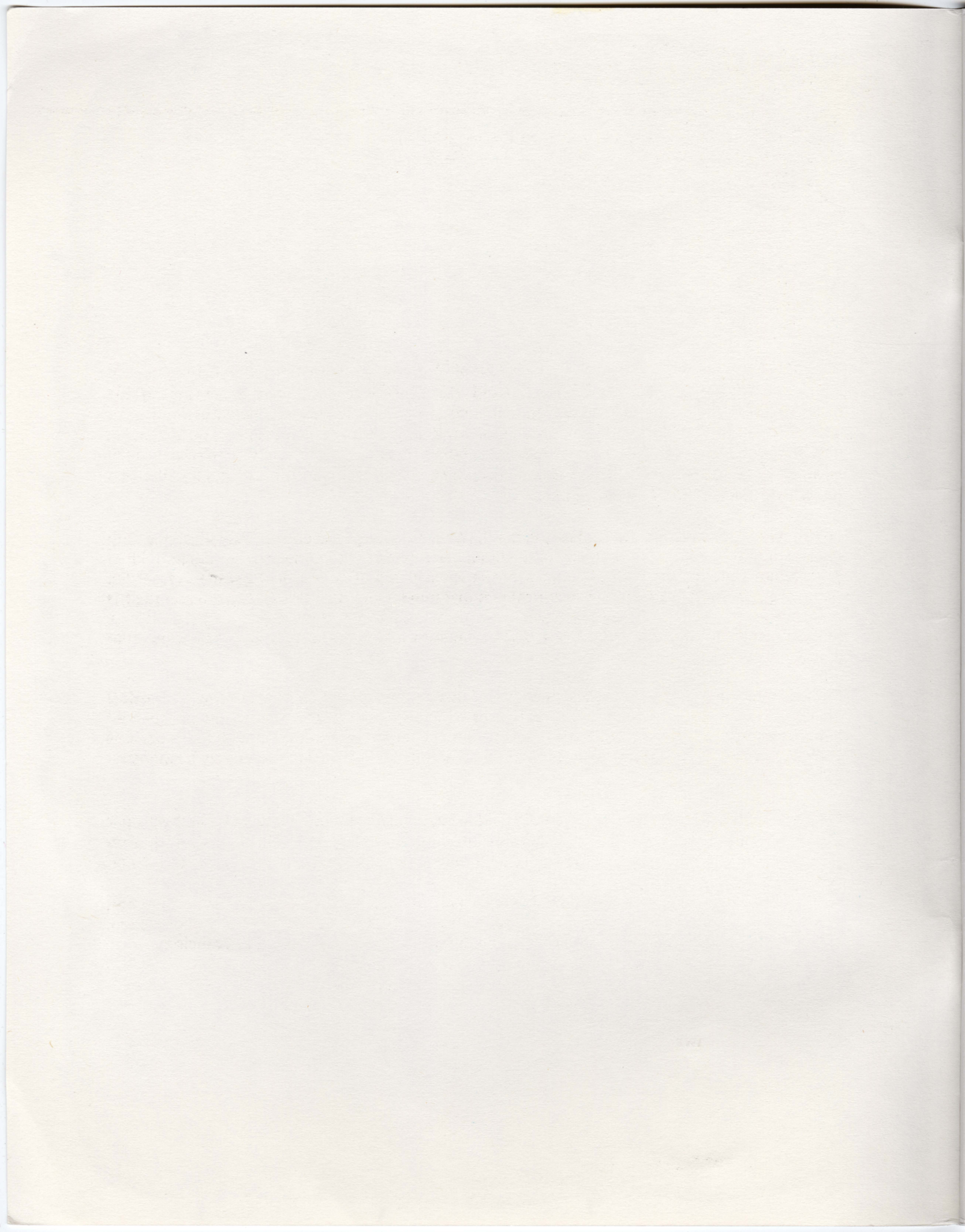


*R*eturn to *T*opaz '93

*R*ecollections

*R*eflections

*R*emembrances



Three Generations Speak

The Issei

I came from Japan some years before the great earth quake left San Francisco a mass of rubble and ruins.

I worked on the first series of Imperial Valley, Salinas, and Florida and turned their rich orchards and meadows ripe with fruit and vegetables.

I worked long hours as a domestic and cook, and all along I sent my children to school, hoping they would be better off than I had been.

Return to Topaz '93

The Nisei

I was brought with my parents who died in old Japanese camps. My mother was the landlady "Anastasia".

I was no use in going to language schools, but later regretted that I had not learned the Japanese parents of the advantage of knowing two languages.

I went to high school and college, earned degrees, and everything appeared to be a successful part of the American world.

But I was no better off than the Issei when Ford Huber came. Exclusion made a mockery of my citizenship, but I made the best of it in the "concentration camps".

To maintain my loyalty I volunteered for the 442nd Central Postal Directory in the Army. I went to the mountains of France to become the "Post Office of the Army".

After the war, I had to fight another "battle" to get my citizenship. I was not allowed to return to the United States until 1948.

I returned to the United States and found a new world. I had a new life and a new home. I was no longer a "foreigner" but an American citizen.

I was not rebelling against my parents. I was just trying to do what I thought was right. I was just trying to be a "good citizen".

I was just trying to be a "good citizen". I was just trying to be a "good citizen". I was just trying to be a "good citizen".

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❖ Recollections

❖ Reflections

❖ Remembrances

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Return to Topaz '93

• Recollections

• Reflections

• Remembrances

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The Anthology Committee wishes to thank all the authors who contributed articles and the photographers for their photographs. Thanks also to the families of deceased artists and writers for their generous contributions of artwork, poetry, photographs, and articles.

War Relocation Authority
Central Utah Project
1942-1945

RETURN TO TOPAZ '93
Salt Lake City, Delta, Topaz, Utah
May 29-30, 1993

Three Generations Speak

The Issei

I came from Japan some years before the great earthquake left San Francisco a mass of smouldering ruins.

I worked on the arid acres of Imperial Valley, Livingston, and Florin and turned them into orchards and ranches ripe with fruit and vegetables.

I worked long hours as a domestic and gardener, and all along I sent my children to school, hoping they would do better than had been wrested from life by the gnarled brown hands of their parents.

Pearl Harbor shattered my circumscribed existence. Some of us were interned, and some of us died in the relocation centers.

But many of us did survive, and now we are plodding into the sunset as senior citizens.

The Nisei

I was impatient with my parents who clung to old Japanese ways, and sometimes I became angry in my insistence on their becoming "Americanized."

I saw no use in going to language schools, but later regretted that I had not seen the wisdom of my parents of the advantage of knowing two languages.

I went to high school and college, earned degrees, and everything appeared rosy as I became a successful part of the American world.

But I was no better off than the Issei when Pearl Harbor came.

Evacuation made a mockery of my citizenship, but I made the best of it in America's "concentration camps."

To vindicate my loyalty I volunteered for the 442nd regimental combat team and fought my way from Anzio, Italy, to the mountains of France to become the most decorated unit in the U.S. Army.

After the war, I had to fight another "battle" to win acceptance again in my new American homes. I rebuilt a career and feel I have done my best as a solid citizen. Why am I so disturbed by the rebelliousness of the Sansei?

The Sansei

I am not rebelling against you as a generation; I just do not see things in the same light. Your god is "success" and conformity; I think there is more to life.

You still think in terms of the "Japanese American community." Mine is a wider sphere—the Third World—and my interests are linked with those of other minorities.

So some of us smoke marijuana, and some of us live in communes. Why are you so shocked? This is a part of our generation, and if you want to understand us, remember the gap that yawned between the Issei and Nisei.

But I agree with both generations on one thing: Be proud of the Japanese heritage.

—Iwao Kawakami
(1907–1976)



Written in 1976. Permission to reprint from Joe Kawakami.

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PREFACE

Return to Topaz '93 was the first organized postwar trek to the site of the War Relocation Authority Central Utah Project. Topaz was one of ten internment camps scattered throughout the United States. It housed 8,500 of the 120,000 Japanese Americans who were summarily uprooted from their homes on the West Coast during Spring 1942. The imprisonment of innocent Japanese Americans continued for the duration of World War II and was due to racism, greed, war hysteria, and the political leadership's failure to protect our civil rights.

"Dedicated to the Issei who suffered the pain and humiliation of the evacuation and incarceration."

During Memorial Day weekend about 450 people made this trek to satisfy their curiosity; reunite and reminisce with family, neighbors, and friends; and loosen the bonds of shackled camp memories. The most compelling reason was the need to heal wounds caused by the evacuation and internment.

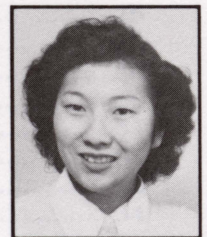
One of the trek's scheduled events was an intergenerational discussion that provided the opportunity for the *Nisei* (second generation Japanese Americans, born in America of Japanese-born parents) to share their internment camp experiences with each other, the *Sansei* (third generation Japanese Americans), and the *Yonsei* (fourth generation Japanese Americans). Many *Nisei* had never revealed their feelings about their incarceration. Overwhelmed by the depth and intensity of these emotions the younger generations urged the *Nisei* to record and recount their stories. *Sansei* and *Yonsei* offered to add their own reactions and reflections to the *Nisei*'s recollections and remembrances.

The Topaz anthology is the result of this collaborative effort. Due to space limitations, we condensed some contributions. In making our editorial decisions we endeavored to maintain each author's words and tone, essence and meaning, and emotional impact.

We thank the writers for sharing their sadness, nostalgia, guilt, anger, loss, pain, and forgiveness.

This anthology of memories and reflections is dedicated to the *Issei* (first generation Japanese Americans, immigrants) who suffered the pain and humiliation of the evacuation and incarceration. During this period many of them encouraged us not to harbor resentment or anger, but to have the faith to endure and overcome the government's failure to protect our constitutional rights.

—Daisy Uyeda Satoda
Topaz Anthology Committee



FUMI
MANABE
HAYASHI

Topaz High School Student
Book 19

Berkeley, CA

In 1931, I started elementary school in Berkeley. I spoke very little English and had no contact with adults other than Japanese neighbors. Going to school was a very traumatic experience. I had so much trouble with math and reading that my mother was told I would never complete high school.

At junior high, I caught up and made the honor roll. There I met students from the Berkeley hills who were used to speaking English. They were paid to read. One student's parents came from families involved in the war. These were "hill" students and sponsored each other. Even the Girl Scout troop.

I entered Tsafuran when I was 17. At both Tsafuran and Topaz, we had a lot of activity. We published school newspapers, planned and attended many events, and discussed all aspects of Topaz High School.

Underlying all of these events had concerns about our parents' bank accounts and the disappearance of "assets" who could not own personal funds, and could

As the oldest child in the family? How would I find my way from Topaz? My parents' reception by the outside world.

My family decided to leave Topaz High, my mother for St. Louis. My mother's way of knowing what we were at domestic and overseas lives. It would be 1946 before

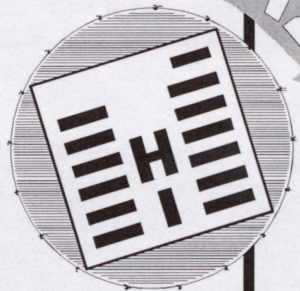
While in St. Louis, I read a few pages and started to cry. Since then, I have had difficulty reading and past. I wanted to know more information.

It has been my aim to help Japanese Americans. It was on this day, and it made a difference.

