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## JAPANESE AMERICAN

As I stand here before you and see how young you are, I wonder how many of you are aware of what happened to an Asian minority group on the Pacific Coast during World War II, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, just because the people happened to be of Japanese ancestry and resembled the enemy physically. Because of their race they became part of what has been called the largest single compulsory evacuation in American history. To most of you, Pearl Harbor and its aftermath probably seem like so much past history, remote from this very moment.

First, let me give you a little of the background of the Japanese on the West Coast. The United States, as you well know, has attracted for decades people of many nationalities, and I am sure that among you yourselves there is a blend of European origins. The Pacific Coast drew towards its shores Asiatic immigrants, just as the Atlantic Coast received immigrants from Europe, and the Japanese formed one of the 1<sup>st</sup>, and smallest, of our immigrant groups.

Japanese immigration began in 1890, and the Japanese immigrants first settled in Hawaii to work on the sugar and pineapple plantations. Then they began coming to the West Coast as agricultural laborers, and by the end of the nineteenth century, there were about 16,000. But they were not welcome on the mainland and soon became the target of anti-Oriental discrimination. The Issei, the first generation, (I am a Nisei, second generation), were ineligible for citizenship, and whether they came by way of Hawaii or directly from Japan, they started life in this country at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder.

Anti-Oriental hostility was not new, but a carry-over from the earlier years when the Chinese people came to settle in this country. Roger Daniels, in the introduction to his book, Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II, states: ". . . the general tendency of educated Americans, including historians, to write off the evacuation as a 'wartime mistake' is to obscure its

true significance. Rather than a mistake. . . the legal atrocity which was committed against the Japanese Americans was the logical outgrowth of over three centuries of American experience, and experience which taught Americans to regard the United States as a white man's country in which nonwhites 'had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.'" The end of that sentence are words from Chief Justice Roger B. Taney's 1857 decision in the Dred Scott v. Sanford, which were echoed by the United States Supreme Court in World War II.

Nine out of ten of the early immigrants had been unmarried men from the farm areas of southern Japan. They were not content to continue working as poorly paid migrant field hands, so after saving enough money, they would purchase a few acres, usually land that no one else would consider farming, and they converted these wastelands into the most productive areas in the West. Seen as competitors, white ranchers started a propaganda campaign against them and eventually had alien land laws passed which prevented the Japanese from purchasing or leasing land in California. Nine other states then adopted similar laws. So the Issei had to turn to other ways of making a living, and they opened fruit and vegetable stores in West Coast cities.

My Father did not come to this country as a laborer, but as a student in 1901. He had finished high school in Japan, but when he arrived in California, he started in high school all over again to learn the English language. He then went on to major in mining engineering at the University of Nevada and later transferred to the University of California at Berkeley to pursue the same major. And my Mother came as a school teacher in 1915, and they were married in California.

So it was that I grew up, along with my brothers and sisters, in Sacramento, the capital of the state of California, where a large section of the city towards the river was almost completely Japanese. In my mind I can still see the familiar streets; the boarding houses for migrant laborers who followed the crops at harvesting times up and down the state, the different stores, homes and gardens. In this part of town lived not just the Japanese, though they were in the majority,

but also the Chinese, the Blacks, the Mexicans, and some Italians. Our home was often the gathering place for children of other races.

What was it like to have been born in a family like mine, with the cultural background of my parents, in this country where standards of child-rearing were more indulgent? At times, I found it rather rough. It meant growing up American by schooling and associations, but with an easily distinguishable oriental face, and conforming to customs and modes of behavior that our parents considered proper. My gentle, courteous Mother could be firm, unshakably so, when she had to be, but she must have despaired of teaching us ideal manners, since she would sometimes refer to all nine of her children, of whom I am the oldest, as yabanjin -- her barbarians.

Japanese families are generally vertical in structure, with the father in position of control and authority. When I was growing up, this patriarchal structure was characterized by strong solidarity and helpfulness. In our family, we paid deference to Father, as expected, because of his position, but we children secretly felt that Mother, with her insight and imperturbable logic, was more than his alter ego.

Certain factors modified this patriarchal structure, one being that the Nisei children understood the American culture better than their parents. The children were citizens by birth, while the parents were aliens. In the Japanese community, the family functioned more as a unit. The family was considered to be more important than its individual members, who derived their positions within the family. Conversely, the family benefited from the success of its members and was damaged by their failures. Family techniques of social control were firm and effective. Good behavior was reinforced, both within the family and by the community as a whole. The catch-all technique for reinforcing desired behavior was an appeal to ethnic identity, such as "Japanese boys don't cry after a fight", or "Good Japanese do it this way," or "Good Japanese don't even think about things like that."

