



National Council for Japanese American Redress

November 5, 1982

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Dear Friends,

Reading Joy Kogawa's novel Obasan was an experience for me. I've reviewed it elsewhere in this newsletter. I think the concept that applies most to the redress movement is the time it takes to grasp and absorb an event. The heroine comes to grips with her childhood experience of Canada's forced migration of Japanese Canadians through a process of reliving the events via an aunt's diary and other documents which add an objective layer of reality to her own moving remembrances. For example, a news account of the "Grinning and Happy", "Jap Evacuees Best Beet Workers" in January, 1946 makes painfully ironic the harsh reality of a child's stoop labor in the endless rows of sugar beets. The irony becomes excruciating when you realize that this labor is the result of a second forced migration after the end of World War II.

Thus, it is no wonder that there is some confusion in our redress movement. People wonder why there is not a unified approach. I suspect that we have not allowed the time for our own personal remembrances to be overlaid with objective reality. If we had an exciting social life in camp, we allow that to be the reality. There is, we must grudgingly admit, a certain amount of truth to the Lillian Baker-Samuel Ichiro Hayakawa version of camp life. If we say that reality cannot be tempered by time and added knowledge, then we stay at the Baker-Hayakawa level. But if we allow for time and knowledge to extend and deepen our experiences, which is really the more normal mode, we mature and develop wisdom.

I can still remember my first lecture on Sigmund Freud given by David Riesman. Suddenly, in a short hour, I was overwhelmed by the emotions and discomforts of childhood and adolescent sexuality and their Freudian interpretations. A similar, but not so sweeping, realization occurred during a series of lectures by Morton Grodzins. I began to understand what it was that had happened to us in camp. Grodzins, a political scientist, emphasized the political aspects, the effectiveness of various pressure groups in influencing Congress. The realization deepened as I read the other books that were published. A second quantum leap occurred when I read Michi Weglyn's Years of Infamy about six years ago. I began to realize that it was more than just politicians. There was racism and duplicity at the highest levels of government.

I remember discussing the study commission (which came into being as the CWRIC) with Michi and how she scoffed at the notion of commissioners digging through the mountains of documents at the National Archives. The scoff was on target. The commissioners simply pontificated. They listened to many, many tales of woe. But they really haven't done any research and learned about the evil role of the government. Bendetsen and McCloy testified and simply attempted to extend the Big Lie technique. Bendetsen claimed we lived in fully furnished apartments and McCloy insisted that there wasn't even the need for the government to apologize. But we, NCJAR, have dug into the National Archives and have unearthed a treasure-trove of documents. The pattern is unmistakable.

We were skewered by the government. The WRA claimed that they were involved in our relocation, Detention, accordingly, became a necessity only because of the resistance from the people. It sounds so reasonable. So close to our direct experience. But when Mitsuye Endo filed for a writ of habeas corpus in July, 1942, it was the War Department that engineered a massive response. They proposed legislation to suspend the writ, an extreme measure not taken since the Civil War. And later, when massive public and congressional pressure was applied to turn over the administration of Tule Lake as a segregated center to the Army, the State Department intervened, arguing that were the U.S. to do this it would cause Japan to do the same to U.S. citizens. We were, in other words, serving as the quid pro quo for Americans held in Japanese hands.

The perception and understanding take time. We need to allow the present to inform the past.

Another area of confusion arises from our own feelings. We were after all victims of a long history of racial oppression. I have in front of my desk a photograph of the graduating class of 1941 of Ralph Waldo Emerson Junior High School. It is a large class of over 400 pupils. Most are white. There is a goodly sprinkling of Nisei children, 14 and 15 year-olds. It looks normal America of 1941. My feelings are positive. When I reflect upon them I remember, "Yeah, it wasn't so bad in those days." But the objective reality is that racial segregation was harshly drawn by restrictive covenants in housing, by rigid patterns of job discrimination, and by racial barriers in emerging sexual relationships. That was the norm. That is what our feelings of the time were based upon.