RETURN TO



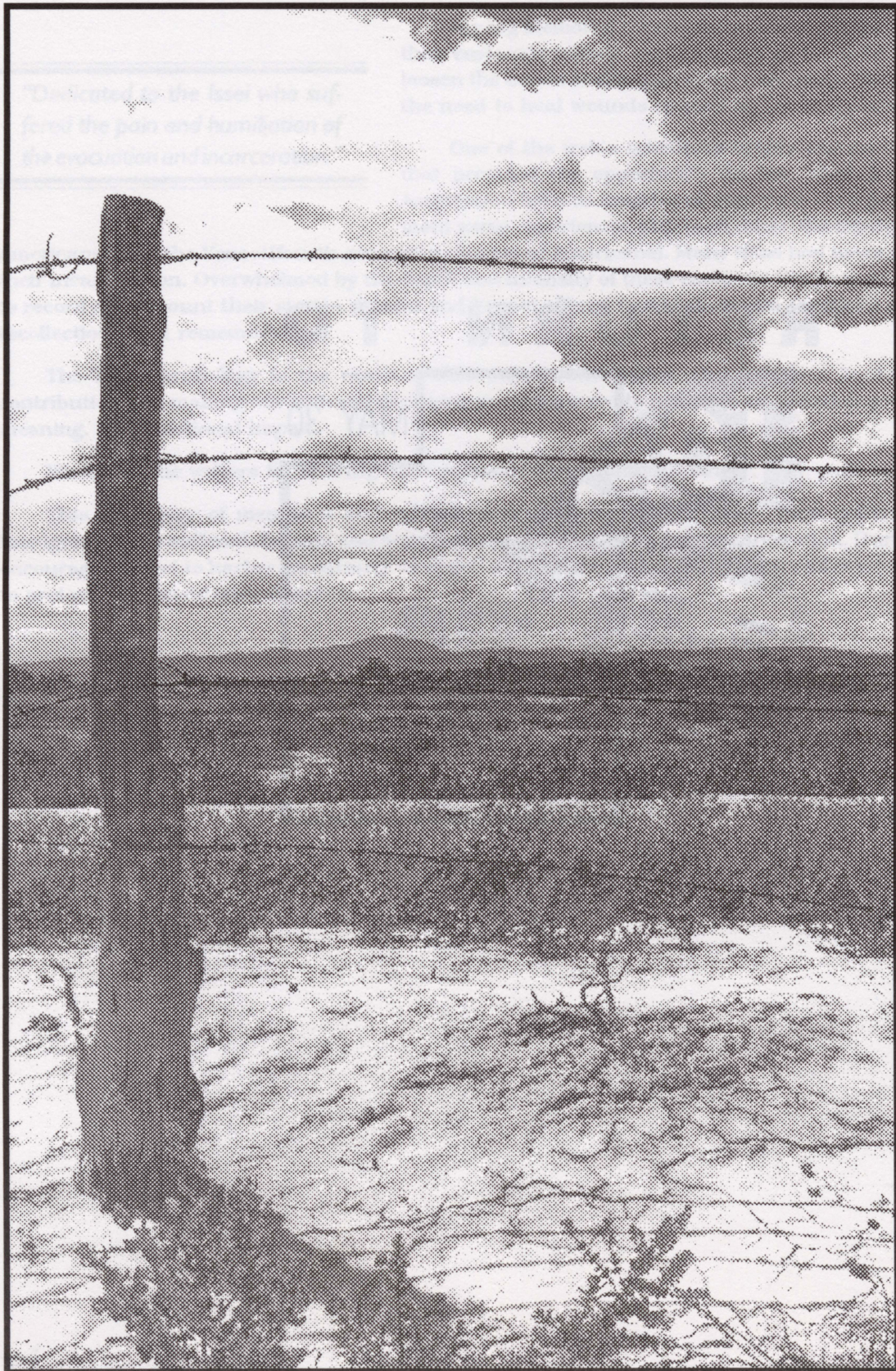
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★ 93

RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

Return to Topaz '93 was the first organized journey back to the site of the War Relocation Authority Central Utah Project. Topaz was one of ten internment camps scattered throughout the United States. It housed 8,200 of the 120,000 Japanese-Americans who were voluntarily uprooted from their homes on the West Coast during Spring 1942. The imprisonment of interned Japanese-Americans continued for the duration of World War II and was due to racism, greed, war hysteria, and the political leadership's failure to protect our civil rights.



It is this trip to satisfy neighbors, and friends, and not compelling reasons was and internment.

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area, we considered some and local, events, and

Englishmen.

the Japanese Americans, respected many of them in the government's culture

—Daisy Yoda, Author and Archivist, Committee



In 1931, I started elementary school in Berkeley. I spoke very little English and had no contact with adults other than Japanese neighbors. Going to school was a very traumatic experience. I had so much trouble with math and reading that my mother was told I would never complete high school.

At junior high, I caught up and made the honor roll. There I met students from the Berkeley hills who received more in spending money than my family paid in rent. One student's father advised President Roosevelt. Other students came from families headed by professors or high-ranking government officials. These same "hill" students ran the school government. They elected each other and appointed each other to committees. There was a definite pecking order. Even the Girl Scout troop was exclusive.

I entered Tanforan when I was fifteen.

At both Tanforan and Topaz, we could choose to participate in any school activity. We published school papers, we produced and acted in plays, and we planned and attended many dances and parties. The freedom to participate in all aspects of Topaz High School was a joyous experience.

Underlying all of these fun and games was the question of the future. Everyone had concerns about the future, but we had experienced the loss of our parents' bank accounts, the evacuation enforced by armed military might, and the disappearance of parental power. Our parents were now "enemy aliens" who could not own property, could not travel, could not draw upon personal funds, and could not even apply for citizenship.

As the oldest child in the family, was it my responsibility to support my family? How would I find a job? When and how would my family be released from Topaz? My parents had few English skills. And we worried about our reception by the outside community.

My family decided that I would continue school. Soon after I graduated from Topaz High, my sister, who was still in junior high school, and I set out for St. Louis. My mother insisted that my sister go with me because we had no way of knowing when we could be together as a family. We hired ourselves out as domestics and continued school. This time was the bleakest period in our lives. It would be 1946 before our family was reunited in Berkeley.

While in St. Louis, I picked up a copy of *Prejudice* by Carey McWilliams. I read a few pages and started to cry. I tried to read the book again, and again I started to cry. Since then, I have purchased many books on the internment, but have had difficulty reading them. Evacuation, relocation, internment, and resettlement were intense experiences that made up a big part of my identity and past. I wanted to have references available so my children could get information.

It has been my aim and pleasure to support those who tell the story of Japanese Americans. It made my heart sing to see so many friends from Topaz on this trip, and it made me proud to be one of them. ■

FUMI
MANABE
HAYASHI

Topaz High School Student
Block 19

Berkeley, CA



"It made my heart sing to see so many friends from Topaz . . . and it made me proud to be one of them."



CHIZU
KITANO
IIYAMA

Topaz Social Worker
Block 34

El Cerrito, CA



Thoughts on the Topaz Pilgrimage

It was my first return to Topaz—fifty-one years after our incarceration. I wanted to see the place, to jog my memory and curiosity. I had not expected it to be such an emotional experience.

As I stood on the sun-baked, cracked, yellow-gray soil upon which our barracks, 34-3-D, was erected, I had such conflicting feelings. I felt a profound sense of sadness, looking over the green greasewood (I had remembered it only as a dull gray), the hot blue skies, the flat desert land with the mountains in the distance. It was so different from the bustling camp—people rushing to the mess hall or to work, sounds of conversation and laughter, children playing in front of their barracks. The memories came gushing forth—our nightly discussions at the block bathroom where young women shared their visions of the future, hoping to return to school; meals in the mess hall with our friends amid the clatter of dishes; our frustration at being confined continually reinforced by guard towers and barbed wire fences and the rumors of what was happening in the outside world.

As a social worker in camp, I was so aware of the problems of group living and the lack of privacy. The median age of the Nisei was eighteen, and most were teenagers concerned with their identity. And in this situation, were they Americans? Japanese? Why this rejection from their country? What about their future? And then there was the pain of having to answer Questions 27 and 28, keeping in mind their parents' feelings and wishes.

I have thoughts of my parents, my sisters and their families, and my young brother living here for three years. I was fortunate in leaving early. How did they survive day after day in this dreary, harsh physical environment of dust storms and terrible heat, snow and cold in the winter, isolation and boredom?

But there also were feelings of pleasure. It was fascinating to talk to people who were school children at the time; they can remember the fun—their friends, school activities, parties, and special events. My mother recalls the classes she took, the work in the mess hall, and the chats with her friends. It says much for human resiliency that, despite these terrible conditions, we were able to bring some joy to our lives. We survived because of our support system of family and friends.

Mixed in were feelings of anger—the injustice of being put in these concentration camps with no charges against us, no trial by jury, and no opportunity to defend ourselves. Our civil rights were totally disregarded. Especially after my class on the Hopi Indians, it became clear that racism is part of America's history, and we need to combat it wherever it appears. I think everyone at the reunion felt we must ensure that no other group shall be treated as we were during World War II. ■

"It says much for human resiliency that, despite these terrible conditions, we were able to bring some joy to our lives."



The following speech was delivered at the Topaz Monument commemorative ceremony on Sunday, May 30, 1993.

A half century ago, a lifetime ago, more than 8,000 persons lived in this vast desolation we came to know as Topaz. We laughed and played here, hurt and cried here. Some of us fell in love and married here. Some were born here, some died here. Relative to a life span, our time here was short, but it was a time of great emotion and heightened sensitivities. Now nothing is left but the sagebrush and dust, artifacts, ghosts, and memories—and a monument to mark a time that was.

We "return" here today—some for the first time, some for the second or more time. Some were never here before. How do we feel? What do we remember? Memories are individual. We do not all remember the same things. Some memories are pleasant, some we wish we could forget, but all are a part of us.

I remember the people—the creativity of people who made beauty out of nothing, the nobility of people who made a life and a community in the middle of a desert behind barbed wire, the forbearance of people who endured incredible hardship and frustration with unswerving dignity.

I remember the simple pleasures—the joy of getting the ever-popular blue jeans, the block dances where we could dance without even knowing how, the athletic events with their "thrill of victory and the agony of defeat," and I remember the fun of just hanging out.

I remember the camp—the barrenness of the desert, the searing heat of summer, the freezing cold of winter, the ever-present cruelty of the dust which became a part of my skin. I remember the spectacular sunsets and the crystal clear nights whose awesome display of stars gave contrast to the land, as if to remind us that along with the bleakness of reality, hope remains.

I remember the lines for every occasion—mess hall lines, lines at the local movie house (where we learned to endure the discomfort of sitting cross-legged on the hard, bare wooden floor), and most of all the demeaning latrine lines. I remember the loss of privacy and how we had to speak in whispers even during family arguments. I remember the too-oft served mutton stew, a dish I swore I never would eat again.

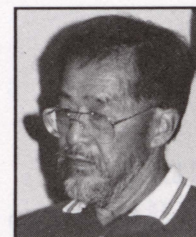
How can we ever forget the hurt, the pain, and the anger of being rejected and imprisoned by our own country? How can we ever forget the assault on our sense of worth, our sense of who we were? What happened to us then was akin to rape, an act that begets a cruel combination of shame and anger. Perhaps this partly explains our reluctance to share our emotions from our incarceration experience with the Sansei and Yonsei and our almost insatiable drive to prove ourselves.

So, in this hot desert crucible, we started on our journey to forge an identity that celebrates our cultural heritage and demands legitimacy as Americans. On this journey many of our brothers fought and died on the battlefield or languished in jails in protest. Some of us are still on this journey.

