

My first date
with my best friend
Patsy
Joe
4/27/45

A Night out at the Club

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27, April 45
Darling Mitsue:
Our first night club
together.
What an' it has been through
together, makes us closer.
Now buds are coming
our way.
Lots of love to a very
sweet girl. Love, Joe



Pals Grayce, Joe and Mitsue Ozeki

In April of 1945, the battle for Okinawa Island was raging. Both American and Imperial Japanese forces suffered horrendous casualties as the Allies pushed their way closer towards Japan.

While at his vacation home in Warm Springs, Georgia, U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt suffered a stroke and died. The man who would soon drop the Atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan - Harry Truman, was sworn in as president.

At the 10 incarceration camps across America, more than 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans were behind barbed wire, unsure of their futures.

And on April 27, 1945, Californian* **Mitsue Ozeki**, recently one of those 120,000, would meet her friends at Borsellino's Supper Club in Cleveland, Ohio.

World War II, like every war, is full of irony.

* Mitsue was born in Alameda, CA., on December 7, 1915

ALAMEDA
**Japanese
American**
HISTORY PROJECT



During WWII, Mitsue found herself incarcerated in Topaz, Utah, washing clothes in a metal tub, when the government that put her there, made it possible to ‘resettle.’ That meant she could leave incarceration, as long as she had a job and a sponsor in the Midwest or East Coast. The West Coast was off-limits.

Mitsue’s daughter, Kay Yatabe, recalled that “My mother and a friend got what they thought were going to be stagehand jobs in Baltimore. When they got there, they found out that it was to *perform*---not clear as what, but mom made it seem really embarrassing---so they took off to Cleveland, where the friend had a friend.” Cleveland had a growing Japanese-American population, resettling from the incarceration camps.





Motoki Yatabe marries Mitsue Ozeki in April 1947

And that's how Mitsi found herself at Borsellino's.

Borsellino's offered live music and dancing every night in an "atmosphere of refinement," according to their advertising.

They also catered and were available for private parties and banquets. Steaks and chops were featured on the menu. Comedians would play there.

For night owls, local AM radio station WHK would broadcast live to the Ohio audience on Wednesday and Friday nights from the club.

Perhaps most importantly, it appears the club didn't have issues with Japanese patrons.

Many clubs across America offered inexpensive souvenir folders, using in-house photographers to shoot fast and make a darkroom print for their customers to take home that very night (front page).

Inside that orange colored folder, friend Grayce Akagi penned this to Mitsi:

27 April '45

Darling Mitsie,

Our first night club together. What we've been through makes us closer. Now breaks are coming our way. Lots of luck to a very swell girl.

Love Grayce

The war with Japan would end on August 14, 1945. Two years later, Grayce's parting thought came true. Mitsi would marry a man she'd met in Topaz; Motoki Yatabe, in a ceremony in Berkeley, CA.

epilog

Mitsi's time in Cleveland was short lived. "Mitsue and Grayce reported to the WRA (War Relocation Authority) and got jobs at a defense plant, where they made incendiary bombs (for the U.S. military), a three month job," Kay recalled Mitsi saying. "In August, Grayce went to Chicago, and Mitsi went to Detroit." Mitsue found herself visiting her sister, Yasue and husband, George, for a few weeks there. She soon returned to Topaz and incarceration, to help her family return to Alameda as the war came to an end.

Motoki Yatabe would not be at Topaz to greet her as he had been already drafted into the U.S. Army.

Motoki's letters to her in August 1945 are addressed c/o the Yatabe home in Berkeley. In mid-October, the address changes to 2311 Buena Vista (the Japanese Methodist Episcopal church, later known as Buena Vista). By November their address is 2320 Buena Vista. Mitsi and her family were back home in Alameda.

THE RESETTLEMENT

While Mitsue's visit to Borsellino's was all in fun, her April departure from Topaz was the result of the government's resettlement program. Plans for moving Japanese



Americans out of the camps formed as early as the spring of 1942, but were not that successful early on.

Milton Eisenhower, the first director of the WRA, along with his successor, Dillon Myer, viewed the incarceration as an opportunity to scatter loyal Japanese Americans around the country. They believed that resettlement would help put an end to the prewar Japantowns along the West Coast and facilitate the integration of Japanese Americans into white mainstream society.

In order to relocate, Japanese Americans had to secure an outside sponsor, furnish proof of employment or education, and submit themselves to FBI background checks. Further, many were simply reluctant to leave

camp, fearing the hostile reaction that would meet them on the outside. They worried about finding work and housing in unfamiliar areas as well as separating from family members who did not qualify for resettlement.

By the end of 1944, nearly 35,000 Japanese Americans had relocated to the outside. This group consisted overwhelmingly of young, educated Nisei; only one out of six Issei had left camp by January of 1945. The WRA steered resettlers towards Midwestern states such as Illinois, Ohio, and Michigan.

On December 18, 1944, the Supreme Court ruled in *Ex Parte Endo* that the federal government could no longer detain loyal American citizens against their will. On January 2, 1945, the government rescinded the mass exclusion orders and opened up the West Coast to Japanese Americans not deemed disloyal.

It is into this maelstrom of a world that Mitsue Ozeki, filled with the greatest of hopes and the greatest of uncertainties, made her decisions in 1945.



What would you have done?

Resettlement information this page is a condensed version of Megan Asaka's full text, which can be found at <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Resettlement/>

Special thanks to Kay Yatabe for photographs, information and the Borsellino's folders.

Produced by Brad Shirakawa • August 17, 2022

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**Souvenir folder from Borsellino's Supper Club in Cleveland Ohio, April 1945.
Mitsue Ozeki, of Alameda, CA., visited the club for a night with friends during World War II.**

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Souvenir folder from Borsellino's Supper Club in Cleveland Ohio, April 1945. Mitsue Ozeki, of Alameda, CA., visited the club for a night with friends during World War II.

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Sister
Joe
4/27/45

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