I think that within the norm of those times, there was a certain acceptability to the exclusion-detention. Within that norm, it was normal. And so it is confusing to feel otherwise. And I'm not so sure we can really change those feelings. After all, they are there like an historic artifact. I think the issue remains confusing as long as we leave it back there.

What we need to do is to extend the event of exclusion-detention into the present. Also, we need to learn what it was the government was up to. We can read and understand. But we also need to make the reality -- the extended reality -- concrete. And that can be done by acting, by deciding to file suit against the government, to tell ourselves and our friends and family that we were wronged and now demand redress.

That's liberating, friends.

Be liberated. Take a step. Join the class action. Send us a token of your support.

Peace,

Willie Hok.

P.S. A special note to all you who live in the Los Angeles area. On Saturday, December 4th, NCJAR is sponsoring a dinner in honor of Harry Ueno at Plymouth Congregational Church at 6:30 p.m. Please try to attend. The cost is only ten bucks. You'll get a chance to meet Harry and to hear your fearless leader (me). Hannah Tomiko Holmes, one of our staunchest supporters, is organizing the event. If you have questions, you may call Rev. Wes Yamaka at (312)280-4060. The proceeds go to the Redress Legal Fund. See ya there!

AVAILABLE THROUGH NCJAR

Quantity

T-shirts and Buttons

Price*

_____	T-shirts made of 100% cotton in blue, yellow, or tan S, M, L, XL with NCJAR symbol in black	\$ 8.00
_____	Buttons, 1-7/16" round, black NCJAR symbol on yellow background	.50

Literature

_____	"Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps" by Michi Weglyn; William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1976	10.00
_____	"Camp Notes and Other Poems" by Mitsuye Yamada; shameless hussy press, 1976	4.50
_____	Amerasia Journal, Fall 1974, Vol. 2, No. 2; Asian American Civil Rights and the Law, Part I	6.00
_____	Asian and Pacific American Experience: Women's Perspective; edited by Nobuya Tsuchida, Asian/Pacific American Learning Resource Center & University of Minnesota, 1982	15.00
_____	Gift subscription to NCJAR newsletter, 12 issues	15.00

*All prices include postage.

Please send order with check to: National Council for
Japanese American Redress
925 West Diversey Parkway
Chicago, Illinois 60614

"We come from our untold tales that wait for their telling."

A Review: Joy Kogawa's Obasan

Reading Joy Kogawa's Obasan is liberation, consciousness-raising, recognition, sadness and joy. (How trite and awkward my own words seem.) Her words flow in lyrical prose-poetry into a story that has, at long last, been written about the Nisei experience. A writer has emerged with a telling to match the tale.

That she is Canadian is a surprise but only an imagined obstacle to the Japanese-American reader. Obasan easily spans the border. Her remembrances are ours. The Japanese phrases, deftly translated, the food and smells, the facial features, the averted look, the silences, wordlessness of our communication are drawn into one's consciousness. Of course, the exclusion-detention in Canada which is the novel's vehicle mirrors our own in all its uncertainty, illogic, racist stupidity and crudity. But there are differences which make little difference.

Joy Kogawa is a gifted writer. She knows the delicate power of words and crafts elegant solutions to the problems of the story. Japanese expressions are used to capture the untranslatable sound and flavor; but without translation these would be mute and tasteless. She weaves them naturally into the dialogue in a variety of ways so you hardly notice. Her story of the forced migration is mainly from the perspective of a young child. These early experiences form the base upon which our lives are built. But she adds a necessary overlay of objective reality from a diary written by an adult Aunt Emily who describes the chaos, uncertainty, and anguish caused by the government's orders to exclude all Japanese Canadians from the West Coast and to segregate men from women and children. The determination of a family to remain together is ultimately frustrated. And Aunt Emily is not seen again for many years.