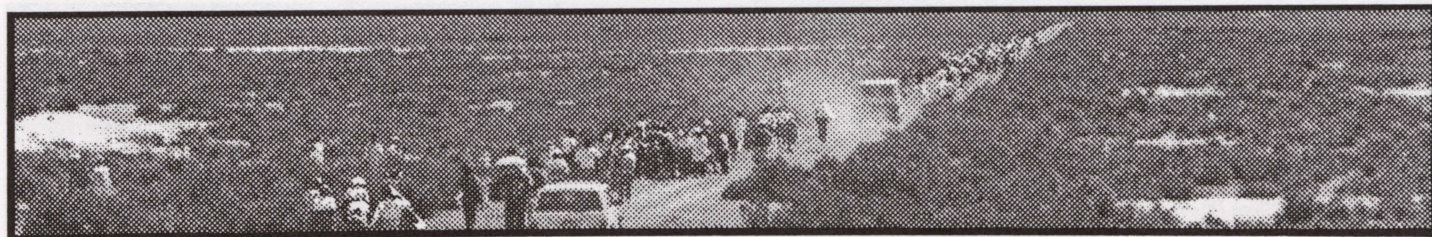
**TOARU
ISHIYAMA**

Topaz Commissary Timekeeper
Block 9

Parma, OH



"I remember . . . the creativity of people who made beauty out of nothing . . . I remember the lines for every occasion . . . It is now time for us to cry the tear we could not cry then, but cry together in healing and with pride."



The fact that we weathered the storm and can return to Topaz some fifty years later, more assured, stronger, and successful as human beings speaks volumes to our courage, toughness, and perseverance. Our time in Topaz truly epitomizes the stark contrast of the fragility of freedom and the strength of the human spirit. We will never forget Topaz because each of us left a part of ourselves here, the innocence of youth. We can never forget Topaz because it is so much a part of us. We know that Topaz will always bind us together as family. And so it is now time for us to remember, to remember together, to remember those who are no longer with us, and perhaps to cry the tear we could not cry then, but cry together in healing and with pride. ■

KAZUKO
OYAMADA
IWAHASHI

Topaz Junior High School Student
Block 20-4-B

El Cerrito, CA



A Time of "Firsts"

My *Return to Topaz '93* brought back memories of a time of many "firsts" for a Japanese American, pre-adolescent girl whose life was changed by World War II. One of my "first" experiences was the feeling of rejection by my 6th grade classmates. Even though I was the only *Nikkei* (person of Japanese descent) all through grade school, I was always included in after-school activities. After December 7, 1941, I was not invited to the next birthday party.

Another "first" was the curfew imposed on all persons of Japanese ancestry—we could not go outside at night and were limited on how far we could go.

The bus ride to Tanforan and the train ride to Topaz were my "first" non-automobile transportation experiences. And who else could claim living in stables at a race track!

Other "firsts" included our living six-to-a-room, waiting in long lines to eat (our eating utensils in hand), and hearing expressions such as "mess hall," "rec hall," "latrine," "block," and "canteen."

"Firsts" also included having crushes, dates, and dances; being a Girl Reserve (or was it a Jr. Tuffie?); camping in pup tents (Camp Antelope) where one day we formed a bucket brigade to put out a hillside fire; participating in *Bon Odori* (dance in honor of the dead) and watching *sumo* (wrestling) matches; attending and cheering at baseball, basketball, and football games; hunting for trilobites and arrowheads; going to school with all Japanese Americans; and getting my "first" job for pay!

Weather conditions provided many "firsts"—unforgettable dust storms and their consequences, extreme heat and cold, potbelly stoves, oversized mackinaws, snowball fights, and awesome cloud formations and beautiful sunsets.

Sad "firsts" come to mind: the day we first heard that a soldier from our block was killed in action overseas, and the day the father of a friend was killed in a tractor accident on the camp farm.



Best of all were the "first" lifelong friendships that developed. It was a period of a myriad of first-time emotions: apprehension, uncertainty, sadness, panic, as well as anticipation and excitement.

There are still forgotten memories of "firsts," to be sure, but time plays a part in what can be remembered or articulated. Nevertheless, I hope my listing of some of my "firsts" will tickle the minds of others who experienced similar universal activities, events, feelings, and our unique life due to the circumstances of war. ■

Incident in Topaz Internment Camp, 1942

Orange crates for building materials were scarce and the line too long. We needed materials for furniture and framing for a privacy screen. My sister with the new baby insisted. Five of us shared one room. Only the potbelly stove and cots were provided.

About five of us headed for the hospital construction site, and on the first night we managed to steal a piece of masonite for a table top. The second night we went back for some lumber, but the military was waiting for us. As soon as we arrived at the hospital site, the lights came on, and all, except me, were caught. I was at the far end where the lumber was piled.

Bill [Sakai], caught first, stood next to the sergeant and witnessed the sergeant's frustrated anger. When the sergeant saw the others, he raised his gun and pulled back the operating lever. Then he saw me running, took aim, and pulled the lever back again, apparently forgetting he had just done so. He must have jammed the gun. He was hopping mad, cursing, and frantically trying to unjam it.

I was running and jumping across the piles of lumber, but I gave up when I saw five or six civilian guards with clubs heading toward me.

Later Bill told me what had happened. I will not forget that night—the jeep, the soldiers, the guards, and the blazing lights. Had the Thompson sub-machine gun not jammed, it would have been over for me. What a price! ❖

Bill T. Sakai, a Topaz High School classmate, adds his recollections.

❖ I will never forget the sergeant—his unshaven face and his swearing—or the clicking sound of his machine gun that wouldn't fire.

❖ We had to go to the director's office the next morning for a reprimand. There was a Japanese American camp rep present also.

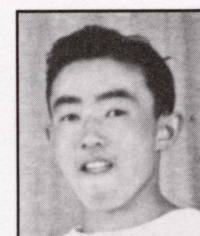
❖ After the above incident I received a copy of the directive concerning unauthorized construction. ■



SEIJI
KAIBE

Topaz High School Student
Block 28

Bothell, WA



BILL
T.
SAKAI

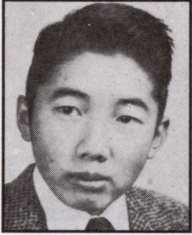


RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

MILTON
S.
KANZAKI

Topaz High School Student
Block 28

67 years old
Pueblo, CO



Topaz Facets and Reflections

If one word were to describe my feelings about my Topaz internment experience, it would be "bittersweet." At one time they were much more bitter than sweet, but my memories have mellowed with the march of time. I'd been waiting to go back to Topaz to see again the place that had such marked effects on my life. So, when I heard about the *Return to Topaz '93* reunion, I wanted to be there. At the same time I felt quite hesitant. It'd been years since I'd had any contact with many of the ex-Topazans, since I'd interacted with a large group of other Japanese Americans. Would I feel lost or out-of-touch?

I paced around in my room at the [Salt Lake City] Marriott for some time before I finally pushed myself to go downstairs for the opening dinner. Then, with the help of the first old friend I recognized and to whom I had identified myself, I was soon mixing with old Topaz High schoolmates and others, picking up where we'd left off nearly a half-century ago. With my white hair and pounds added over the years, nobody recognized me until some identifying anecdotes were told. There was a lot of reminiscing about the old Topaz days. There was the kidding: "Pueblo—where's that? How did you end up in a place like that?" And heard again was my old and almost forgotten nickname, Zeke, after all these years.

The highlight, of course, was the Topaz trip itself. After the commemorative program, I was ready to seek out old Block 28. I couldn't find any old block mates to go with or a van heading in that direction. I followed someone who was looking for Block 7, from where I could make a right turn and continue my search for old 28. As I trudged along in the hot sun and dust, I kept telling myself I was on a wild goose chase, but I kept going. At a certain spot I saw some people standing around, and I called out, "What block is that?" "Twenty-eight," was the response, and so I had reached my destination. Soon I was trying to figure out just where barracks 10, apartments E and F (our old family residence) might have been. And I picked up, as souvenirs, a belt buckle and a small door hinge, both well-mellowed by age and rust. Mission accomplished.

Often I've wondered where I'd be today and what course my life might have taken had there been no move away from San Francisco via Tanforan to Topaz way back then. I'll never know. ■

"Often I've wondered where I'd be today and what course my life might have taken. . . I'll never know."



YO
KASAITopaz Mess Hall Worker
Block 775 years old
San Leandro, CA

Pilgrimage

"Why would anyone want to revisit a desolate place like Topaz, Utah? There's nothing there but sagebrush, nothing to see, and all it will do is stir up unpleasant memories." My reply is, "Why does anyone visit a cemetery? There's nothing there but stones and metal markers."

Over 400 internees, their children, and grandchildren gathered to revisit that desolate place, Topaz, Utah. It was a stark reminder of the injustice of our incarceration some fifty years before. For some the trek was a healing process; for others it was unfinished business that had haunted them for so long. For the younger generation it was an education. After reading and hearing of the intolerable conditions their parents endured in the Utah desert, they were anxious to see for themselves the exact location of that incarceration. For many it was where they had left part of their lives: They had come full circle to pick up the pieces and end the anger and bitterness within themselves.

This was my second trip to Topaz, and I wanted to be a part of the planning for the pilgrimage. I was happy to see so many who felt it was important to bring their children and grandchildren with them. The oldest to attend was ninety; the youngest, ten months.

For the bus ride from Salt Lake City to Delta and Topaz, I brought along song sheets for a group sing along. Our bus was equipped with a tape deck so we listened to a recording of Teal Joy. In camp we knew her as Elsie Itashiki. She was a high school student then, and she sang at camp shows.

I was surprised to hear that Roscoe Bell, the camp's assistant project director in charge of agriculture, had wanted his children to experience the same kind of life the internees endured. He thought it unfair for his children to enjoy the freedoms of outside life, so his family lived in one of the camp barracks and his children attended school in camp. One of them, Paul Bell, was the keynote speaker at the Delta dinner. He spoke of his mixed feelings of being a minority in all of his classes.

At the close of the Delta program, I was pleased to lead some songs, so we all stood, held hands, and sang *God Bless America* and *Auld Lang Syne*.

It is comforting to know that some of the townspeople of Delta are committed to preserving the history of Topaz. A committee is raising funds to fully restore a barracks to house displays of memorabilia of life in Topaz. Donors from our pilgrimage helped kickoff the fund-raising campaign. ■

"Why would anyone want to revisit a desolate place like Topaz, Utah? There's nothing there but sagebrush, nothing to see, and all it will do is stir up unpleasant memories."



RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

YUSEI
KATO

Father and Siblings in Topaz

62 years old
Berkeley, CA



In the fifth grade, Yusei Kato went for a visit to Japan where he was stranded because of the outbreak of World War II.

Haiku

*Called upon the site of indignation,
There stands a lone dead tree.*

*Ruined and gone is the camp,
Ants busily working around its ant-
hills.*

*Redress, unjust, all swept into one,
A dust storm strikes.*

*Indignation now turned into nostalgia,
I call upon Topaz.*

*Topaz, the desolate land,
Even barbed wire is no longer in
sight.*

*When the bus is driven in,
All of Topaz disappears in the cloud
of dust.*

Toi kitaru hifun no atoya kare koboku.

*Kuchite naki kyanpu ni sewashi ari
no tsuka.*

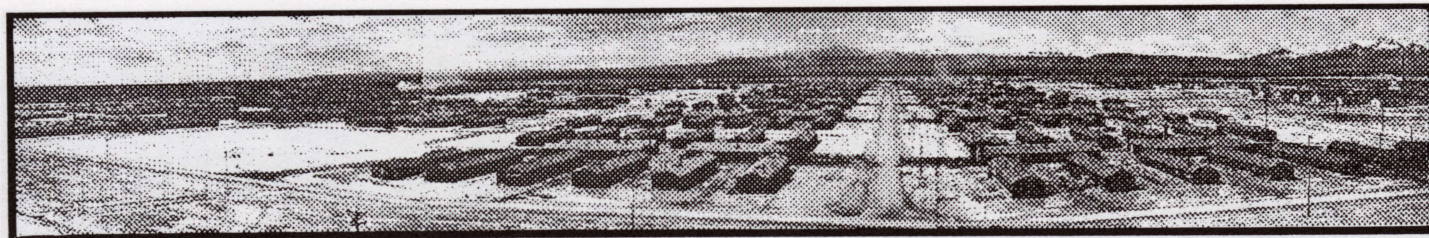
*Ridoresu mo hifun mo makite sajin
fuku.*

Hifun ima kyoshu to nari Topazu tou.

