

TESTIMONY SUBMITTAL
TO THE COMMISSION OF WARTIME RELOCATION
AND
INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS

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My name is Nobuko Yanagimachi Suzuki. I was born in Seattle, Washington, on November 25, 1909, of Japanese parents. They came from Ueda, Nagano-ken, Japan. I received my Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Washington and Master of Religious Education from the Pacific School of Religion at Berkeley. We spoke Japanese at home so I went to Japanese Language School every day for an hour after attendance at public school. Because of this need to be bilingual, my parents sent me to Japan to study for a year at Aoyama Gakuin in Tokyo between high school and college. I was married in 1935 to Mitsuo Paul Suzuki when he was a senior in medical school in Omaha. He then interned at Harborview Hospital in Seattle for two years before opening his medical practice.

When I was in college, it was hard to find a work-oriented major because there were no jobs open to Japanese American young people. Only nurses could work in hospitals, secretaries were hired mainly in Japanese firms and rarely in other offices. After graduation, we were in a depression, and I found part-time work with the Japanese Community Service in helping a few elderly, indigent people.

December 7, 1941 found me convalescing from pleurisy. The six months prior to this had been particularly trying to me with the birth of our third son and the sudden infant death of our second son a month later.

Being the only nisei with social work experience at that time, there was much work to be done. People were being fired from their jobs. The Seattle schools fired all nisei clerks and workers. The leaders in the Japanese Community Service who took care of the indigent were all taken to some detention center. With the help of the Y.W.C.A., The Council of Churches, and the Family Society, we were able to get limited funds from the Community Chest Emergency Fund to help families that needed immediate assistance.

In a month or so, the ^{WCCA} (War Relocation Authority) opened an office to assist Japanese residents who wished to relocate outside the restricted area. I helped to interpret, explain, and assist where I could until it was time to get my own family ready to go to the Puyallup Center at the end of April 1942.

Before the wholesale move, we were required to have smallpox and typhoid immunizations. It was customary to go to the City Health Department where these shots were provided free to residents of Seattle. If one were going abroad, these shots could be had on request. Many people went to their own doctors for these shots, but there were many families, some with five or more children, who could not afford to pay for this service. I checked with the epidemiologist who would be administering the immunizations, on whether there was enough vaccine available. He assured me that they had enough on hand if we could set up stations in central gathering places and could get the help of available doctors and nurses to assist him. However, we would have to get the permission of the Chief Medical Officer of the Seattle Health Department to release the vaccine. I made an appointment with him. He did not listen to anything I had to say. Under no circumstance would he give us any help. He shouted me out of the office. I tearfully left.

Hearing of my plight, Dyke Nakamura and Taul Watanabe of the Cannery Workers office, which was disbanding, made some funds available. With this, we did set up some stations and gave the needed injections.

My husband was born in Japan and came to the United States as an adopted son of his aunt and uncle and was ineligible for citizenship under the Alien Exclusion Act. He had his license to practice in the State of Washington and his patients and friends implored him not to desert them. His assurance that he would not leave them certainly calmed many who had fears of the unknown places to which they were to be sent.

We did not have too many material possessions. Household articles were stored in my mother's basement. My husband's office furniture was stored in the basement of a close friend. Our 1939 Mercury sedan was stored and cared for by another friend. There were many friends who were sympathetic and helpful, and then, there were others who were afraid to lift a finger for fear of repercussion.

We went to Puyallup Fairgrounds Assembly Center. A makeshift hospital and clinic was put up under the grandstand. Our quarters were long barracks with rooms separated by walls not more than seven feet high and open at the top. We could hear neighbors talking and babies crying in the farthest room at the other end. The rooms were about ten feet square.

Two weeks after arriving at the camp, Yoshi, my eldest son broke out with chicken pox. Some children had brought the infection with them into the camp. Fortunately, his was a very light case, but two weeks later, his nine-month-old brother, Robert, had the worst case we had ever seen! His poor body and face were covered from the top of his head to the tip of his toes with oozing pox and crust. By this time, it had been decided to isolate infectious diseases, so, he was to go to the other other side of the fairgrounds to a building where animals had been kept during fairs. The air was musty and damp, and smelled of animals. Kerosene stoves were brought in to heat individual stalls, but were hardly adequate. This time, it was necessary to enlist my husband's help to care for the sick infant. During the three months we were in Puyallup, our friends would come to visit us. But we could talk to them only in certain places along the fence at a distance of about five feet. One day they brought us a homemade chocolate cake that had to be delivered through the central office. It came to us split in several places, checked for any contraband.

In August, it was time to move again, and this time, to Minidoka in Idaho. We had heard it was dusty but were unprepared for the sudden swirl of dust that would seep through the doors and windows and cover everything. A family of four had a room 10' x 17'. This time they had partitions at least to the ceiling. A pot-bellied stove in the corner, with foraged scraps of wood for burning, provided the heat. One light bulb, hanging by a cord in the middle of the room, was our light and outlet. Any extension blew the fuse for the rest of the building. Each cluster of buildings had a community dining hall, a laundry area, toilet, and showers. The toilets had no partitions and were hastily constructed country outhouses. Not until February 14, 1943 did we have hot water in the washrooms and flush toilets with partitions for privacy.

