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TESTIMONY OF VIOLET KAZUE deCRISTOFORO

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However painful it is, even after 40 years of trying to forget the bitter memories of the indignities and hardships suffered by the Japanese-Americans as a result of the nightmare of the relocation and four years of incarceration, I dedicate this testimony to my children, Ken, Rei, and Kimi, to my brothers Toki and Dick, and to my late father-in-law Gohei Matsuda, and my former mother-in-law Kame, who lived through the frightening experience of wartime internment, in the hope that the tragedy resulting from Executive Order 9066 will never again be endured by any American citizen of whatever race or ancestry.

At the time of the evacuation in the spring of 1942 I was 25 years old, a native-born U.S. citizen, with a seven year old son, a five year old daughter, and three months pregnant with a third child. Yet, we were uprooted from our familiar surroundings and forced to live behind the barbed wire fences of the camps without really understanding why such a thing was being done to us. The resulting disruption of our close family ties, the neglect of the children's education in their formative years, the tragic death of their beloved grandmother, the inhumane treatment of their father Shigeru and their uncle Toki at the hands of the War Relocation Authority personnel, the removal of their father and uncle to the Santa Fe camp, and the decision of their family to return to Japan, all had a great emotional and psychological impact on the children and on me. To date the children still suffer from the loss of the close family ties they once had, from being denied the proper parental care and guidance

which was their due, and because two of the children were sent back to America in 1947 and 1951, from Japan, alone and friendless, to shift for themselves at the tender age of 12 and 14 years. This action of sending such young children away was not understood by them as a means of giving them a better opportunity in life. It was viewed by them as a denial of my love for them and has alienated them to the extent that even now they look upon me as unworthy of their love and affection.

Only two weeks after a major surgery at St. Agnes Hospital in Fresno, in March 1942, and three months pregnant, my husband and I were forced to close our home and book store, without having the opportunity to properly dispose of our belongings, and compelled to sell a brand new car and refrigerator, both for less than \$50, just so we could have a few dollars to take to camp with us. We were evacuated to the Fresno Assembly Center, a former race track, with only such personal possessions as we could hand-carry. Conditions in the Assembly Center were almost fatal to me because of my weakened physical condition, and my allergic reaction to hay was aggravated by having to sleep on a hay-filled mattress, which I had to fill myself. I also suffered severely because of the long wait in the mess line, three times a day, in the unbearable summer sun, when I was recuperating from surgery, pregnant, and caring for two young children. The long six-month stay in the Assembly Center, the broiling heat, the suffocating atmosphere of the tar paper covered buildings, and the poorly prepared food provided for us, inedible for most internees, resulted in frequent bouts of food poisoning. In my weakened physical condition I was always the first to succumb and I had to be hospitalized several times in the makeshift hospital of the Assembly Center. During this time I could

not rely on much help from my husband because he was assigned to work details and taking care of his ailing mother when he could.

My youngest daughter, born under such adversity in a horse stable, and only 18 days old when we were moved to Jerome, Arkansas, had to make the four-day and four-night trip in a dilapidated coach, amid much filth, and without the facilities to prepare her baby formula, in the stale air of the coach because the windows and shades were always drawn for security reasons. In the extreme summer heat, and in such adverse conditions, she developed double pneumonia on the train and, upon our arrival at Jerome, she had to be rushed to the still incomplete hospital. Later, at Tule Lake, this sickly child was again made severely ill when she inhaled the tear gas thrown in front of our barracks by the Military Police, when they were trying to quell a disturbance following the imposition of Martial Law. As a result of these incidents, this child had to weather several crises in her repeated stays in the hospitals at Jerome and Tule Lake.

During our confinement at Tule Lake from October 1943 to March 1946 the children and I witnessed the lingering illness and eventual death of my mother-in-law who, although terminally ill with cancer, was treated with callous and unfeeling disregard for her illness by the WRA authorities. My mother-in-law had become violently ill on the train trip from Jerome to Tule Lake in October 1943, and the train had to make an emergency stop so she could be taken to a nearby town for hospitalization. My mother-in-law did not understand or speak English, and I begged the authorities on the train to leave me behind with her so I could interpret for her and comfort her, but they refused. At this time we were not aware that she had cancer.

A few months later she was brought to the hospital at Tule Lake in a ghostly condition and months later we were notified that she had cancer. Upon hearing this I requested the WRA authorities for radium or isotope treatment for her at an outside hospital, since the Tule Lake hospital did not have the needed facilities for her treatment. Again the authorities refused my request. In vain I contacted the American Red Cross and the Spanish Consulate for permission to have her moved to a civilian hospital. Finally, in the spring of 1945, after two and a half years of unbearable pain and suffering, she was authorized to go to a hospital in Portland, Oregon, for radium treatment. Once again I requested permission to accompany her, and again my pleas were denied. Instead, my mother-in-law was taken away by two MPs, armed with rifles, and she was terrified because she had heard rumors that she was to be executed because of her long illness and hospitalization in the camp. Upon her return to Tule Lake a few weeks later, she told us of her ordeal of not being able to communicate with the doctors at the hospital, and of being constantly guarded by MPs during her stay in the hospital, while receiving treatment, and on the train trip back to camp.