*Kobaku no Topazu ya ima wa saku
mo nashi.*

*Basu ikeba sajin ni kiyuru Topazu
kana.*

■



**CHUCK
KUBOKAWA**

Topaz Junior and Senior High School Student
Block 27

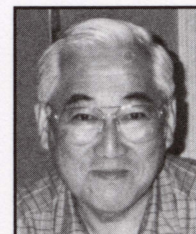
Palo Alto, CA

Return to Topaz '93 was the second revisit for me because I had taken a side trip when I was a guest speaker at Brigham Young University in Provo about six years ago. My first return trip was very emotional. Being alone, I had more time to think about the mental stress my family had to endure just for being of Japanese descent. Yet, a few years after leaving camp, my parents proudly applied for U.S. citizenship. My anger had surfaced because I thought about the loss of my parents' hard-earned money, dignity, and health caused by all their worries about the family's future in their twilight years.

One of my cherished moments from this second trip was telling my daughter, Lisa, and her husband, Dean Inouye, the facts of living in Topaz, pointing out where her grandparents and uncles had resided in one small room, sharing stories at the spot where I lived for three-and-a-half years. Lisa and Dean were experiencing the stinging mosquitoes, dusty roads, hot weather, dry climate, sagebrush, barbed wire, and red ants. All my once-angry energies were directed to leaving my daughter her legacy of these stories, her keepsake to preserve the rights of people in our country forever. The adage, "Forgive, but never forget," was brought up on this trip, fortifying George Santayana's warning "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

This time, being responsible for the smooth coordination of all trek support activities for over 450 people, I didn't have the luxury of relaxing, but the entire trip was enjoyable and left me with a better outlook. Sharing my thoughts and fellowship with the local townspeople, my daughter, and her husband had a positive effect.

Finally, there is an old Japanese saying, "There is inevitably a third time after the second." So, when is the next trip to Topaz and Delta? ■



RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

IBUKI
HIBI
LEE

Topaz Elementary School Student
Block 16

San Francisco, CA



Six years after I left Topaz, the childhood memories of camp surfaced in a junior high school creative writing class where I composed this poem.

Deep in the Desert

*Deep in the desert in the depth of night
A coyote howls at the pale moonlight.
The mountains and mesas are at rest.
Nothing ever to protest.*

*Through this infinite land, freedom lurks so high
As the shining stars in the violet sky.
Sagebrushes roam across the plain.
One stabs a lone horse's mane.*

*The wind whistles secrets of the desert unknown
Of creatures long-gone who tread the land alone.
Now all is quiet at this hour.
Soon the morning sun will rise to power.*



Now, almost forty-eight years later, I have been fortunate to return to Topaz. I was old enough to remember, yet too young to have understood human tragedy. That would inevitably come later. Being five-to-eight years old, I was shielded from all harm and lived a happy day-to-day existence with my artist parents and my older brother, Satoshi.

I remember long, slow, quiet strolls in all extremes of weather, holding my father's hand, as we walked across the desert sands from Block 16 to the art school in Block 7. They were peaceful times with my doting, gentle father.

There was my mother's shell pin class, taught by Mrs. Hanamura, Mrs. Shibata, and Mrs. Tachibana—women my mother had spoken of—where I watched the ever-patient issei women color and glue the delicate shells they had gathered from the desert to make beautiful and unique artwork.

I recall the Easter egg hunt when I found only eight paper eggs. I didn't have a chance to win since the teenaged boys (who were not supposed to participate) decided to help another girl find thirty-eight paper eggs!

My friends and I looked forward to seeing the movie, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. I was transfixed by this fantasy story for weeks afterwards.

I recall my own swing which my father fashioned right outside our "apartment." When a neighbor child teased me by using the swing and not allowing me to, my father quietly said that in the setting in which we lived, the swing could not be mine alone.

I remember my second grade teacher, Emily U. Light, who taught me to read and write. She wrote twice in my autograph book, "The world is so full of a number of things. I'm sure we should all be happy as kings." She gave us hope for our future.



"I remember long, slow, quiet strolls... holding my father's hand ... peaceful times with my doting, gentle father."



I remember Harada-san, my father's friend, who worked at the canteen. Treats were few and far between, and there was a pair of red socks that I wanted, but my mother couldn't afford them. Mr. Harada gave them to me as a gift, and I wore them every day.

I remember Mr. Raymond Sanford and his family who drove us to Delta one day—my mother, father, and myself prone atop his car. I liked this arrangement, but as soon as we entered Delta's tree-lined Main Street, a stern policeman stopped us and ordered us all down. Didn't we know riding a car this way was not allowed?

I recall another trip to the "outside" world, to Oak City to view the colorful autumn foliage and especially the crimson red oak of that park—such color and landscape to contrast with sandy Topaz.

Then I remember the gradual exodus of neighbors and friends to places unknown. And on September 25, 1945, it was our family's turn to leave for New York City. Memories and feelings were internalized as we coped independently to live the rest of our lives. ■

Reflections on the Topaz Pilgrimage

It's difficult to sort out how I feel now about Topaz and our wartime experiences. On seeing Topaz again, I was struck by the utter desolation of the area—miles and miles of desert and sagebrush.

The overriding memory that comes back to me is the care our elders gave us; the care they gave us in establishing church worship, Sunday schools, schools, recreation halls. Also, I was thinking about my parents and how they must have felt about evacuation and camp. Looking back, I don't remember my parents ever complaining about camp—the injustice of it all, the staggering losses, the discomfort. Because they did not complain or bemoan their fate, it prepared the way for us—their children—to accept our circumstances and make the best of it. Their lack of complaints kept us from becoming resentful and bitter. My young age (14–16 years old in camp) also kept me from being aware of all the ramifications of camp.

Topaz holds a lot of good memories for me. School and school activities were all-absorbing. I made life-long friends there. Because we were together in adolescence—a time when experiences and emotions are probably the most acutely felt in all one's lifetime—my classmates bonded together. The fact that we were sharing a unique wartime situation strengthened that bond.

I thank God for the care he provided through our elders. I just took these good things for granted during my stay at Topaz. Now I can really appreciate how our elders put aside their own profound grief and disappointment and worked for the welfare of the youth and others in the camp.

To all those who gave of themselves so unselfishly in that desert land, thank you! ■

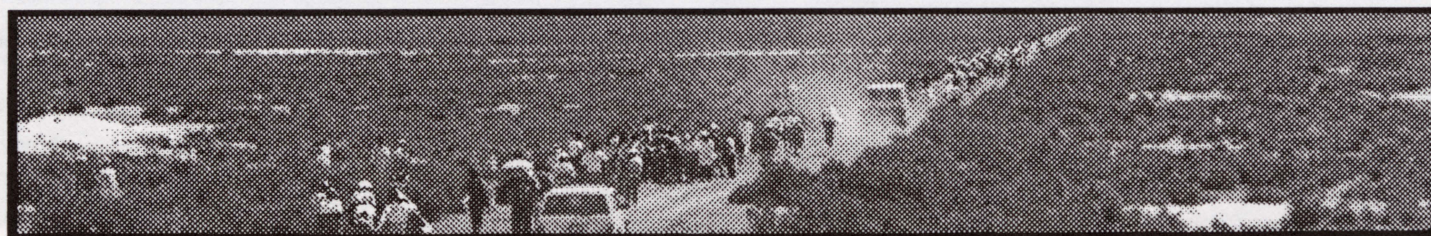
SACHI
KAWAHARA
MASAOKA

Topaz High School Student
Block 12

San Mateo, CA



"Now I can really appreciate how our elders put aside their own profound grief and disappointment and worked for the welfare of the youth and others in the camp."



RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

JOSEPH

H.

MORI

Topaz Junior High School Teacher
Block 34

Saratoga, CA



Reminiscence of Return to Topaz '93

For some of us who were in college, the time spent in camp was a respite from constant study, a chance to recharge our mental batteries, and an opportunity to mature sufficiently so the challenges of college were no longer intimidating. It may have been a time to find one's life calling or to confirm the one already chosen.

Most of us knew nothing of the land beyond the Sierra Nevada. In fact, many of us had not travelled or seen anything beyond the San Francisco Bay Area. But because of what our government forced on us, many moved eastward. I only considered attending the University of California in Berkeley when I lived in San Francisco. But because I had to look elsewhere, I ended up in Ohio, attending the University of Dayton, a selection made because its catalog was in the library. This choice turned out to be fortuitous because the school has an outstanding engineering college.

Some of us needed this *Return to Topaz '93* to force us back to where a major upheaval of our lives took place. As the reunion registration deadline approached, the numbers kept increasing—300, 350. We were worried that we wouldn't be able to accommodate everyone! What a shift from worrying about having too few to having too many. Everything turned out well because everyone who took responsibility to get part of the project done saw to it that her or his part was accomplished. Without the efforts and assistance of some people in Salt Lake City and in Delta the planning committee would have been overwhelmed by the long-distance coordination that would have been required to take care of local programs and logistics. Instead the committee came out looking like the "good guys."

It was gratifying to have over 400 participants at the *Return to Topaz '93*. It made all the sweat, fingernail-biting, and arguing we went through worthwhile. But now it is time to put this event in the files of our memory and say to you all, "Sayonara (Goodbye)." ■



It is always a pleasure and a surprise to go to the Topaz reunions. But what is most surprising to my sisters and me are the familiar faces who come up to us and ask, "How is your father? We used to call him Mickey Mouse." Yes, he played softball after working in the mess hall, and with gloves on he played in the outfield. I guess his mitt was too big for him. Consequently, people would call to my sisters and me, "Hey, Minnie Mouse." After all these fifty years, we are amazed and grateful for those who remember him fondly.

When I returned home I showed my sisters some of the broken dishes that I picked up at the mess hall ruins. They fingered them like they were memories of just yesterday.

My parents celebrated their seventieth wedding anniversary in March 1991. Father is ninety-seven now; Mother is eighty-seven. ■

Revisiting Topaz, Utah

Named for a beautiful gemstone, Topaz was a desolate place—just barracks, heat, and dust. The camp was brought to life by the people I met there; I will never forget them. Everyone was doing his or her best during a difficult and frightening wartime situation. Though we are of Japanese ancestry, we are Americans, and we did not lose sight of the dream we had for our future in the USA.

I had many jobs in Salt Lake City—I baked bread for the Royal Baking Co., washed taxicabs for SL Transportation, cut meat for Cudahy Meat Packing, washed dishes at various restaurants, gardened at the Hillcrest Apartments, and passed ammunition at Tooele Ordnance Depot.

Standing at the site of our barracks made me feel as though I was still a young man looking into the future, not knowing what was in store for me—not knowing that I would own a nursery business and become an Oakland City Councilmember. All I wanted then was to live from day-to-day, take care of my family, and enjoy life as much as possible. I even learned to speak Spanish from my co-workers on various jobs.

All these memories flashed before me as we talked over old times at the reunion. It is unbelievable that children who were going to elementary school in camp have grown up to be grandparents. Salt Lake City has changed so much that I wouldn't be able to find my old workplaces. I am glad to have visited Topaz. My greatest joy was seeing my old friends again.

Thank you for the trip back to Topaz. ■

MIYO
SUZAWA
NAKAGAWA

Topaz High School Student
Block 36

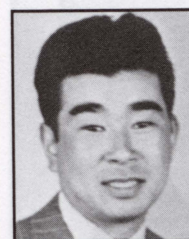
Whittier, CA



FRANK
H.
OGAWA

Topaz Block Manager
Block 10

Oakland, CA



"Standing at the site of our barracks made me feel as though I was still a young man looking into the future."



RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

TOMIO
SAKURAI

Topaz High School Senior
Block 6

Concord, CA



The Water Tower

We were always aware of its presence whether going to school, returning from visiting friends, or going to the mess hall or the latrine. It was always there, looming ominously above the one-story, tar-papered barracks of Topaz. It was the predominant landmark we would look for on our way back from any excursion away from camp. It was visible from miles away. It was the water tower.

It was inevitable that one afternoon one of the guys would suggest we climb it. That afternoon finally came. While no one expressed enthusiasm, a magnetism drew us toward it. That magnetism was the fear of being called "chicken." The next thing we knew, we were following our self-appointed leader to the water tower.

The ladder of the water tower was crudely constructed. The rungs consisted of 2" x 4" lumber nailed to the frame that extended all the way to the top. There was no protective cage surrounding the ladder.

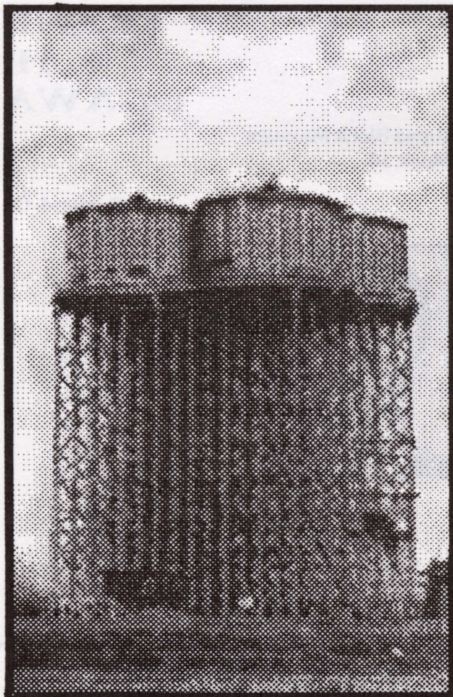
Somewhere in the middle of our climbing party, I concentrated on the shoes of the person above me to avoid having my fingers smashed. More important, I avoided glancing down—I had never climbed anything this high before. I had no idea how high it was, but one thing was sure—it was definitely too damned high!

After the midway point, I was beginning to feel tired. My curiosity got the better of me, and I glanced down. What a mistake! My stomach completely dropped out of sight. The knuckles of my hand grasping the ladder turned white. My palms were suddenly sweating profusely, and my knees felt like they were turning into gelatin. I had never been up this high, yet we were only halfway there.

How stupid to get in such a pickle. I came to my senses when I realized that the shoes above me were still forging upward and the two hands below me were crowding my heels. I just didn't have the guts to say I wanted to quit, so against my better judgment, I continued the upward climb.

It was getting more and more difficult to get a secure grip—my palms were sweating so much. It was getting seriously dangerous. To compensate for my slippery hands I gripped the ladder tighter, but my fingers were quickly losing their strength. The fear of losing my grip, falling backwards, and knocking down those following behind was so real that I hooked my arm on the rung above. I then pulled myself up one step and repeated this procedure one rung at a time.

I was soon confronted with another dilemma: why was the water tower starting to sway? Funny, I never noticed it before. The higher up we went, the more the tower swayed. Now I had to hug the ladder for dear life; I was developing a very intimate relationship with that ladder. It did not give me a great sense of security to see the others now using this same hook-and-hug technique.



Somehow, we made it to the top platform where we all collapsed flat on our backs. Nobody stood; we were so exhausted and the tower still swayed. We stayed in this position in dead silence for what seemed an hour or more. We probably all had visions of what it would be like to fall from such a height.

Then thoughts of missing dinner and climbing down in darkness made our descent immediately imperative. I took a final look at Topaz below and saw what a long way down it was. I vowed that I would never do such a stupid thing again.

To find where the first step was located I had to look down. It was crucial that I not miss the first step or any others that followed. I clung desperately to the platform with my sweaty palms, not wanting to look down, but needing to in order to ensure my proper first step. Had I not the benefit of youth, I would have died on the spot from shock. I seriously thought of never coming down.

I was so humbled by this adventure that I didn't boast about it. Fifty years later, when my sons worry about inheriting my receding hairline, I assure them my hair loss is directly linked to the water tower expedition. ■

Return to Topaz '93 was a worthwhile trip to close the final chapter of our camp experience. It was well-planned, and I look forward to completion of the Topaz Museum in Delta.

Back in the late '70s my children and a neighbor inquired about camp life for their high school history and English assignments. Their inquiries encouraged me to write about my evacuation, internment, and postwar experiences. (I was 13 years old when I entered camp.)

I wanted to clarify my feelings and tell our children and future grandchildren what it was like from the viewpoint of one who experienced it. I also wanted to share my experiences with a Caucasian co-worker who was interested in my camp life after she had read of the reparation. She understood what we went through, but was grateful to hear firsthand from one who had experienced it.

I recall being a young teenager who had only an inkling of the responsibility my parents faced. After camp they must have had great anxieties and worries about starting from scratch to support our large family. Quarters at our nisei aunt and uncle's home were cramped. To add to the family income, Father returned to gardening while we children lived in Caucasians' homes as domestic workers and attended high school with Saturday afternoons and Sundays off. Those were hard times for us, but we survived and eventually all pursued better-paying jobs.

Our only regret is that our issei parents did not live long enough to receive their share of the reparations. Since receiving our reparations, we three sisters and five brothers shared the expenses toward resurfacing the niche where our parents rest. ■

"My curiosity got the better of me, and I glanced down. What a mistake! . . . When my sons worry about inheriting my receding hairline, I assure them my hair loss is directly linked to the water tower expedition."

KYOKO
TAKESHITA
SASANO

Topaz Junior and Senior High School Student
Block 37

San Mateo, CA

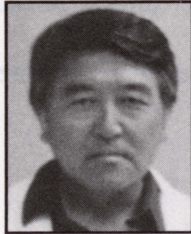


RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

ROY SHIMADA

Topaz Elementary School Student
Block 34

Campbell, CA



Block 34, Where Are You?

"Where's Block 34?" I asked a man holding a map of Topaz. He pointed toward three permanent farm buildings at the farthest corner of this barren site.

Taking this bearing and using amateur surveying techniques, I finally stood on the rectangular concrete slab of Mess Hall 34. My father was a cook there. I recognized the H-shaped foundation of the laundry room-washroom-latrines-boiler room complex.

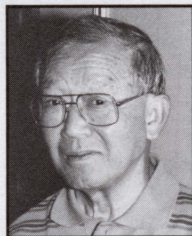
I saw the fading gravel pathways that led to each entrance of the living quarters and found the one that took me to the very spot—Block 34—Building 11—Room A, my residence with my parents from 1942 through 1945. There were no foundations. There was the rock-bordered flower bed my mother had planted nearly fifty years ago. I picked up one of the rocks and some of the dirt, bits of tarpaper, and rusted nails. I took pictures of that site and the surrounding scenery that are still familiar to me, even now in 1993. I stood there for a long while until a van took me to the waiting buses headed for Delta.

I have that rock, and I will place it on my parents' gravesite in Colma. The circle is complete. ■

JOHN AND MIYUKI IWAHASHI TAKEUCHI

Block 22 and Block 3

Ages 70 and 68
Richmond, VA



Reflections on Return to Topaz '93

On May 30, after high noon, we caravanned from Delta to Topaz, each busload trailing a roostertail of the fine native soil which persisted in keeping pace with us for our homecoming. On arrival at that section of land we called home some fifty years ago, what we saw confirmed what we had long expected—an expanse of nothingness. But what a sight—a beautiful desert from horizon to horizon, a full circle, all 360° of unspoiled space. What can we say, the scene was immense, and we were mere specks of wanderers in the desert.

During our enforced habitation, the desert patiently abided our presence, but soon after our departure, the recycling process went into action and gradually returned Topaz to its original and rightful state, a desert beautiful.

May Topaz now continue to retain its natural beauty, and may God spare no mercy on those who have designs to again forcefully thrust others on this sacred section of our land that we call Topaz. ■



The following is excerpted from a talk given at the Delta Community Presbyterian Church on Sunday morning, May 30, 1993.

A Journey of the Heart

At Topaz, in spring 1945, we wrote: "A few more weeks now and we shall leave the desert. Perhaps we shall never come back to it again. Or perhaps in that distant day in the yet misty years we shall have the strange satisfaction of coming back to find the scene claimed again by the restless wind and the swirling dust."

On October 1, 1985, on the fortieth anniversary of our departure from Topaz, we camped next to the lonely monument . . . we saw the beautiful Topaz sunset silhouetting Mt. Swazey in the purple distance, we wrote:

*Dust . . . and dusk . . .
Rugged purple mountains indelibly etched
In flaming crimson—
The echoless silence of a city no more . . .
Reclaimed by the incessant ravages of time.*

*Gone are the barracks . . . row on row . . .
Gone are the laughter and tears . . .
Gone like a mirage . . . a city of shadow.*

*In the twilight . . . in the silence
'Neath the burning skies . . .
Thanks be to God
All this is no more. . . .
Thanks be to God
For life abundant once more.*

*But o'er all
Gramercy for sterling character
Forged in the crucible of dust.*



**DAVE
M.
TATSUNO**

Topaz Community Co-Op Worker
Block 41

Christian Lay Leader
San Jose, CA



DORIS
UYEDA
TONO

Topaz Nurse's Aid
Block 9

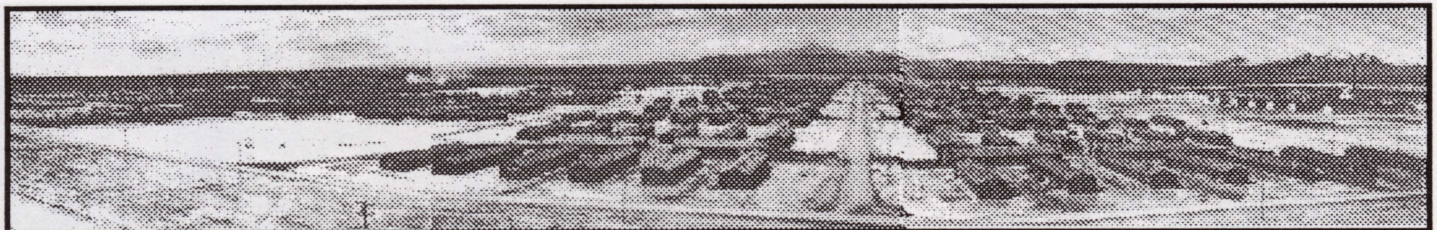
Daly City, CA



The Unforgettable Journey

What an exciting day it started to be
Back to "Jewel of the Desert"—May 30, 1993.
On Bus #5—headed by sister Daisy
One-third filled with the Uyeda family
We all sang along with talented gals and guys
"God Bless America"—brought tears to our eyes.
Almost pandemonium—Singing loudly the songs we knew
Forgetting lyrics or a line or two.
As we neared our destination—it got quite hazy
Dust kicked up and obliterating the road like crazy.
Driver shut the air, as not to clog the engine
Couldn't see a thing—not even the sun.
The singing had stopped as we neared Topaz
An aura of disbelief and sadness came over me then
Thinking back, my nisei mother with her eleven children,
Father arrested, alone to face the fate around the bend
She looked so brave, hiding her fears to give us solace.
What will the future bring us in this God-forsaken place?
We got out and stepped down into the fine alkaline powder
Churning up dust, enveloping us—as if in a shower
Contemplating, can we survive this desolate place?
We trudged and reached our barracks at a very slow pace
What bitterness and frustration—Are we in America?
What was in our future, without our father?
Finally we got our father back as we all wrote for his release
No charges were filed, and family united—we finally found peace.
To quell my frustration, I worked at the hospital
I quickly grasped the routine and didn't miss a call.
It made me happy—that in some way I helped
To ease the pain and ills of the sick and disabled.
As time grew from days to years and my tears to hide
I tried to look on the brighter side.
So, we finally made it—it's freedom—of fifty-one long years
Still trying to forget the questions and most of our fears
Hope and pray—This will never happen again to anyone hence
To be incarcerated and put behind barbed wire fence.
We're here today, again, we're part of the human race.
Topaz, Topaz—a memory now—But we'll never forget or erase.