Of the Japanese on the West Coast in 1940, two-thirds (71,484) were American-born citizens, the Nisei, and the remaining third (40,869) were the Issei. At that time, the total number of the Japanese in the United States comprised less than one-tenth of one per cent of the entire population. But like other ethnic groups, they tended to cluster. Almost nine out of ten lived in one of the three Pacific coast states, with nearly three-quarters of the total in California. The concentration of the Japanese was not only geographical, but also occupational, with 43 per cent in agriculture; the additional 26 per cent in wholesale and retail trade. In 1941, the Japanese turned out 42 per cent of the truck crop in California, the production valued at \$30, 000, 000.

The Japanese parents, the Issei, felt that education would enable their children to enter occupations barred to them and be free of the intolerance that they had had to endure, so they began sending their sons and daughters to colleges and professional schools, often through difficult and tremendous sacrifice.

But prejudice against the Japanese did not vanish. As the American-born generation graduated from the universities, they found it impossible to obtain positions for which they were qualified. Engineers worked as auto mechanics, and my Father earned his living as a life insurance agent and interpreter. Girls with doctorate degrees worked as housemaids. Graduate chemists and physicists often worked in their fathers' fruit stores. So before the war, the Japanese on the West Coast, like the rest of the world, lived and worked from day to day, in cities and on farms, in stores or on fishing boats, in menial jobs or in professions. These were the Japanese, not one type, not one truly homogeneous cultural pattern, but men and women, and their children, large and small, fat and thin; the healthy and the sickly; the good and the bad; with varying degrees of American and Japanese traits.

Then World War II brought changes into the lives of many peoples around the world. One small aspect of this change was the evacuation of the Japanese from the West Coast. I would like to describe for you what this forced exodus imposed, as I lived through its phases.



So now let me take you back in time. At 7:55 a.m., Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, the United States Naval Station, Pearl Harbor, on the island of Oahu, Hawaii, was attacked by Japanese aircraft. At that hour, I was giving my little son, not quite three months old, his morning feeding, and I had just turned on the radio. As I listened to the announcer presenting his grim news, I was stunned. My immediate thought was how we Japanese living in this country would be affected. I learned. All Japanese funds were frozen; credit became difficult. By that night I found that I could not even buy milk at the corner grocery store where I had been going for months. Because of prohibitions against trading with the enemy, grocers refused to sell food; milk companies ceased to deliver to Japanese families.

In the panicky weeks after Pearl Harbor, the feeling against the Japanese ran high. A superpatriot chopped down four of the Japanese cherry trees along the Tidal Basin in Washington, D.C. The Tennessee State Department of Purchasing declared "open season on Japs, no license required", and an elderly Japanese man and his wife were shot to death in their beds in El Centro, California. The U.S. Attorney General reported 36 instances of crime and brutality against the West Coast Japanese between December 8, 1941, and March 31, 1942. And my brother Roy enlisted in the United States Army.

Immediately with the beginning of the war, the Department of Justice, through the Federal Bureau of Investigation, had arrested registered enemy agents and persons known to have hostile intent. About 12.5 per cent of the Issei were apprehended. They were allowed a hearing before a civilian parole board at which they could be represented by a friend or a relative, but not a lawyer. There were numerous repeated investigations and arrests wherever and whenever there were suspicions, and we were in constant fear of unexpected FBI raids.

It was when the Japanese problem was transferred to the War Department that the unprecedented abrogation of the civil rights of a racial minority occurred. Then there was no consideration of individuals, whether innocent or guilty, citizen or alien. They were all subject to the control of the Western Defense Command.

The Western Defense Command was established on December 11, 1941, and the West Coast was declared a theater of war, with General John L. DeWitt as military commander.

By the end of January, 1942, public opinion continued to mount against the Japanese. As they became more and more identified with the enemy, the distinction between the aliens and citizens was ignored. We were already under curfew and had to be off the streets by 8 p.m., and we found it hard to shop or market for our large family. Public temper became even more spiteful.

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order no. 9066, authorizing the War Department to set up military areas and to exclude any or all persons from these areas. The next day this responsibility was delegated to General DeWitt

No one knew exactly when our evacuation order would be issued. Everyone was tense, uncertain as to what to do, how to make preparations and when. But by a series of 108 separate orders, DeWitt ordered all Japanese removed from the West Coast, which included all of Washington, Oregon and California, and a portion of Arizona. By August 7, 1942, the three West Coast states had been cleared of Japanese residents. The explanation given at that time for the mass evacuation was that of military necessity. DeWitt's decision involved a judgment on sociological grounds, and racial considerations were evidently regarded as part of the military necessity.

Since no preparation had been made for so huge a mass exodus, fairgrounds and race tracks were commandeered for use as temporary assembly centers, and there were 18 of these. In these places Army engineers constructed primitive barracks to provide temporary quarters for 110,000 people.

