

LIQUID LIVING

"I Firmly Believe From What I Have Seen That This (the Redwood Empire) Is the Chosen Spot of All the Earth as Far as Nature Is Concerned." — Luther Burbank

When American citizens lost their freedom

By **GEORGE HOWER**

Within hours of the Sunday, Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, FBI agents seized suspected Japanese agents or sympathizers all over the United States.

Their dragnet even swept through Sonoma County, and the Dec. 8, 1941, Press Democrat came out with this page one headline:

"Eight Jap Aliens Here Seized by FBI."

Two days later, The Press Democrat had this headline:

"County Japanese Denounce Japan; Resolve to Act."

The story under that headline quoted Henry Shimizu, president of the Japanese-American Citizen's League, as saying 100 citizens of Japanese ancestry pledged their support against acts of sabotage or any other act against the United States government.

"Our flag-waving days are over. In the future, we act," Shimizu said.

But it was to be awhile before the Japanese could act.

Hatred of Japanese-American citizens, rooted in the history of the West as far back as the mid-1800s, grew into a movement which resulted in their being placed in concentration camps.

The order which made it possible for the American government to do this was Executive Order 9066, which authorized the Secretary of War to designate military areas—meaning the entire west coast—and which also authorized the government to remove all persons of Japanese ancestry.

When it went into effect, Japanese-Americans were given only a few days to sell businesses and homes—at financial losses, of course—and were permitted to take few personal belongings (100 pounds per person) to the relocation camps.

While World War II raged in the Pacific, newspapers on the coast headlined this: "Ouster Of All Japs in California Near!"

"Evacuation Sale" signs went up on their businesses.

One Japanese store owner put this sign on his store window:

"Many thanks for your patronage. Hope to serve you in the near future. God be with you till we meet again."

An American who took over a Nisei Grill put this sign up:

"This restaurant under new management. Will open soon."

But freedom and Constitutional rights, suddenly denied Japanese-Americans, weren't to be returned to them soon. Many did not leave the camps until 1946, and they were not able to gain back their citizenship until 1953—eight years after the war's end.

Japanese-Americans were tagged and sent by train to camps in Arkansas, Arizona, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, and to Tule Lake and Manzanar, Calif.

There they lived in tar-paper barracks. They were surrounded by high, barbed wire fences, and guarded by soldiers in towers, armed with machine guns.

Cameras, radios, razors, flashlights, and electric irons were taken away.

They ate in community kitchens and took care of personal needs in community bathrooms. Women's latrines had partitions between them but no doors. Men's latrines didn't even have partitions.

There was dust in the summer, snow and ice in the winter.

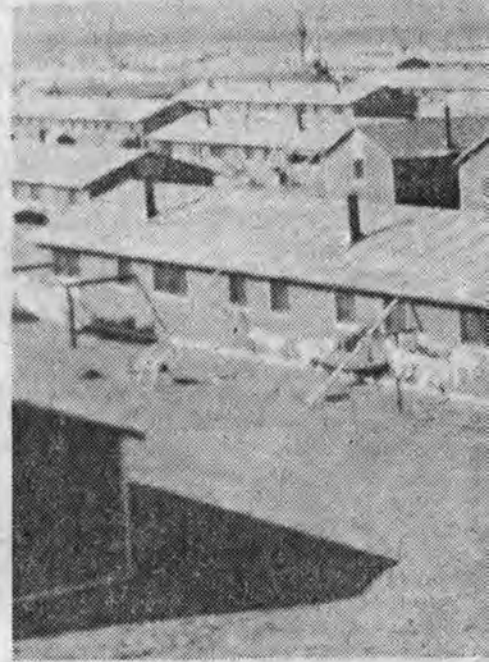
It was, says 51-year-old Santa Rosan James Murakami, "degrading—if nothing else."

Murakami was 15 in 1942. He received his high school diploma in a camp high school, was in the service after World War II, and is president-elect of the national Japanese-American Citizen's League (JACL) organization and is president of the local group.

Here are some of his thoughts now.

QUESTION — Would that happen again if the U.S. again went to war, may be with Russia, Arabia over oil, or Communist China?