My mother-in-law died soon afterward, in August 1945, and I sincerely believe that the indignities, the humiliating experiences, and her fears and suspicions negated the long-delayed medical treatment to a great extent and hastened her death. But the most cruel blow was that my husband and my brother, who by now had been held in the Santa Fe camp for "enemy" aliens for over a year, were not allowed to visit her at the Tule Lake hospital during her illness or to attend her funeral. My children and I have never forgotten this cruel and hard-hearted treatment at the hands

of our fellow American citizens.

This inhumane treatment extended to my brother Toki, who was placed in the stockade more than once, not because he had actually committed any crime, but simply because he was suspected of having instigated dissension in the camp. My brother was a cook in one of the mess halls and was aware of the considerable pilferage of food from the warehouse by the caucasian personnel of the camp, resulting in short rations for the internees. Eventually he found himself on an internee negotiating team to investigate and remonstrate about the food shortages. This was viewed as dissentious by the authorities and my brother was again put in the stockade where he was repeatedly beaten by the security personnel, so badly that once he was left for dead. All this without a hearing or a chance to explain the circumstances. Eventually he was moved to the Santa Fe camp for enemy aliens and later deported to Japan. News from the nurses who tended my brother's injuries had a searing effect on my children and me, and on my mother-in-law who was very close to my brother, and who heard the news of his latest beating even before I did because by now she was confined to the hospital most of the time. To date my brother still resides in Japan, caring for our mother, who is an A-bomb victim, and trying to forget his bitter memories of his four years of incarceration even though he was a U.S. citizen by birth.

This duress also extended to my brother Dick, who had been drafted prior to the outbreak of the war, and participated valiantly in the Pacific Campaigns, knowing all along that his relatives were being treated like common criminals in the concentration camps and he, himself was treated

as a second-class citizen by the members of his unit because he was a "Jap". Just prior to my return to Japan this brother came to see me at Tule Lake. Upon hearing of his younger brother Toki's tribulations and his deportation to Japan, my mother-in-law's tragic death, my husband's removal to Santa Fe, and my father-in-law's imminent repatriation to Japan he, too, broke down and cried with me. This soldier brother had made his home with us in Fresno before the war, and now found himself homeless. All his belongings he had left with us were lost, and his family had disintegrated. Yet he spent all his discharge money on my children and me, knowing that eventually we were returning to the uncertainties of life in war-devastated Japan, and not wanting us to look like destitutes when we got there.

When my soldier brother came to see me at Tule Lake, he told me how anxious he had been to accumulate the necessary points for discharge from the Service because of the abominable way he had been treated during the Pacific War. He had been one of a few Nisei interpreter-translators assigned to an Infantry Division. During the war he had contracted malaria but, because of his pressing duties, he was forced to do his job even when he was very ill and had a high fever. More than once, even when ill, he was called derogatory names and made to go into caves in search of documents or interrogate Japanese prisoners, always with some caucasian members of his unit armed with rifles and bayonets at his back because they did not feel he could be trusted.

Before the war, my husband had attended Fresno State College and, besides owning a Japanese book store, he was the correspondent of the

Hokubei Mainichi, he had taught in the Japanese school for years, and had been a respected leader of the Fresno Japanese community. Because of his background, he was regarded by the WRA authorities as a potential leader of the internees at Tule Lake, and thus was suspect. After a short time in Tule Lake he, along with my brother, were taken to the Santa Fe camp for enemy aliens in December 1944, and eventually shipped back to Japan. Thus, for more than a year, I was left alone in Camp, without their help and moral support, to raise my three young children, and take care of my sick mother-in-law as best I could.

By now Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been A-bombed and I was frantic with worry because Hiroshima City was the home of my parents. I was thus torn between the desire to visit my parents in Japan and remaining in the country of my birth. I contacted the Justice Department officials, who were conducting hearings at Tule Lake, to seek their advice. However, finding no alternative way to stay in the United States, I left for Japan on the last repatriation ship in March 1946. There I learned that my father had been killed in the A-bomb explosion, my mother had been severely burned in the same explosion, and their home and all their belongings had been destroyed. They had also suffered a great deal of anxiety and mental anguish worrying about their three children in America.