With others living around the San Francisco Bay region, my family was sent from Berkeley to the Tanforan Race Track in San Bruno, south of San Francisco. The evacuation itself was handled on an area basis, as one district after another was designated for exclusion. In Berkeley the larger families were moved out first,

so we were among them. The morning of our departure, a sunny April day, we gathered at a church, surrounded by military sentries standing guard with drawn bayonets. We were then taken by chartered buses, under military guard, from Berkeley to the Tanforan Race Track. At the intake station under the grandstand, the men and boys were frisked for contraband, and my Father had his pocket-knife confiscated. Our family, now to be known by the identification number of 13423, and not by our surname, was assigned housing in the horse-stalls in one corner of the race track. Because of size of our family, we were permitted to have two horse-stalls.

Here at the race track, we were introduced to communal living -- eating in a mess-hall, bathing in doorless bath stalls and shower cubicles, observing curfew, answering to a roll-call morning and evening, under surveillance by Caucasian camp police. The lack of privacy disturbed us all, as well as not having the conveniences we had been accustomed to, like a bathroom or running water. Civil liberties were at a minimum. The entire camp was closely guarded, surrounded by watch towers manned by armed sentries, and searchlights played around the camp at night.

Churches were established early to bolster the morale of the distressed and humiliated people. There were Protestant, Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist and Buddhist groups. Another help to morale was the opportunity to work, and those who were physically able worked. The wages were set at eight dollars a month for the unskilled; twelve dollars for the skilled; and sixteen dollars for the professionals (doctors, teachers, and those in administrative positions.) Later, in the permanent camp, the salary scale was increased to twelve, sixteen, and nineteen for the various levels. In addition, a clothing allowance of \$3.75 was issued to each worker.

Schools were eventually established for adults and children, and volunteer evacuee teachers were employed. To young people who had grown in closely knit family groups, camp life meant the disruption of orderly living, sudden freedom from parental authority and school. But the majority still needed the stabilizing

influence of a regular school program. A group of us who were recent graduates from universities in the San Francisco Bay area opened a "high school", and to our amazement, 500 students registered for classes of their own accord. The curriculum was based on the core curriculum of the California school system. I taught English, because that had been one of my majors at the university.

In August of that year, rumors began to seep through the center that the evacuees would be moved to a more permanent camp, a relocation center in Utah. Ten internment, or concentration, camps were built from California to Arkansas, and managed under a civilian agency, the War Relocation Authority, we commonly spoke of as the WRA. No one knew till September when the relocation would begin. Again we went through the unrest of preparing, packing and crating. The first group that left from Tanforan was the advance work group of 214 people, all volunteers, to make way for the induction of those who were to follow. Among them was my brother Bill, a bacteriologist, on the sanitary engineering crew.

My family, without Bill, arrived at the Central Utah Relocation center on October 3, 1942, and Bill was waiting for us at the intake gate. We had traveled for three days from California on a rickety train to Delta, a small town seventeen miles away from the camp. At Delta, we were placed on buses under military guard to finish the trip.

The Utah camp, which we called Topaz, was situated in the desert and was a square mile in size. The center contained 42 city blocks, but resembled nothing we had known of cities. Each block consisted of 14 resident barracks, 24 feet wide and 96 feet long, partitioned into rooms, with the smallest rooms at the ends of a building for a couple, and the larger rooms in the middle for family units. Our family was larger than most, so once again we were permitted to have the two center rooms. The 14 barracks in a block were arranged in two rows with an alley between. In this alley way were located the latrine building and the mess-hall. The population of Topaz numbered approximately 10, 000, with most of the people from the San Francisco Bay area.

As the people settled in and adjusted to the rigors of bitterly cold win-



ters, the ever prevalent dust storms, and the harshness of camp life, an "indefinite leave" program was started, by which the evacuees, after proper clearance by the government and assurance of a job "outside", could leave and settle in a city of their choice. Also, by 1943, the Army decided to recruit a Japanese American combat team. This combat team was the much-decorated 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which took its nucleus from the camps. In our own camp, we had a number of Bronze Star and Purple Heart mothers.

In December, 1944, the Supreme Court ruled that citizens whose loyalty had been established could not be held in camps. The Army then decided to rescind the exclusion order.

So the camps began to close down. As the residents left and the blocks became depleted, mess halls were consolidated. Most of my family had relocated to Cincinnati by the time our camp closed, but Father, Mother, my youngest brother Lee, my son and I remained until the end of October, 1945. How often in those weeks, at night, as I looked out at the darkened windows of the neighboring barracks, I would think of the strange events that had brought us to a desolate place like this, of people I would never see again, and wonder what lay ahead in time for us. When we were first interned at Tanforan, my son had been five or six months old, and now as we were about to leave camp, he was just past his fourth birthday. He had never seen a concrete building, or a regular house, a city, a lawn, a park, a bush in bloom, people with other faces and coloring. So I saw through his eyes, the fresh sight of a wondering child, the outside world from another perspective and accepted the release as he did.