

July 19, 1991

Sharon M. Tanihara
11025 Sherman Avenue
Garden Grove, CA 92643

Dear Sharon;

I am writing to thank you for the letter and accompanying information that you sent to my mother, Dorothy Nakamura, on July 6, 1991. I apologize for my delayed response. Mother has been ill and she asked me to respond to your kind letter. I have been assisting her in this matter for some time and am very familiar with all the particulars.

Mother is 76 years old and my father is 84 years old. They have been married for 53 years and have enjoyed good health and a fairly good life together. I, too, was born in Chicago, Illinois due to the relocation. My father received his redress check last year with no problems. I can't believe the woman who stood by his side all these years is being denied due to her race. The ORA says she is ineligible because she "voluntarily chose" to enter the camp to be with her family. How does a mother of a two year old child (my sister) have any choice in this matter? Mother was told she could avoid the camps, but that my father and sister would be required to go. Remember, one of the reasons the evacuees cooperated as well as they did with relocation was that the United States government promised the families would be kept together. That was a main issue at the time. Also remember this was in 1942 - long before women's liberation, and a wife was expected to stay with her husband and family. My mother never would have allowed herself to be separated from her child!

It is heartening to know that we are not the only people dissatisfied with some of the decisions of the ORA re: the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. I'm sorry to hear of the runaround you have been given by JACL officials. While I realize they have worked long and hard for this cause, they seem to think the fight is over and won. Maybe they don't have the heart left to pursue so-called minor issues. Your information is very useful to me since I was going to ask the JACL for assistance on my mother's behalf, but seeing how they have ignored you, I don't think I will bother.

It is interesting to note that Senator Inouye wrote you in January that he was considering submitting an amendment re: restitution for non-japanese spouses. Representative Matsui's staff told me last year that the same amendment was being considered in congress. At that time I was assured that the amendment would be approved. However, when I called Representative Matsui's office last month to inquire about the status of the bill I was told there was no such bill and there never had been.

Feeling very frustrated due to the conflicting information I made an appointment to meet with ORA officials at one of their local workshops held to assist persons applying for redress. I inquired as to the status of an amendment re: non-Japanese spouses and other persons who were omitted from the original bill. Mr. Bob Bratt (who is the director of the ORA) told me that there never was a bill submitted to Congress. He said the ORA has sent a request for funds to the Office of Management and Budget where it has been for three to four months. If approved, the amendment will be submitted as a part of the next presidential appropriations bill next January. At that time, Congress can approve or disapprove. He has assured me that all of the persons who were overlooked in the original bill (ie: military persons who weren't in California at the time, non-japanese spouses, etc.) will be covered in the amendment.

Mr. Bratt told me that members of Congress can also submit amendments but none have done so. Regarding non-japanese spouses, Mr. Bratt told me there were approximately 80 who were evacuated in 1942 and only 40 still alive. Only 19 have applied for redress. Perhaps 40 votes is not enough to get Sen. Inouye or Rep. Matsui's attention.

Sharon, unfortunately I haven't heard anything pertaining to persons like yourself who were born outside the camps. I wish there were something I could tell you to give you hope or something I could do to assist you.

Thank you for taking the time to send us copies of your letters. You have worked hard and I am sorry to see how you have been treated. Please remember you are not alone in this. I don't intend to let it rest until there is "justice for all." I am certainly not going to wait for Congress (or the Justice department) to do anything. At the least I can do is pester them to death. I will continue sending letters and making telephone calls. Thanks for the moral support.

Good luck and please let me know if you have any ideas or if you need any information or assistance that we can give you. I will let you know if I hear anything that can be useful to you.

Yours truly,

Helen Napoleon

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