At about this time still another tragedy took place in my life. This was the beginning of a long and lingering illness which eventually caused the untimely death of my kind and loving father-in-law, who had never recovered from the death of his beloved wife at Tule Lake. Adding to his illness and his grief had been the financial reverses he suffered

as a result of the loss of his home in Fresno, and his life-long savings, as a result of the freezing of the assets of all "enemy" aliens in the United States. To this was added the loss of his lands and rentals in Japan resulting from the Land Reform Act imposed by the Supreme Allied Commander, and the devaluation of the Yen. He was also heartbroken by the marriage of his only son to a Japanese woman and my abandonment as well as that of my three American-born children, and his inability to help us in any material way.

At the outbreak of the war, fearing that we might be separated because he and his wife, and my husband, were classified as aliens, my father-in-law gave me the numbers of the savings accounts he had with the Yokohama Specie Bank in San Francisco, so that if he should die or become incapacitated, I could use the money to care for my children. I do not know what has become of these accounts, and I would like to request the Commission's assistance in locating these assets because that money now rightfully belongs to his U.S.-born grandchildren, all presently living in California. I am listing below the account numbers and the amounts on deposit my father-in-law had.*

When I arrived in Japan, with my three children, in order to rejoin my husband so I could begin to rebuild my family life, another shock awaited me. My husband had married a Japanese woman and had a child by her. Again, I was left destitute, abandoned by my husband and without the material help my father-in-law had hoped to provide for my support and that of his three American-born grandchildren. Thus, as a result of the evacuation and internment, I had lost my husband, my family had disin-

tegrated, all our property and belongings had been lost, and without any employable skills, I had the responsibility of supporting myself and my three children in a war-devastated country whose economy had collapsed.

Eventually I was able to get a job, but I was denied the privilege of working as an American citizen and being paid in dollars. At first I was forced to work for a Japanese construction firm, then being bilingual in English and Japanese, I went to work for the U.S. Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission, where I had no trouble obtaining one of the highest security clearances, but I was still being paid in depreciated Yen.

Conditions in war-devastated Japan were such that I did not feel I could give my American-born children the opportunities they deserved as American citizens, so I had to make the heartbreaking decision to send my oldest boy, aged 12, who did not know a word of English, back to America, alone and friendless, hoping that he could make a better life for himself than I could offer him in Japan. I was precluded from accompanying him because the U.S. Consular Service in Japan refused me permission to take him back to America. The authorities claimed that my "non-citizen" status prevented them from giving me the necessary documents, and they did not know when my citizenship might be restored. A few years later, in 1951, I again had to make the same sorrowful decision to send my older daughter, aged 14, back to the United States, also alone and friendless, so I could devote all my time and efforts to my youngest daughter, aged 8, who had been born under conditions of extreme hardship, in a horse stable at the Fresno Assembly Center, and who had always been of frail health, and who was more in need of emotional security than the

other children.

In September 1953 I married my present husband, who was an American Serviceman stationed in Japan, but I had to suffer the additional indignity of marrying him as a Japanese national, and being subjected to a comprehensive character check to make sure that I had a sound moral character and would not defile American sensibilities when I returned to my native land.

Upon our return to the United States in 1956, my husband was offered an important position with the United States Information Agency, but the question of my citizenship hindered his eligibility and I had to resort to challenging the Justice Department over my "non-citizen" status. But the bureaucratic delay was such that when my citizenship was finally restored in January 1958 the position had been filled, and I have felt responsible ever since that, on my account, my husband was denied a position for which he was eminently qualified.

The indignation suffered as a result of the evacuation and internment, and the uncertain status of my citizenship has left a deep and humiliating scar on my psyche, and I often have to be consoled by my husband, who has always upheld my belief in myself, and in the fact that this monstrous wrong will eventually be righted. But I feel that no degree of counseling or moral support will ever make things right again.

Now it is my fervent hope and desire that the United States Government make just restitution for the financial losses suffered by thousands

of American citizens of Japanese ancestry, and by me, particularly since I was unable to file a claim for my monetary losses under the Evacuation Claims Act (HR 3999), signed by President Truman in 1948, because I was in Japan at the time and was not permitted by the American authorities to return to the United States to file a claim. I also hope that the authorities will give a solemn pledge that they will remain faithful to the provisions of our Constitution and that the indignities and emotional stresses we suffered will not be repeated in the future, nor will the exploitation of innocent and politically naive citizens of whatever race or ancestry, ever will take place again.

* Accounts of my father-in-law, GOHEI MATSUDA, of Fresno, California, with the YOKOHAMA SPECIE BANK, of San Francisco, California, at the time of our internment:

<u>Year A/C Opened</u>	<u>A/C Number</u>	<u>Amount on Deposit</u>
Taisho 13/ 9/18		
Showa 2/12/ 1		
Showa 15/11/25		
Showa 14/11/30		
Showa 5/ 6/19		
Showa 5/ 6/19		
Showa 15/12/12		

Violet Kazuo de Cristoforo