MURAKAMI — "I rather doubt whether it would happen again. They could be incarcerated—but not



Not long after the first World War II, Japanese-American internment camps on the west coast were labeled "contraband" but some who now lives near Petaluma

collectively, not as a group.

"At one time there was a law on the books—as recent as 1972, 5 years ago—which gave Congress the legal right to incarcerate a group without due process.

"It was Title II of the Internal Security Act, and (through the efforts of the JACL) there was a repeal of that particular act.

"I think the community—the greater community—has begun to know the Japanese-American a little bit better, and they view them more on a one-on-one basis than as a group.

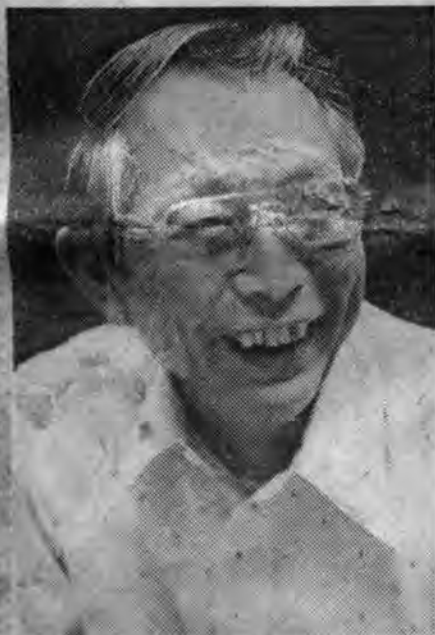
"It could happen again, say to another Asian group which could be categorized into the 'distrustful' group, so to speak, but I don't think that will occur to Japanese-Americans because we have established a lot of friendship within the community.

"That mask of inscrutability has been eroding away."

QUESTION — You said during an initial phone conversation racism was the reason.

MURAKAMI — "I think it was. "There was no other way you can view it. Racism from this viewpoint: because we were American citizens and because of the fact we had some physical characteristics and the same common cultural background as the country with which we were at war.

"If you view it from that standpoint, and the fact the Germans and other Axis country aliens were not



JAMES MURAKAMI

interned at all . . . why single one particular group out of the whole Axis powers?"

QUESTION — How old were you at this time.

MURAKAMI — 15.

QUESTION — Old enough to understand what was going on?

MURAKAMI — Not the seriousness of the whole movement. Had I been a few years older, I might have realized what the serious ramifications of the evacuation was—which was really a violation of the Constitution, and due process (of the law) wasn't there.

"In other words, we were simply uprooted—and at that time they said in the cause of military necessity, but as I asked you on the phone, 'military necessity?' When 110,000 people—fully 60 per cent of which were women and children—you consider if it's military necessity.

Of that 110,000 people, 50,000 were women; 16,000 were under the age of 10; 13,000 were males under the age of 14; 2,000 were over-65s; 2,000 were hospitalized or institutionalized; 46,000 were males in the 14-65 category—so there weren't many potential enemies there.

"Within the Japanese-American population, there wasn't one recorded case of an act of Sabotage by a Japanese-American person or by any permanent resident of Japanese ancestry."

QUESTION — Is 'internment' the correct term here, or was that a euphemism for any other term, such as concentration camp?

MURAKAMI — "I think incarceration is the more accurate term.

"You lost your privilege of freedom of movement and were under strict, guarded control.