■



Excerpted from a letter written to his son and daughter-in-law in Pennsylvania.

We got back from a very busy weekend yesterday, tired and sleepy. It was a nostalgic, but happy, gathering of about 400 people from all over the country. ...After dinner we greeted old friends, talked, and tested our memories.

Block 11

On Sunday, it was . . . a 2½-hour ride to Delta past the Wasatch Mountains, beautiful with plenty of snow on top. In Delta we had a bag lunch at the high school and looked at some pictures of camp before taking off again for Topaz. The driver turned off the air conditioner when the interior of the bus filled with the dust from the gravel roads. Fortunately, the ride wasn't too long.

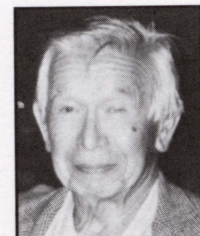
In front of the Topaz monument under a very hot sun, we listened to speeches and watched the ceremony. Mom was able to sit in the shade of a tent, but I think that's why she got so many mosquito bites.

After the ceremony we were free to walk around what used to be the camp. . . . Kay, Mom, a friend of Kay's who had been to Topaz a few years back (he was four years old when he was evacuated), and I walked about ¾-mile through low growths of greasewood and weeds to find Block 4 and Block 11 where Mom and I lived, respectively. (We did not know each other when we first got to camp.) . . . we were able to find the approximate locations of our respective barracks and apartments by orienting ourselves with the remaining foundations of the mess hall, laundry, and latrines. Some of the gravel paths between the barracks still remain, and the ground that had been under the barracks was now exposed with lots of foot-high ant hills. There were a few trees still standing although most were dead because the residents had planted varieties that could not survive in this climate. Someone said there was one beautiful blooming cactus that someone had planted fifty years ago.

So, back to Delta, dinner, and more speeches at the local fairgrounds. One of the speakers was a Caucasian non-internee who had attended high school in Topaz because his father was head of the camp's agriculture department. I worked under his father for a few months and found him to be a very dedicated and sincere man. He's not well now and did not attend, but quite a few of his family were there.

When this pilgrimage was first proposed I wasn't too excited, but Kay wanted to go, and now I'm very glad I did go. I found myself remembering things about the camp—especially when we walked around the site. I even found myself getting a little teary-eyed listening to the speeches while standing in the sun.

I am really grateful to the hard-working committee that put the whole thing together. The people in Delta were most hospitable. They sprayed the area for mosquitoes, the National Guard supplied and put up the tent for shade, high school students transported and set up folding chairs, a local car dealer supplied vans to transport people looking for their barracks, someone prepared all the sandwiches for lunch, and other high school students acted as Delta bus tour guides pointing out homes that have been built from buildings salvaged from camp. Delta even has part of one of the rec halls which they are trying to restore as part of their museum exhibit. ■



砂漠の貝細工

ばあちゃんよ、
よくかんば、だね。

部屋を丁寧と
貝で作ったきりいな宝石細工を思い出す。

今までその貝が
いったいどこから来た事もあましく考へず
子供だ、た私は、

その貝がどこから来た事も頭には、入、こゝろな、た。

ばあちゃんがその時愛情こめて作ってくれた物も、
子供だ、た私は、

和しくて付けろ事も出来な、た。
ごめんね。

今になつては、
掛りかえのない宝物になつた。

ばあちゃんよ、
私もかんばらないとね

私の今の生活は、すゝと簡単だ、
ばあちゃんが耐えた憎しみ苦しみ差別などぜんぜんない。

あの貝細工は、熱く乾ききつたトパーズの砂漠で
掘り出された、きらいじやない、これ、
そこらにあるあり合わせの物を色付けされた宝物、
立派な物なんだ。

今になつては、
この貝細工とはばあちゃんの思いでしかない。

やさしいばあちゃんよ、
いつも人生を心残りないよう我慢強く生きてきた。

ばあちゃんよ、
いつかまた一緒になれるから待、ててね。

私は、これから一生懸命いつまでも
ばあちゃんの様子精一杯心残りないよう
がんばります。

I am a Sansei. My grandparents and several other relatives were Topaz internees (Block 14-Barracks 11-Apartment C). My parents, however, were not. My mother was separated from her family, having gone to visit her grandparents in Japan, and spent the duration of the war there. My father was drafted into the army before everyone was sent to the camps. My maternal grandfather died of lung cancer in Topaz. I was very close to my maternal grandmother. She lived in our home in Richmond while I was growing up: She passed away in 1990 at the age of 101. The trip to Topaz enabled me to gain a better understanding of what she had endured in her life. Writing this poem was both wonderful and challenging; most of it came to me in Japanese first and then other parts in English—a reflection of who and what I am. Therefore, I developed two versions, one in Japanese and one (mostly) in English. I am grateful to my husband, Tony, for assisting me with vocabulary and grammar in the Japanese version. His help and support enabled me to more precisely convey what I wanted to express.

LINDA
SHOJI
CHIN

Palo Alto, CA



Seashells in the Desert

*Ba-chan yo
Yoku gambatta ne.*

(You really persevered, didn't you?)

*I remember
Watching you in your room
Carefully crafting jewelry from seashells
The whitest shells I'd ever seen
Shells of all shapes and sizes.*

*Until now
I never wondered
Where those shells may have come from
Or how you happened to have
Jars and jars full of them.*

*As the child I was
Such thoughts
Didn't even cross my young mind.*

*I remember
Being embarrassed
To wear those beautiful shell pins and brooches
You so lovingly created
With Elmer's glue
And fingernail polish as paint.*

*Now
They are priceless jewels.*

*Please forgive me
Ba-chan yo
Watashi mo gambaranai to ne.*

(I guess it's my turn to persevere.)



RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

My life now—it's so easy
Compared to what you've been through.
Hatred and discrimination
I hardly experience or feel it
Not the way you were subjected to, anyway.

Those shells—it wasn't easy
Unearthed in the hot, parched desert of Topaz
Gathered and cleaned
Pieced together and painted
With whatever you could find, somehow.

Now
How precious they are.

I miss you.

All that's left now
Are those seashells and memories.

Memories—of you
Always strong, silent, loving
Memories—of you
So kind, gentle, peaceful.

Memories—of you
Of a life lived without regret.

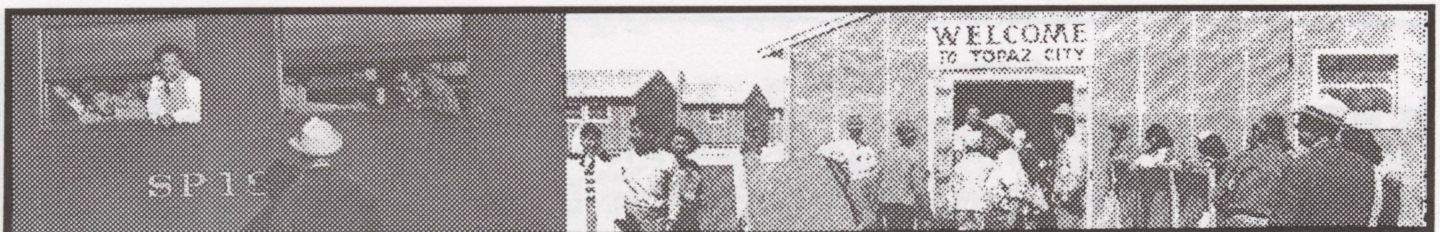
Ba-chan yo
Someday we'll be together again
So wait for me.

Only now
Do I understand.

Only now
Can I comprehend.

Only now
May I live a life without regret.

Ba-chan yo
Watashi mo kore kara issho sei ippai (For the rest of my life with all that I
Gambarimasu. am, like you, I too, will persevere.)



Now I can say, "I have been to Topaz." I am a Sansei; It is a big part of my identity. Even though I have been living in New England for 16 years, I was raised in the East Bay and am a second generation University of California Berkeley grad. I played softball on the Berkeley Bears Optimist Club team for Jiro Nakaso when I was eight years old, baseball with Tad Hayashi and the Oakland MYF (Methodist Youth Fellowship), and basketball for the Contra Costa Jr. JACL Viscounts.

I had always heard about "camp," especially Topaz. I went to Topaz to be once again with the community of my roots, the origin of my strength and spirit. It was important to see people again—the Utsumis, Tatsunos, Gerons, Ogawas—I hadn't seen some of them for thirty years. I went in memory of Yoshiko Uchida, *Obaachan* (Grandmother), *Ojūchan* (Grandfather), and all my family members who couldn't go. I went for myself. I went to be bitten by Topaz mosquitoes and feel the desert sun. I went to make Topaz real to me. The Topaz Monument was an important, literal milestone for me.

I'm glad I went. When I read *Journey to Topaz* again, it will have more meaning. Thanks to the committee. I enjoyed being with everyone.

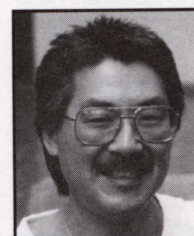
Gambare!

P.S. As I prepared for this trip, I noted that on May 23, 1993, the man charged with killing Yoshiro Hattori was found not guilty. Hattori, an exchange student from Japan attending school in Louisiana was shot while trying to get to a Halloween party. ■

ALLAN
S.
FUJITA

Son of Bill and Dorothy Takahashi Fujita
[Block 4]

Brookline, MA



RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

LAWSON
F.
INADA

Ashland, OR



The following poem is dedicated to Toyo Suyemoto.

Poem for Toyo

*You know, Toyo, since you're our Poet Laureate,
I naturally had to read your poem out loud
Over the microphone to the gathered crowd
At Topaz camp, for our wonderful 1993 reunion.*

*It was a beautiful day, for families, children,
And, believe it or not, the plants were blooming,
While even the desert sun took it easy on us,
And the dust just made a "token appearance."*

*You should have graced us with your presence—
"Relocated" yourself all the way from Columbus!
But your words were there, your powerful spirit
Sounding about like butterflies and memories!*

*So, just like that, ol' Topaz camp came back,
And I saw you composing poetry in your barracks—
Except, this time, we were all in there with you,
And when you finished the poem, we shouted, "Yes!"*

■

Poem by Toyo Suyemoto (from *Trek*, the Topaz literary magazine) read by Inada at the commemorative service, Sunday, May 30, 1993.

"Gain"

*I sought to seed the barren earth
And make wild beauty take
Firm root, but how could I have known
The waiting long would shake*

*Me inwardly, until I dared
Not say what would be gain
From such untimely planting, or
What flower worth the pain?*

■



JANET
HIRANO
MATSUOKA

3 years old in Topaz
Block 11

Castro Valley, CA

Shedding Childhood Impressions

I was three years old when I entered camp, my memories of Topaz only snapshots of an idyllic existence. What child would not relish the luxury of having three indulgent grandparents and attentive young aunts living within easy reach. Supported by this extended family, my parents masked their own anxieties and disappointments, protecting their children in this cocoon of well-being. Mama, in the lilt of her broken English, lulled us to sleep singing songs and reciting tales of good conquering evil, all learned while she grew up in Japan. Grimacing and howling under the pretense of pain as we twisted and stomped on parts of his body, Dad wrestled with us many an evening, making us squeal with laughter and draining us of our often unmanageable energies.

