

MICHI WEGLYNTC AUDIO**MICHI WEGLYN INTERVIEW 2/20/98 (Side 3)**

(the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee, how do you regard their accomplishment, what they did?)

- 4:00:38 Well, first of all you have to give this group an enormous amount of credit because you have to understand, and it's very difficult for most people to understand that these young men, some of them were only 17,18 19. Of course we had people like Frank Emi who didn't have to get involved because he was married had two children. He was one of the older ones. But when you think of
- 4:01:17 how young they were and that they, they were bright. I would say that they were bright. If they had been ordinary Jo Blows, or people like me. I went to camp at 15. I was so naive. It's unbelievable, it's truly unbelievable for me to believe that somebody 17, 18 let's say three years older than me, had enough courage. And he had an understanding of the constitution to the degree that he would say, oh
- 4:02:05 this is utterly, utterly against everything I've been taught The constitution promised liberty and justice. And it does not...the bill of rights protects us. We in no way have been protected by it. We have been deprived of all our rights. Shorn of it. And for a young person to think that deeply, and I'm shocked at this late date that there are those of us who are in our seventies, eighties who still can't understand how important it is to know what your constitution stands for. And that in an emergency like that it is supposed to protect us.
- 4:03:11 But that these old fogies saying all those wipper snappers. They didn't really understand what they were doing. They probably just followed the crowd. But you know I've gotten to know quite a number of them. And I am so impressed. I cannot throw a letter they write me because it is a letter of such fervor. They are able to articulate in a way that the average person does not even bother to. They
- 4:03:59 understand the significance of what they had done and the fact that to this day they are so proud of it. And they would do it again. And they tell of the brothers who fought in the Pacific or who served in Europe and the fact that they all understood. And I think that is marvelous. That you can go against your entire family at that early age and believe even though the government, they were
- 4:04:52 threatening to fine them, what was it? Ten thousand dollars or twenty thousand dollars and so many years in jail. It was a horrific fine that they were threatened with. Who knows, it was a time when they could have easily been shot and nobody would have much pity for them. But they believed that strongly in the righteousness of their cause that we have no right in a democratic America to have concentration camps for U.S. citizens who are guaranteed their inalienable rights in the constitution.
- 4:05:53 And they truly believed in what they had been taught. I was taught all that myself. But I just thought of it like when I had to memorize Lincoln's Gettysburg address. It was just words to me. And the civil war did not hit me in a way it does now that I have become a little bit more knowledgeable of what a gory gory war it was of brother against brother.

(tell me about Mits Kochiyama.)

- 4:06:37 Mits, well, he's extraordinary because he was very young. I believe he was around eighteen. And he to this day will write letters which are so eloquent. I learn everytime I receive a letter from Mits. And I wish I myself could write such letters which is full of fervor and it's not that he is trying to justify what he did but
- 4:07:30 he cannot understand why the average person who is able to appreciate an apology that is issued by the President of the United States. That they think is the greatest thing you know when President Bush apologized and we were put away *(wihhups.comfort michi, I save all your letters too. and they're full of fervor and passions. I can't dare to throw them away. and I will always save them. tell me about Frank Emi.)*
(does Frank Emi write you? has he written to you?)
- 4:08:16 Frank writes me from time to time. He prefers calling me because we love to share secrets of how to say young.

(well it works. god you guys have great secrets. cause you both have of anyone. tell me about Frank Emi, his resistance and his character.)

- 4:08:38 Oh Frank was incredible during those years in Heart Mountain. I loved to read and re-read these bulletins which he authored. I wish I could write that well now. But, my goodness I would love to frame some of them. I would love to emblazon them forever more in bronze.

(why?)

- 4:09:09 Because what he is saying to the people in Heart Mountain is that we have been impoverished. We have been utterly deprived of everything we have worked for our whole life. Our parents came here and they struggled and struggled through the depression. They brought us up and they had come to a point where they thought they were going to be able to have a comfortable future. And now this is
- 4:09:51 all threatened by the unconstitutional internment and that we must begin to become more conscious of our rights that are guaranteed under the constitution never never give up your rights under the constitution. And that we are being asked to do too much. We have been asked to give up too much. And this is a moment when we must make a stand. We will not obey an illegal order. That reminds me of Nurenburg (sp?)

(Heart Mountain had one of the only organized resistance of the ten concentration camps, one of the largest organized resistance anyway. why do you think that was?)

- 4:11:03 Well I suppose it was because Mr. Inouye, Frank Inouye...

(no Okamoto...no Frank Inouye and Kiyoshi Okamoto)
 Inouye started it

(why do you think Heart Mountain had the largest organized resistance?)

- 4:11:27 Well, of course I have not investigated the Poston resistance. I know that one hundred and one resisters there were given a \$1 fine by Judge Lean. I am wondering if a Chinese Judge could have been living at that time. You have your doubts well anyway. Heart Mountain...Resistance at Heart Mountain began at the time of registration. Mr. Inouye, a Hawaiian. And generally the Hawaiians as
- 4:12:16 Mr. Dillon Meyer used to say, are the trouble makers. He was very conscious of his rights because he had been brought up in a more equal society. Which reminds me of Mr., Senator Inouye who I had the privilege of meeting a couple of months ago. And he said that he visited Rohwer. When he saw the people confined there he decided I don't think I would have volunteered. I would not have wanted to volunteer if my parents and I had been locked up this. Those people were there.
- 4:13:17 So, back to Heart Mountain. This consciousness had been instilled during the registration, no, a year later. January 1944 you get selective service instituted. That really got them boiling. How dare they. I mean it's one thing to volunteer, but you cannot force us to do something that is illegal. And they considered it unconstitutional and illegal and wrongheaded and they were not going to abide an order which they did not respect. They would prefer to go to jail. And can you imagine, young fellows making such hard decisions. I cannot get over it.