Naomi, grown-up into a schoolmarm, is forced into her past as "Nomi" the child by Aunt Emily and her diary and other papers. We are told how it sometimes takes years for answers to be found, and events to be understood. Nomi lives in her own world with overwhelming questions which are never answered in so many words, such as her father's absence, the unrealized promise to replace a lost doll, her most intimate possession, and her stubborn wish to return home. Her splintered family is forced to live in a ghost town in Canada's interior, along with other Japanese Canadians. It is not quite detention but a cruel bargain nonetheless with a remote and tiny cabin, a long hike to the public bath, and hostile kids to fend off on her way to school.

Her father's return is one of many moments of the story that overflows with poetic imagery:

"We do not talk. His hands cup my face. I wrap my arms around his neck. The button of his pyjama top presses into my cheek. I can feel his heart's steady thump thump thump. I am Minnie and Winnie in a sea shell, resting on a calm sea-shore. I am Goldilocks, I am Momotaro returning. I am leaf in the wind restored to its branch, child of my father come home. The world is safe once more and Chicken Little is wrong. The sky is not falling down after all."

Just as Naomi is forced to relive her past, we are compelled to join in her retelling. It is strangely gratifying to remember one's own hurts and anger in another's story. The forced migration does not end with the end of World War II, when Stephen, Nomi's older brother shouts, "We won, we won, we won!" A government edict forces them once again to move. This time the departure is marked by a painfully appropriate Christian celebration of Holy Communion held in Nomi's home, a rare and fitting remembrance of the Crucifixion. This time it is to a dust-clogged sugar beet farm to live in a chicken coop hovel and to work harsh endless days of stoop labor. It is a bitter time when reality becomes slippery, hard to grasp. So the news of her father's death is shunted aside. Instead a frog is fed in hope it will turn into a prince. It is a few years before she accepts his death. It is many more years, in middle adulthood, before she learns of her mother's fate.

Obasan is the telling of a story of an injustice, a human cruelty, which takes decades to be revealed. It is a story we all need to read and relive.

Introductory Remarks by Merry Omori
at NCJAR Benefit Concert "Omoide"
on October 23, 1982

What we are commemorating tonight is an event that occurred forty years ago: the forced exclusion of 120,000 Japanese Americans, solely because of their Japanese ancestry, from their homes on the West Coast and their detention in concentration camps for periods of up to four years during World War II.

For a few of us, the pain and shame have been mercifully blunted by the passage of time. Some of us may have even succeeded in exorcising the painful experience from our minds.

But, for most of us, the memories of our experience as an interned people continue to be excruciatingly painful and hauntingly ever-present as we carry on with our daily lives.

The few pleasant memories we managed to salvage out of the many tragedies wreaked by the exclusion and internment are quickly obscured if one dares to contemplate the more somber realities of camp life: the disintegration of families, the barbed wire fences, the tar-papered barracks we called home, the sentries with their guns, the guard towers, the deaths of loved ones because of inadequate medical care, the riots, the middle of the night raids for contraband and dissidents, the killings, and sons and brothers fighting and dying on the battlefields to defend the freedom of all Americans -- except ours -- the freedom denied us because we were different.

What do I remember most vividly? I remember the son of a family friend who was killed in action fighting in Europe. I remember his body being shipped back to the camp for the funeral. I remember a Buddhist priest intoning the chant for the dead. I remember his mother, an Issei, dressed in black, holding ever so gently in her hands, the three-cornered flag, gazing down at the flag, as though she were embracing her son for the last time. I wonder what her thoughts were?

Was she really bearing the unbearable with quiet strength and dignity? Was she thinking "shikata-ga-nai"? Can we not imagine, and forgive her, if she had felt some anger in her grief and in the realization of the senselessness and incongruity of her son's sacrifice?

The concept of shikata-ga-nai has been alluded to so often whenever we ponder why we went so docilely into the camps. Is shikata-ga-nai really an attribute of the Japanese character or is it a myth used to keep us from asserting our rights?

The Nisei have heard it so often that we have come to accept it as being an immutable trait.

I believe that the concept of shikata-ga-nai must be cast aside; we have to stop perpetuating the myth that whatever is done to us -- we will accept -- because it is inherent in our genes. Too many of us are hiding behind the shikata-ga-nai syndrome. It is a convenient "cop-out" to keep from acting.