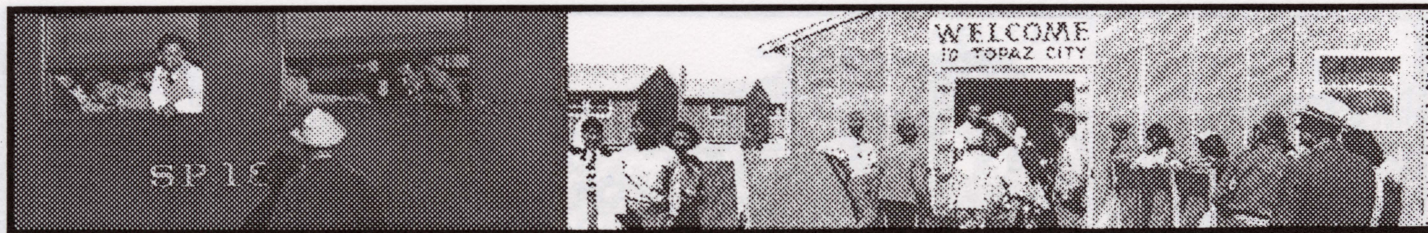
Harsh physical conditions, abundant in Topaz, were curses to the adults, but offered me opportunities for fun and creativity. Cold wintry days meant memorable sled rides engineered by an older, uncomplaining brother across snowy expanses. Even the sudden alarm created by the threatening, twirling dust storms and the mad panic followed by the slamming of windows and tearing off laundry from clotheslines outside became rituals of excitement for a young child. The ladies' bathroom on our block—the common place where we bathed, showered, and excreted—embarrassed and anguished especially modest Japanese women; to me, it was a haven where I learned early to escape my father's wrath and spankings and where he stood outside shouting for me to come out, threatening all ills upon me in our battles of wills.

Fifty years have passed since my early years in Topaz. When the invitation came for evacuees en masse to visit this relocation center on Memorial Day weekend, I could not resist, knowing how skewed my childhood memories of camp were and how different my reactions to Topaz now had to be.

At the Marriott in Salt Lake City, I mingled quickly with the Topaz crowd, unable to take my eyes off name cards to see if a certain name ignited a memory. I studied faces, worn with time, to find a gesture, a smile that I recognized from the past. I rekindled a friendship with a San Franciscan neighbor I had not seen for over forty years, remembering her maiden name and the twinkle in her eyes which the years had not tarnished. I was astounded to see a number of old friends, never suspecting in the years I knew them that they, too, were once residents of Topaz. Why was Topaz never mentioned when we spoke of the past? Did we learn too well from our parents this code of silence?

A roomful of evacuees with families and friends gathered early at the hotel to share and hear stories of Topaz—some causing laughter, others disbelief, even tears to men who rarely cried. Young people leaned forward in their seats to listen and understand this travesty in history unmentioned in their classes, unwritten in their textbooks, undiscussed at their family tables. I was among the many speaking out publicly for the first time about experiences in camp, finding healing in the mere telling, and feeling a link to those in the audience as we anticipated our visit to Topaz.

"Young people leaned forward ... to listen and understand this travesty in history unmentioned in their classes, unwritten in their textbooks, undiscussed at their family tables."



The next day on our three-hour bus ride from Salt Lake City, I felt the tension mount as we headed for camp. We passed land that changed from lush greenery to dry barrenness and felt the air in the bus shifting from pleasant to suffocating—we knew we had arrived at Topaz.

Very little is left of the camp I knew as a child. We saw broken planks and rusty nails scattered everywhere—evidence of barracks that once stood. Bent, unbristled toothbrushes and rusty tin cans told of life that once was. Chipped concrete foundations with pipes protruding here and there identified the bathroom in which I hid, the mess hall where people ate.

After we walked over the stretch of dirt I once called home, a friend expressed explicitly the emotions I felt. "People say that there's nothing out there, but there is, Jan. Didn't you feel the spirit of the people who once lived here? Didn't you hear the ghosts?" Yes, I felt the resolve of Mr. Kawabata as I saw remnants of the Japanese rock garden he built in the middle of our block, creating beauty and peace in the midst of desolation. I heard the sound of dishes clattering on a tray as Mama walked three times a day to and from the mess hall to bring meals to our barracks, providing us the luxury of eating as a family in privacy. I heard the muffled sobs of my mother and her family when Grandpa Morioka died late at night, never to return with us to the West Coast. I recognized our family's cheers of jubilation when my deaf older brother—only nine when he was left behind in Berkeley—visited us once. I sensed the disillusionment of my father, once a devout Christian, never returning to worship in a church after evacuation.

Tears surface when I reflect on this return. My emotions are in knots, difficult to untangle. At times, my admiration for my parents soars, knowing no bounds. Rarely did we hear them complain. They knew what had to be done to survive in this prison and pressed forward. Yet, often, the fighter in me is outraged, unable to comprehend. "Why didn't they resist? Why didn't they just refuse to go to Topaz?" Perhaps the silence of the Japanese American internees will always remain a paradox—a display of unspeakable inner strength to some, but to others, an act of denial that this detention was indeed criminal. ■

"My emotions are in knots, difficult to untangle. My admiration for my parents soars, knowing no bounds. Yet, the fighter in me is outraged, unable to comprehend. Perhaps the silence of the Japanese American internees will always remain a paradox . . ."



RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

STEPHANIE MIYASHIRO

Daughter of Florence Nagano Miyashiro
[Topaz High School Student; Block 23]

Berkeley, CA



Return? I had never been to Topaz, and yet I needed to go. Why? One of the most striking components of this pilgrimage was the ambivalence people felt about going. My mother had said for years that she wished the Topaz reunions could actually be held at Delta, but that others did not want to go back there. My parents and I planned to go, but when the time came, Mom was too sick to travel. I decided to go by myself—not quite by myself, as I managed to get two friends to drive with me. Both had their own compelling reasons for going. One, a young man whose father would not go back to Topaz, but who needed to piece together bits of his father's life to better understand him. The other had been a child at Topaz and had a very traumatic childhood in addition to the trauma of relocation. Myself? My mother spoke of camp while I was growing up, but I initially thought it was summer camp as she spoke of dances and sports. She had been a teenager at Topaz and graduated high school there. I thought there was more to the story than that. I had always felt a great deal of pain in our family as a child and never could quite place where it came from. I thought Topaz a piece of that puzzle.

I wanted to hear stories from people since Mom would not be there to share her memories. The Topaz committee graciously agreed to schedule some time and space for discussion groups. People shared from their hearts, and the stories were moving. Again, there was a lot of ambivalence. Friends said some people would not even enter the room. Others left before they would be asked to speak. With so much pain and fear we still dared take only little peeks, but the glimpses were powerful and freeing for those who participated.

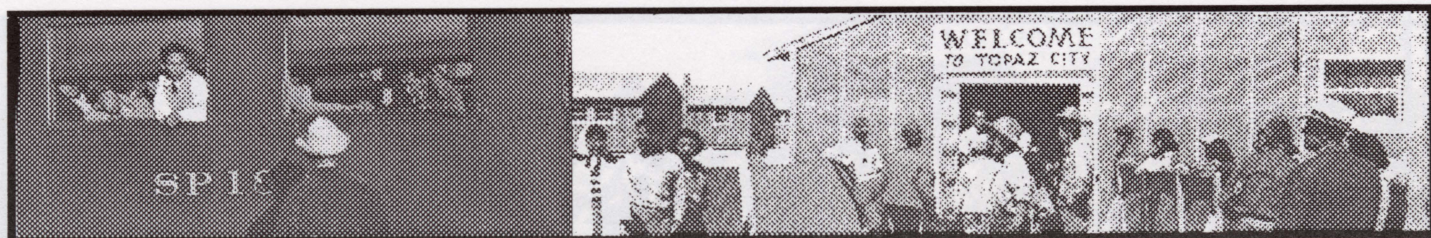
Some of the stories I remember include the water tower escapade. It was told with such emotion that my hands and feet tingled with the fear of falling off the tower. Another spoke of a raid on the woodpile and the soldier who intended to kill them even though they were only teenagers. Another said his worst day was when the telegrams arrived after the 442d sustained heavy losses trying to cross the River Po in Italy. It was hot; the windows were open; the wailing could be heard throughout the camp. He noted that the next day in Delta, goods that had hitherto been unavailable became suddenly accessible to internees. I guess the news of this battle, the casualties, and the Japanese American soldiers' bravery was heard nationwide.

So many women declined to speak and deferred to their husbands. This action appeared very cultural and generational. I wonder if we need women-only groups to hear the women's stories?

We heard there was no place for young couples to go on dates, so long walks around the camp perimeter were one solution. The security staff complained their main problem was flushing people out of the bushes.

We heard from one Caucasian man who admitted he had been taught to hate Japanese, but that he had come to love some of the Nisei who worked on his farm. How ironic that his people had also been driven from their homes by their own government. If our hearts are open, we can learn that the things we all have suffered are not so different. These injustices have been perpetrated on many different groups over the years. He was shaking as he spoke and seemed near tears. ➡

"I had always felt a great deal of pain in our family as a child and never could quite place where it came from. I thought Topaz a piece of that puzzle."



There are still many feelings to sort out from this trip. There is a lot more healing that needs to occur, but I am very grateful for having had this chance to see the place where my mother and my grandparents spent World War II. The drive out and back with my friends was also wonderful and illuminating. The feeling during the pilgrimage was of family and community, and it was good to connect with people and share both memories and new experiences. Out of the pain and evil in our history we may yet be able to transform and forge something of beauty. ■

Jim Okutsu, Associate Dean, School of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University, wrote the following article that first appeared in the San Francisco *Hokubei Mainichi* on June 3, 1993.

The Trek

For San Francisco Bay Area Nikkei, the trek refers to Topaz, Utah. It was one of the ten detention facilities during World War II incarcerating over 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry. The trek is such a monumental milestone in Japanese American history that events still are demarcated as occurring before or after camp.

Another version of this trek took place over the Memorial Day weekend as a caravan of seven buses accompanied by cars, vans, and the media embarked on a sentimental journey from Salt Lake City to the site of the Topaz detention camp. Topaz became a city of over 8,000 between September 1942 and October 1945 and instantly was one of the largest cities in Utah. The center was one mile square, subdivided into forty-two blocks.

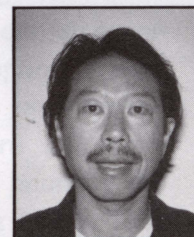
For most of the participants, it was a return to a place of not-so-fond memories. Each one had personal reasons for enduring the searing desert heat, dust, and mosquitoes, to rekindle memories from fifty years earlier when Topaz was their home. The recollections included eclectic snatches from the past—one former internee still cannot eat lamb today because of the way it was prepared in camp, while another will not eat noodle soup because it was served so often. And, of course, all remember the constant lines and dust storms.

After a commemorative ceremony, we were allowed one hour to search for evidence of the past. The trek to Block 42 where my parents had lived revealed nothing more than an ant hill where their barracks once stood. I was surprised at how small the blocks were. I couldn't find any artifacts at Block 42 except scattered rusted nails, but in Block 41 I found bits of broken dishes and a small Horlicks bottle amazingly intact after fifty years. Back at the bus, others returned with treasures ranging from barbed wire to rocks, to a chimney flue cap.

JIM
OKUTSU

Son of Jane and John Okutsu
[Block 42]

San Francisco, CA



"The unsettling thought of my sweet kid, who is not quite three, imprisoned behind barbed wire really brought it home to me."



RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

STEPHANIE
MIYASHIRO

Daughter of Frank and Nagayo Miyashiro
Delta High School Student, Block 21

Verdoba, CA

There was nothing visual at Block 42 for my parents, but it still enabled my father to recall an incident. One day as he left camp to work outside, my mom and sister saw him off at the main gate. Later, Mom put Sis in the sandbox that my dad had made outside their barracks. After a few minutes in the sand, Sis disappeared. Somehow, she was found many blocks away. She had gone off looking for Dad. Then, Mom interjected that my sister had been just about my daughter Jesse's age. The unsettling thought of my sweet kid, who is not quite three, imprisoned behind barbed wire really brought it home to me.