As soon as we arrived in Minidoka, I worked in the Social Services Department interviewing students whose studies had been interrupted. Those who already had acceptances from eastern colleges were helped to get clearances to leave camp and to be on their way before the fall semester. The wages paid most people in camp was \$16 a month; only doctors were paid \$19 per month.

Meals were served cafeteria style in a separate building at long tables with benches. It was most difficult to feed a four year old and a nine-month-old child at the same time. My husband had his meals at the hospital and was on continuous duty from 7:30 a.m. to 10 or 11 p.m. I was fortunate in having my mother close by for assistance with the children. The food was prepared by the cooks in the group with whatever provisions were delivered to the camp. My first meal in Puyallup was a boiled wiener, a potato, and cabbage, all out of the same giant pot. There was quite a bit of commotion that night with many people having to run to the toilets.

Minidoka dining halls were a little smaller with groups eating in two shifts. For a people whose main diet consisted of rice, seafood, and fresh vegetables, it was hard to get used to this fare--especially with strange meats. Not even a good cook was able to disguise or make appetizing a shipment of oxtails or pork neck bones.

We were fed and housed, but we were not free. We were enclosed by barbed-wire fences and guarded by armed soldiers, not for any wrongdoing but only because we were born of Japanese parents.

The feeling of confinement was always with us. Forced inactivity does weird things to our mental health. In January 1943, while I was at the Minidoka Hospital for an appendectomy, I saw a ward full of patients who were disoriented. They had been picked up because it was too dangerous to have them wandering about. The strain had been too great.

The Minidoka camp officials were very understanding and, when there was a passenger car available, allowed us to go to Twin Falls for a day at the Y.W.C.A., lunch at a restaurant, and shop at the local dime store. This happened about once in two months. Even so, there was fear among the evacuees to venture forth into the outside world after being confined. With so many idle hands used to working and keeping busy, I thought that we could help with the war effort and the Red Cross by rolling bandages or knitting afghans and socks. Our offer was refused at both camps.

I was allowed to go on speaking trips to the Boise Y.W.C.A., and then on another occasion to Denver, en route to a conference at Alta, Utah. There was a reunion with many Seattleites who had moved to Denver voluntarily or had been released from camp.

In the spring, an opportunity to volunteer for active duty with the 442nd Battalion presented itself. My three brothers left for Camp Shelby. My

husband was not accepted because he was not a citizen. It was not until 1953 that he was able to become a citizen of the United States.

When voluntary relocation was encouraged, we made our plans to leave Minidoka. We had been with our people for over a year, and it was time for our eldest son to start school. Since my husband's license was valid only in the State of Washington, we went to Spokane.

Reverend Emery Andrews of the Japanese Baptist Church and Floyd Schmoe, American Friends Society, were two great people who ran shuttle service between Seattle and Minidoka doing various errands for the evacuees. Our car was brought to camp for us.

On the drive to Spokane, with the car full of only our immediate needs, we had a flat tire in Pasco. The gas station attendant would not help us fix the flat nor give us a replacement tire to use as a spare. The windows of eating places had signs, "No Japs." We went on to the next town.

I had gone to Spokane previously to find a house in which to move. There was opposition from the local real estate agent who was irate because I had purchased the house directly from a kindly old German lady. In order to vent his hostility, he threw a large rock into the front window. We heard of his intent to bring a gang of his cronies from a beer tavern and to descend on us, so we asked our friends and Christian neighbors to be with us when they came. The Catholic priest, the Lutheran and Baptist ministers, and some of their parishioners from the neighborhood were there to discourage this hostile gang.

When we moved to Spokane, all the furniture stored at my mother's house was shipped to us by the WRA. We found other people's things as well as my mother's and mine. Fortunately, we had a big barn in which to store the articles. The WRA had taken no care in packing, and dishes and glasses were just put into boxes with no packing materials. Many were thus chipped or broken in the moving.

We also had troubles with the Medical Society. Through the help of friends, we were able to get his membership in the King County Medical Society reinstated. However, the Spokane Medical Society would not accept a transfer. This meant that he had limited hospital privileges and his practice would be limited to internal medicine--no surgery. Only because of some understanding members of the hospital board, he was able to take his patients to Deaconess Hospital.

The Y.W.C.A. of Seattle, of which I was a board member, did much to help and keep up my morale during all this time. I soon joined the Spokane Y.W.C.A. and attended a conference at Asilomar. Region I was still closed to Japanese, but with special permission and designated delegates from the local Y.W.C.A. as "guard," I traveled by train and bus. I had a reunion with my friends, including some Chinese, in the Bay Region. At the Chinese restaurant, I was mistaken for a Chinese and spoken to in their language.

As soon as the coastal region was open for relocation, I returned to Seattle to find a house for my mother to which we could all return and start over. My mother's former house had been sold before our return by the lawyer who had been taking care of it. After finding another house, we had no problem returning to Seattle.

There have been efforts to seek monetary compensation for the evacuees. In 1941, we were house hunting and almost bought a house for \$2,500. Today, that house cannot be bought for \$50,000. I do not know how one arrives at a "fair" monetary amount.

I have an abundance of "faith," my name translated from the Japanese character. I would want more than anything, an assurance that similar incidents of wholesale distrust and suspicion of law-abiding citizens will not again occur in any neighborhood in cities and in towns that make up these United States.