But, we must act.

In the words of Victor Hugo: "Stronger than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come." Is it not time for us, the victims, to seek restitution for the injuries we suffered? NCJAR is firmly convinced that the time has come to seek that justice.

In May of 1981, we retained the Washington law firm of Landis, Cohen, Singman and Rauh to represent us in initiating a class action lawsuit against the government for their actions.

Our goal was to raise \$75,000 toward legal fees to take our case to court. To date, we have raised \$65,000. We hope to go over the top by the end of this year with the remaining \$10,000.

Not only are we nearing our initial financial goal -- and I say, initial, because NCJAR will continue in our fund-raising efforts until the question of the legality of evacuation and detention is decided once and for all by the courts -- we are also learning the truth about indiscriminate government policies and the individuals responsible for those policies and decisions that resulted in our removal and incarceration.

Recently declassified government documents contain information that is repugnant and reprehensible to the integrity of all Americans in a democratic nation. They reveal racism, falsification of data, collusion, suppression of evidence, cover-ups, informants, and a deliberate attempt by government officials to abrogate the constitutional, legal, and civil rights of Japanese Americans.

In the complaint which is soon to be filed in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia, our lawyers have systematically identified over 60 factual allegations of government wrong-doing that constitute grounds for adjudication, and sets forth 20 causes of action giving us the right to bring a suit against the U.S. government.

For the first time, through legal research and through NCJAR's own research of the documents, we have gained a clearer understanding of the nature of the wrongs and the magnitude of those wrongs.

In addition to the many hours we have devoted to fund-raising and researching the many thousands of government documents, our efforts in the past year included a successful search for plaintiffs to serve as representatives for the five categories of persons designated in the class action.

The legal obstacles we face are formidable. But we become more and more encouraged each day as we continue to gain support from both the legal community and the general public.

We are finding that laws can and do change over time, that laws are not as immutable as we first thought. The outcome is, of course, difficult to predict, but we are participating in the making of history -- we are asserting our will and exercising our rights as Americans.

A Memorable Omoide Concert

The musical concert, Omoide -- a containment of memories -- was a memorable event for those 200 persons from the Chicago community who attended. Young, ten-year-old, Annabelle Jimenez' violin sang Vivaldi and Severn with understanding and verve. Hinae Nakazawa, a remembered and beloved soprano by many in Chicago, brought back old memories in haunting Japanese songs as well as in Richard Rogers, "Hello Young Lovers". Edward Ozaki, son of NCJAR board members Haru and Sam Ozaki, brought artistry and skill to his tenor rendition of songs by Leoncavallo, Lerner, Bizet, and Ponchielli. And finally, Marina Bales Ozaki, Edward's wife and accompanist, displayed her power and sensitivity in four etudes by Chopin, a beautifully executed "Jeux d'eau" by Ravel and a "Ballade" by Chopin. Amy Duran accompanied Annabelle and June Oda, Hinae.

The artists are all local Chicagoans. They contributed their talent and left the audience with a sense of delight. This and the fine effort of many others enabled NCJAR to raise around \$1,900. All who attended and volunteered deserve our thanks, but especially Haru Ozaki and Merry Omori who co-chaired, Eddie Sato for his art work and ubiquitous calligraphy, and everyone who cleaned the church, sold tickets, T-shirts, etc., made coffee, tea, and got that large tin of arare.



**NATIONAL COUNCIL for
JAPANESE AMERICAN REDRESS**
925 West Diversey Parkway
Chicago, Illinois 60614

BULK RATE



ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

MS SASHA HOHRI

Let's push ourselves over the top!
We've paid \$65,000 of our \$75,000 fee to our attorneys. There are two ways you can help us make the final \$10,000 by year's end.

1. Make a contribution now!
2. Send us names of friends who might be interested.

- \$1,000 as one of the Forty-seven Ronin.
- \$500 as a measure of my commitment.
- \$100 and my hope that hundreds more will do the same.
- \$ _____ and my very best wishes for success.

(All contributors will receive our newsletter.)

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