

A Salute to Mrs. Gunderson

Mrs. Margaret Gunderson (89) taught high school in a concentration camp for Japanese Americans in a remote location in California during World War II. A 50th Anniversary Reunion of those who were interned was held in Sacramento at the end of May. 1,300 of those who were involved, mostly Niseis, assembled from all over the U.S. and overseas, including Japan.

Mrs. Gunderson was also invited as a special guest and had an emotional reunion with her former students.

The highlight of the event was the "Sayonara Party." Speeches by Congressman Robert Matsui and Bob Bratt, former redress administrator, representing the government, followed. The last guest speaker was Professor Yuzuru Takeshita (a sociologist) of the University of Michigan. "Mrs. Gunderson gave me courage and lighted a flame in me. She consoled us warmly like a mother and gave us strong encouragement. Through her class in American history,

she firmly planted in us America's conscience and true spirit." The Issei's shock was great as they went off to camp, following the President's Executive Order, which directed that "each person take with him only what he can carry in his two hands." After all, they had lost at once their positions and livelihood they had built up over the years with much hardship. The Nisei children who were brought up as American citizens were beset with anger, confusion, and frustration as they were treated as enemy aliens by being shipped off to concentration camps surrounded by barbed-wire fences and guarded by armed soldiers. Professor Takeshita concluded: "We owe all that we are today to Mrs. Gunderson."

Mrs. Gunderson, helped by her former student, stood on the podium and surprised everyone by starting with the statement: "I am a Nisei." She related that her parents were immigrants from Scotland. "To violate the Constitutionally guaranteed rights of

one person is to violate not only that person but all Americans---no, all of us in this world. We have fought in the past to protect the rights of people in defense of our democracy. We must continue today to fight for the rights of all people." Mrs. Gunderson's passion-filled words to the Nisei students during World War II were: "The internment of Japanese American citizens was clearly a violation of our Constitution. To right the wrong committed by our Federal Government is a duty and responsibility we as citizens must all bear!" Her speech this night was as full of fiery passion as her words of 50 years ago.

What passion and fighting spirit gushing out from this small and thin elderly woman! The banquet hall that was hushed while she spoke broke out in thunderous applause---to salute Mrs. Gunderson!

(Reported by Teresa Tamura of San Jose, a legal consultant)

The caption for the cartoon reads: "50 years ago Mrs. Gunderson gave the children courage and lighted a flame in them"