(to your knowledge, you describe Frank Emi having the guts and the eloquence to write these bulletins and openly declare if we are called we will not accept this order. any other camp, any other camp have a Frank Emi? combination of charisma and eloquence and that could grow the people together.)

- 4:14:57 I don't think there was another camp that produced a Frank Emi. I know at Amache there was a small group but they didn't have the organization. Heart Mountain, the Heart Mountain resisters wanted to make it an all camp revolt. It did not succeed. But you're right about Frank Emi. Frank Emi was alone. Of course on the outside we had a James Omura the Thomas Payne(sp?) of Nikkei journalism. Yes, I would compare Frank Emi in camp to James Omura outside of camp.

(tell me about James Omura just briefly, your opinion of James Omura.)

- 4:16:01 He was a man ahead of his time. I do, I do envy the enormous insight he had without even having the advantage of a college education, to see through these government edicts. Whereas you had the Ph.Ds and the academic types who should have know better. Who had studied the constitution backwards and
- 4:16:47 forwards. But you needed a James Omura. A simple unassuming person who was suspicious of you know these braggadotial (sp?) types who stuck themselves ahead of others and assumed leadership when he felt that the leadership demanded true leading of the people to a restoration of rights that was being shorn. And that was Omura's terrible terrible dilemma. He was a nobody. He knew that he was
- 4:17:40 just a journalist, but he had a terrible, terribly refined and sensitive conscience. And he felt that we need leadership. We've got to stop this. We can. We can still stop it. If we would all get together. But he was a lone voice crying in the wilderness.

(would you say that Frank Emi provided leadership at Heart Mountain?)

- 4:18:11 Oh, indeed he did. Yes, because...

(did you include Jimmy Omura in your book?)

4:18:22 Jimmy Omura, you see. I have to explain that when I wrote my book I had so much material. And what I wanted to do was to break new ground. I wanted to be able to cover areas which had not been touched upon. Oh, I was so intimidated when it came to Heart Mountain because Douglas Nelson had his book published. Prior to that Roger Daniels had his book published, "Concentration Camps U.S. A." in which he quotes quite a bit from his student

4:19:06 Douglas Nelson. And I thought oh my gosh here's an area where I need so much research but I could never do justice to it as Douglas Nelson has done. I would not be breaking new ground. I had written a footnote saying that since this area has been covered by Roger Daniels and Douglas Nelson so carefully I prefer not to tread on areas that have been so scrupulously researched. Well darn it it happened that my editor, and it was partly my fault because I should have kept track of everything that she had excised as being a little too much and it wasn't until the book had come out that I realized oh, that particular footnote crediting Nelson and Daniels had been excised.

(did the Japanese American community, did the Japanese American leadership embrace the Fair Play Committee at Heart Mountain at the time, or not?)

4:20:40 I cannot say that they embraced the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee. However, in Heart Mountain the block leaders were mostly issei. And the block leaders were very sympathetic with the Heart Mountain resisters. Especially Mr. Tsuneishi. Paul Tsuneishi's father who spoke both English and Japanese. And

4:21:13 he would try to transmit to the Japanese community what exactly, what the Fair Play Committee was trying to accomplish. And I believe that's one of the reasons why the issei do not hold against the Fair Play Committee the kind of animous that we still find extant among the veterans and the elderly well I suppose those who belonged to the JACL and believed that it was our first priority to share

4:22:07 blood, to shed blood on the battlefield. And that you were a coward if you didn't. And that it destroys our image by having that record of ending up in a penitentiary. So Mr. Tsuneishi smooth things over really...

(has the Japanese community, the Japanese community today accepted the Heart Mountain resisters?)

4:22:44 As far as I'm concerned, now of course you know very well that there are the detractors, but I believe that they may end up like the ronins, that they had a hard choice too and there are going to be generations who succeed us who are going to hold up this group as the Jews are now holding up. Some groups of Jews who

4:23:20 really fought against the concentration camps. And more and more stories are emerging and in the same light several generations from now, these Heart Mountain resisters are going to become legendary figures and they are going to be proudly pointed to as having been young people who would not put up with what the government, what our community leaders felt was best for us.

(that's how you feel, that's how I feel. But for someone who doesn't know this whole story michi, is there a division in the Japanese American community today?)

4:24:12 Well, you know there is a division. I do believe that it's based on their being a bit too lazy to go to the National Archives to do a little bit of research. You find out the truth. It is. There is nothing like primary documents of the period. Not an interpretation of the document but you must read the documents. And it will just blow your mind to think that, oh, these young people in this camp had the courage to organize and to fight the great United States.

(is there anything else you want to touch on before we wrap up?)

I think we pretty much touched on....