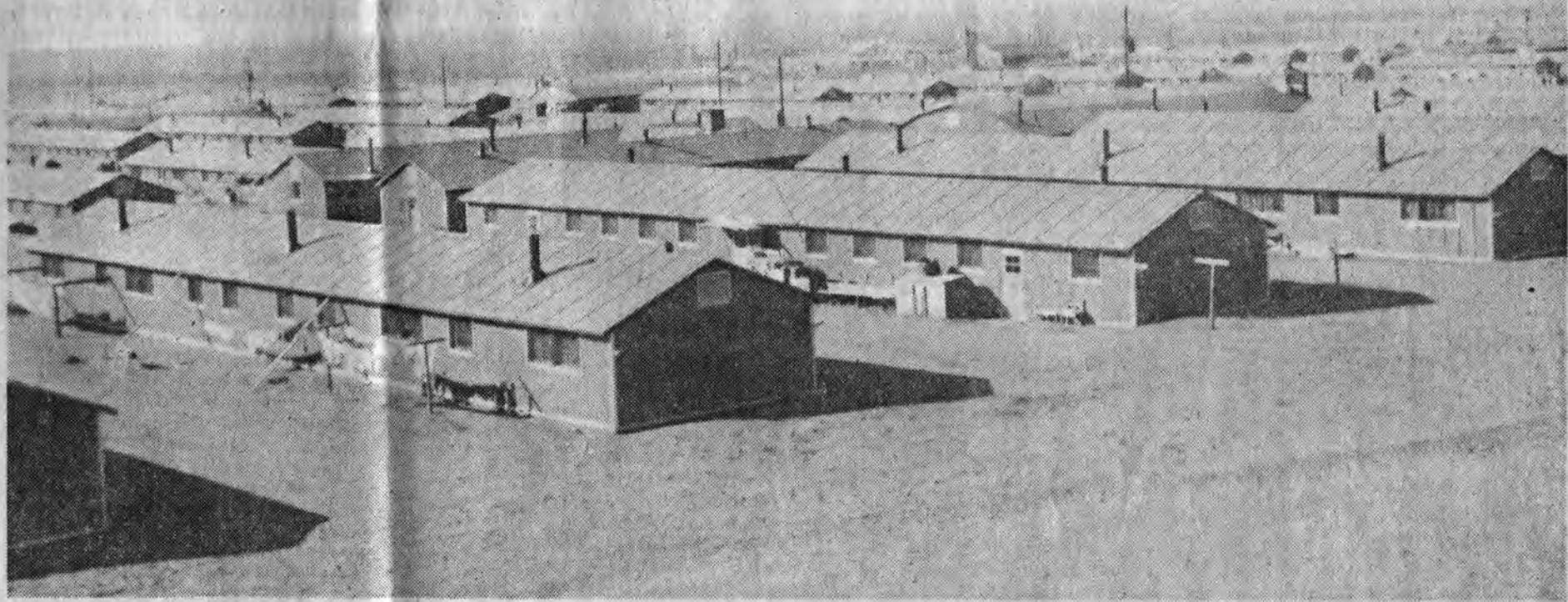
"There were two categories at the time.

"There was a group of what I

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There was dust in the summer, snow and ice in the winter, but the children adapted to it and the parents put trees in front of the barracks. The girl on the right—Tak Kameoka's daughter—died.



Not long after the first bomb had fallen in World War II, Japanese-Americans were sent off to internment camps on the west coast. Cameras were "contraband" but some—such as Tak Kameoka, who now lives near Petaluma—kept his Argus 35

millimeter camera and took some of the photos on this page. This shot show some of the living quarters at Amache Camp, near Colorado-Kansas border



Life was not a cabaret for Japanese-Americans in those early days of World War II. Families of four or five would live in 20 by 20 rooms, as shown at left. Above, a group of families begin to settle into internment camp. Although cameras were banned, the two pictures were taken by government officials and accurately convey internment camp life.

Colorado camp

*'The Colorado dust was so thick
you could see 100 feet distance'*

PETALUMA — To an oriental farmer suddenly uprooted from California almost to Kansas—just as Dorothy was in the Wizard of Oz—the thing that still sticks in the mind is the weather.

Tak Kameoka, one of more than 100,000 Japanese-Americans uprooted after the start of World War II and ordered to an interment camp, remembers the wide variation in the weather at Amache Camp, Colo.

There was snow and ice in the winter, dry heat and dust storms in the summer.

"During the summer, the worst thing was the dust storm, dust storm so thick you can't see maybe 100 feet away.

"I remember, they had an outdoor theater and everybody watching (the show). Then, in one direction we see what looks like a fog. You ought to see everybody disappear in five minutes! It was just like a fog rolling in. The next morning when I woke up everything was covered and I had sand on my face.

"I could scrape my hands like this' (he draws his hand down front of his face) with sand on my face.

"Another thing—they do have thunderstorms. The thunder sounded as if you had your head under a tub and somebody was pounding on it.

"Many times, you felt the charge from (lightning) going through you. It was so close you felt the tingling go through you.

Kameoka, now 62, was a 28-year-old Pt. Reyes farmer when he and the family were sent to the "war relocation center" near Lamar, Colo.—a spot near the Colorado-Kansas border and above the Oklahoma panhandle.

A "city" of 10,000 Japanese-Americans sprung up where there had been none and, although cameras were illegal, Tak Kameoka used his Argus to click some pictures off when the guards weren't looking.

A year later—in 1943—the ban on cameras was relaxed.

Kameoka also got around the ban on radios by volunteering to work for a radio repairman-electrician.

Although he was a farmer, he didn't want to work in the hot, surrounding fields. So, in pursuit of his hobby, he got a job with H. Ichimura, a radio repairman.

The only time Kameoka remembers the usually-placid Amache Camp atmosphere being disturbed occurred during debates over military service.

The Nisei—first generation men, Japanese-Americans—wanted to serve the United States government.

The Issei—their parents—objected.

"Here the parents were," Kameoka remembers, "being dragged off to camp and then having their offspring claimed" by the military.

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term first-generation Isie who were interned two or three days following Pearl Harbor.

"What happened was the Navy Department and FBI had dossiers on these community leaders and . . . they immediately incarcerated these individuals under suspicion of possibly—possibly—committing acts of sabotage, of being sympathetic to Japan, which is a normal procedure, I think, in any nation who at the beginning of hostilities begins to round up foes.

"Ultimately they wound up in Crystal City, Texas, and — I didn't know this until about five years ago — were under the Geneva Convention rules.

"They received food rations in accordance with the Geneva Convention and had separate living units and had fairly good accommodations in comparison to what we had under the Dept. of Interior (authority) in which we didn't come under the Geneva Convention."

QUESTION — In other words, your living conditions weren't as good.

MURAKAMI — No. We had common eating facilities, the bathing facilities were common, the quarters we had were simply nothing more than sleeping quarters. It was the first time I had ever seen cello-tex, and that's all that separated living units. You could hear everything that was going on all the way down the full length of the barracks."

QUESTION — Did you, your family, or others lose faith in America in those years?

MURAKAMI — "I don't think so. "They viewed America as their home. They had to.

"You might say they boxed themselves out of a situation (living in poverty in Japan) when they came to the United States. They came here to make a bundle of money and return to Japan. What happened, realistically, was the money

American

didn't accumulate that quickly. The husband got lonely for the wife and sent for her. As soon as the wife came over, the children started coming.

"One thing led to another and instead of becoming birds of passage, they became permanent residents."

QUESTION — But they never lost faith in America.

MURAKAMI — "No. I think they viewed it as a situation—as bad as it was—as being much better than in some remote village in Japan, (living) in subsistence from day to day.

"I never heard any great amount of bitterness. On occasion, yes, when they'd get angry, they'd wonder why they should be accorded this kind of treatment. I think by and large if most of them had those thoughts they kept them to themselves."

QUESTION — Today that kind of restraint would be remarkable.

MURAKAMI — "Yeah, but you have to go back to what I told you earlier—that they were a remarkable group of people in that they made the best of any situation and in spite of some of the bad situations there was always hope; there was always a brighter side, there'll always be tomorrow."

QUESTION — How much property did your family own when you were rounded up?

MURAKAMI — "Five acres west of town (Santa Rosa). We had a poultry ranch and had to dispose of it in a week's time at whatever price you could get."

QUESTION — Your parents must have been hard workers, to acquire five acres.

MURAKAMI — "That's right. I can remember my dad making 25 cents an hour and my mother would be out there as well, the two of



Life in an internment camp was much like military life — community laundries, community baths, community latrines. A person late answering the mess hall call might stand in line as long as half an hour — whether it was hot and dusty or snowing and bitterly cold.

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citizens

them, 10 hours a day, six days a week. They were basically migrant workers and they would move from the hop industry and go to work in the apple industry. I would say," Murakami laughed, "it was because it was cooler in Sebastopol."

QUESTION — Were there jobs your parents had to or wanted to go to during their days in the camps?

MURAKAMI — "They didn't have to go to work, but I think you have to understand the industrious nature of any immigrant, or Isie, parent that even if they were not working for any livelihood, they were always doing something that would be of some usefulness. Consequently, in these camps they would be performing some sort of duty."

QUESTION — Military units composed of Japanese distinguished themselves later in the war. Did the Nisei troops feel they had to perform harder than American troops to gain respect?

MURAKAMI — "I think they did. "First of all, they were not permitted to serve in the Armed Forces. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, there were many Nisei who were already in the service—conscripted under the normal draft—and many were assigned to latrine duty and picking up cigaret butts and yet some of these people had attained rank of sergeant.

"They, and those who could not get into the service, were immediately classified as enemy agents, believe it or not, and were ineligible for military service. Being 21, and gung-ho for their country, they represented being 4-C, so later when they got this chance to serve, they were

trying to disprove that particular classification."

QUESTION — What was it like, trying to ease back into the community after the war?

MURAKAMI — "My wife's parents came to Sebastopol, and their reception was a little cold, to say the least. There were people going around with (fire)arms, indicating, 'well, you better not stay here because it will be dangerous to your life'. (It got) to the point there were some homes burned—what homes we had left. I suppose it went on, if you want an educated guess, for three or four years.

"Then it went underground. By that I mean there are still people who are re-living those eras. Every now and then it comes up."

QUESTION — How?

MURAKAMI — "It surfaces in

certain remarks that are made, such as, 'Well, I don't think you can trust them'.

"These are mostly people my age, from that era, and I think they were spoonfed this, er, propaganda."

QUESTION — After the war, did the Nisei veterans—because of the GI Bill and college educations—leave the farm, the mom-and-pop stores, the fishing boats and find new jobs, which they wouldn't have if it hadn't been for the war?

MURAKAMI — "I think they have.

"Let's take my brother-in-law's case, a classic example—a Phi Beta Kappa graduate engineer from California in 1936 or '37 who could not obtain a job, although he was proba-

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American citizens

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bly one of the top graduating engineers out of UC.

"He had to go to work in New York City for a Japanese based firm because that was the only chance they had for him.

"If you contrast that to the present time, an engineer with that sort of scholastic record now wouldn't have any problems whatsoever gaining employment with any one of the larger, or even smaller, firms and being fairly well paid.

"But, at the time, there were many college graduates who did not do what he did, but simply came back and worked on the family farm."

QUESTION — After the war, did many in this country drift back to the farm?

MURAKAMI — "Originally they did. Those in Sebastopol who had large orchards went back to the family business. Those in Petaluma started back in the poultry business—but you know what happened to the poultry business. It ultimately met its demise because of the high importation cost from the midwest of feedstock."

QUESTION — Did your folks lose the orchard?

MURAKAMI — (No), they managed to lease the orchards to other people in the community in return for simply taking care of the or-

chard. There were a lot of friends in the greater community—don't misunderstand me—but they in turn were intimidated, too, by the community, but they very quietly did their job.

"Otherwise there would have been no possibility for some of these landowners to come back and try to pick up where they left off.

"Of course, it meant a lot of heavy borrowing initially to get started again."

QUESTION — Have you returned to Japan for a visit?

MURAKAMI — "I've never been to Japan.

"People make the assumption because you're of Japanese ances-

try you have visited Japan, (or) because you're Japanese ancestry you speak the language. I think it's a misconception people have."

QUESTION — What other misconceptions do we have?

MURAKAMI — "The 'inscrutable' conception Americans have of those of Japanese ancestry.

"This inscrutableness really is a mask, you might say, for their reserved nature.

"I think we tend to be introverted, and this reserved nature and shyness comes out as being inscrutable, and when the term is applied to our parents, they're inscrutable because there is a language barrier."