At Topaz, we met a man from Provo, Utah, who matter of factly stated that he had not meant to dislike us "Japs," but at the time he said he didn't know any better. Ironically, this man is now a hay farmer who sells his bales to Japan. The monument, recently erected, already has been defaced by gunshots.

Folks in Delta are trying to raise \$100,000 to house a Topaz museum in an original recreation barracks. Delta High School students eagerly provided docent tours of the converted former camp buildings located throughout the town.

I cannot help but comment on the Utah perspective that pervaded the commemoration. Both banquet keynote speakers were white and male.* The speakers were very personable, emotional, and easily able to talk about the racial injustice that the Nisei felt constrained to discuss. But the speakers also symbolized a concept that the concentration camp experience is more valid and compelling when presented from the perspective of the majority American society. In addition, the lack of an outlet for the nisei female viewpoint was apparent to Sansei.

I've tried to make some sense of the trip, but because it was so intensely emotional, I've generally stopped trying to be analytical about it, and just let it be. I had been to two Manzanar pilgrimages, but wasn't prepared for the emotions that being at Topaz would evoke. I grew up hearing about Topaz, but seeing the ruins firsthand brought up renewed mixed feelings of both sadness and outrage. Fortunately, I've been able to channel the anger in a positive manner by educating students about the lessons of the camps.

The Japanese have a belief that one should not dwell on the bad things in the past. It is, therefore my American side that allows me to wallow in the inhumanity of the concentration camps. To know that it was all so unnecessary doesn't help matters. As a result, I couldn't shake the funk I felt for several days.

I woke up to the cool morning mist of the Bay Area and wondered if I had really been to Topaz just the other day. The contrast was so great. The thoughts and emotions all jumbled up inside. Since I was born after the war, I had no memories of Topaz. Now I do. It definitely was a prison camp. ■

* [Editor's note: Verdoia was a Utah choice; Bell, a Bay Area internees' choice.]

"I've tried to make some sense of the trip, but because it was so intensely emotional, I've generally stopped trying to be analytical about it, and just let it be."

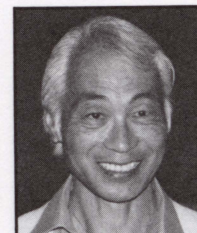
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**TORU
SAITO**

4-8 years old in Topaz
Block 4

Berkeley, CA



July 4, 1993—Fifty years ago my address was Block 4—Building 10—Apartments C&D, Topaz, Utah, USA. From the ages of 4½ to 8 I grew up in a family traumatized by the sudden and deliberate attack on Japanese Americans by the U.S. government. My father, a pharmacist in Japan, could find employment only as a laborer in America. My mother, a Kibei (born in America, educated in Japan), was restricted to life in Japantown. My parents spoke no English.

My memories of the concentration camp at Topaz are always overshadowed by the look on my mother's face—her look of despair and shame. My memories of Topaz are of the mess halls with their long rows of picnic tables and hard, wooden benches; the latrines and toilets in rows without partitions for privacy and inaccessible at night. I remember chamber pots, the washhouse, attending school for the first time, and learning English from a hakujin (Caucasian) teacher.

I also recall sneaking under the barbed wire fences, going on hikes to explore the desert, and experiencing the horror of the frequent dust storms. I remember the day when men delivered and planted a huge tree next to our mess hall. Everyone cheered the first and only living tree we ever had.

Returning to Topaz after half a century, I entered the grounds with mixed feelings and emotions. I found the remains of our mess hall, our latrine, the washhouse, our barracks, and our front porch. And there, huddled in a mound, was a collection of stones that I had gathered as a child. Something told me to dig under our porch. When I broke through the hard crust of the desert floor, I found a pocketful of marbles I had hidden for safekeeping so long ago. I wanted to dig and explore for other things, but I restrained myself for it seemed I was destroying a sacred gravesite.

Over by the mess hall I found the Block 4 tree. It was lying on its side, its branches frozen in a wilted form. It looked like it died a lonely death, long forgotten by those who once enjoyed the shade it provided from the hot desert sun. Topaz seems like one big graveyard, a graveyard of broken lives, broken promises, and broken dreams. There are still many ghosts and spirits haunting the grounds of Topaz today. They hide in the trenches and beneath the sagebrush. Unable to return to life as they once knew it, they remain prisoners of the decaying and rusting barbed wire fences. ■

“Topaz seems like one big graveyard, a graveyard of broken lives, broken promises, and broken dreams. There are still many ghosts and spirits haunting the grounds of Topaz today. They hide in the trenches and beneath the sagebrush. Unable to return to life as they once knew it, they remain prisoners of the decaying and rusting barbed wire fences.”



RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

ROB
KIRK
SAKURAI

Son of Tomio Sakurai
(Topaz High School Student; Block 6)

San Francisco, CA



"I realize now that my parents' stoic demeanor stemmed not from callous indifference or weakness, but from an inner strength—a strength that allowed them to look beyond the adversity and not let the past kill them."

As we walked along the seemingly endless path leading to Block 6, I couldn't help but glance over at my dad. I was expecting a flood of emotions to suddenly inundate him. As we passed a marker for Block 4 I asked him, "Any apprehension?" As usual, his reply was a simple no. So here I was again, thinking that nothing would ever change and that I would never be able to understand what he went through in this dismal place.

The previous day, I sat in a discussion group and listened to my dad tell anecdotes about camp. As I listened, I wondered how he could bury the suffering that I knew must exist. It was only eight years ago that my parents first talked about camp. I have a painful image of my grandmother, who died in Topaz, suffering silently in the way that my dad still echoes to this day, "Shikata ga nai (It cannot be helped)."

How can I understand this approach to life? As I look back toward Drum Mountain, I feel as though I am suffocating in frustration and anger; frustration because I fail to understand the silence that has existed. How can so much pain be put aside? I will never know the pain and suffering that existed in Topaz. I realize now that my parents' stoic demeanor stemmed not from callous indifference or weakness, but from an inner strength—a strength that allowed them to look beyond the adversity and not let the past kill them. While my admiration for the survivors is of epic proportions, my myopic vision causes me a lot of anger. All I see is the punitive quality of the camp.

There was a story told at the discussion group that particularly disturbed me. A gentleman recounted the story of the 442d, some of whose members had been sacrificed during a river crossing. He went on to describe the crying that could be heard throughout the camp as the families behind the barbed wire received the news. Yet another painful image haunts me as I attempt to sort through the plethora of questions and emotions that have been evoked by this trip.

Going through such an ordeal should spawn an incredible resentment among the Issei and Nisei. Yet, they are among the warmest individuals that I have had the pleasure of knowing. I can only aspire to be as strong as my parents and the other survivors who possess this enviable resilience. ■



When the topic of a group trek to Topaz came up at last year's Labor Day reunion in Burlingame, I knew that I wanted to be part of it. As Memorial Day weekend neared, however, I became apprehensive about participating since I would be going alone—none of my family wanted to take this journey with me. The only trekker I would know would be my aunt Takako Endo, a member of the organizing committee. But my need to make this pilgrimage was so strong that I set out from Chicago with an open mind and heart.

At the airport, while waiting for the shuttle bus to take us to the hotel, our small group introduced themselves to each other. When I said my maiden name, Minnie Hashimoto from New York mentioned that her brother had worked for my late father years ago in San Francisco. She also knows my Uncle George and his wife who live in New Jersey. A connection was made—the first of many that unfolded throughout the weekend.

A moment of grace is shared when the couple from Virginia with whom I was sitting at the Saturday banquet gave me the t-shirt the wife had won playing Jan Ken Po (hand game, known as paper-rock-scissors) against me. Thank you for connecting with me.

The big day arrived, and we boarded buses that would take us to Delta (déjà vu of '42?). I decided to take Bus #2 since there was a single seat left, not knowing that Aunt Takako was the monitor on this very bus. After I took a seat in the back, an Issei came to sit by me. She took one look at my name tag and asked if my family was in the trucking business. When I said yes, Kimi Fukami became quite emotional in explaining that my father looked after her late husband during the pre-war years, helping him start a new life in San Francisco and establish their Tani Shoten grocery store. Mrs. Fukami felt a deep sense of *on* (debt of gratitude), but it is I who should be grateful that she so willingly shared stories of my father's early years in this country. And this connection came about simply because we happened to take the last two seats on Bus #2!

After the ceremonies at Topaz, we were invited to walk the camp confines. I felt a deep longing to be where I spent my earliest years, but how was I to find Block 36? I didn't have to worry. As I walked along the dusty roads inside the boundaries, each group of people I met asked what block I was looking for, told me how much longer I had to walk, pointed out landmarks, and served as caring guides for my mission. I felt a real sense of community through these connections.

Once at Block 36, I met the Haramaki clan, and Sumi Lampert pointed out the laundry room where she remembers my mother bathing me in the sink. Sumi had previously recounted other memories of me as a baby, and I am grateful to her for these precious stories. She is definitely part of my Topaz family connection.

Return to Topaz '93 has been a blessing to me. Visiting and examining this significant piece of my past through the kind intercessions of so many people enabled me to claim part of my present. This pilgrimage empowers me to journey into the future with a sense of mission for which I am thankful. *Domo arigato gozaimasu* (Thank you very much)! ■

JOANNE
KIYOKO
SHIMAMOTO
TOHEI

1-4 years old in Topaz
Block 36

Chicago, IL



"A connection was made—the first of many that unfolded throughout the weekend."



RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

YASUKO
UTSUMI

Spouse of Bob Utsumi
(Topaz High School Student; Block 13)

Oakland, CA



A Time to Heal

A time to heal—A time to kneel

*Broken hearts, silent tears—an act we had to appeal
Issei, Nisei, Sansei, Yonsei, Gosei molded of steel
Survive injustices and bigotry—scars hard to heal.*

*Guards in towers boldly pointing bayonets and guns to kill
Barbed wire fences and searchlights searching to quell and still
The Bill of Rights and Constitution didn't protect and fulfill
Usurped freedom and tar-covered barracks could surely break one's will.*

*Continued faith in justice and equality made one patiently feel
Someday, somehow, evacuation advocates could no longer conceal
Executive Order 9066 and its improprieties eventually did reveal
Racial hatred and selfish economic greed—our rights they did steal.*

*Fifty years of memories swell in hearts the cherished bonding we feel
Ties of friendship—disappointments and successes—all seem to congeal
Anguished injustice we've survived—an unjust act was subject to repeal
A journey of disappointment and tragedy I hope to someday bury and seal.*

*A tribute to brave issei and nisei parents who managed to instill
"Be brave and loyal" emphasized with authoritative and undaunted skill
Generations of dignity and loyalty—hearts finally reverent and tranquil
A long overdue apology arrived from the President and Capitol Hill.*

God bless America.



June 7, 1993—As I sit at the computer to write I wonder why tears well up in my eyes, why I am overwhelmed by the emotions that rage through me. There seems to be no end to the suffering that people cause one another.

I went to Topaz to fit another piece in the puzzle, to discover what my family had experienced, but had not told me. I went to satisfy my curiosity of what this place was like. Sometime in my early childhood I heard that my dad had been in a camp—that euphemism for an experience that we will never forget. Now I am not as fearful of examining the past. I also went to be a part of the nikkei community. So, for me, it was a special thrill to look around and see a roomful of Japanese faces.

Driving to Salt Lake City with Toru Saito and Stephanie Miyashiro reminded me of being with my dad. I enjoyed sharing my story with others in the discussion group—I talked about my emotions and my reasons for making the pilgrimage. Later that night I found the Ken Verdoia film intense, describing what happened to many people in the room. Yet as he discussed the nikkei experience, he sometimes would say “they,” instead of “you,” as he addressed the Nisei and Sansei who had been in camp.

On the bus to Topaz, riding past farms, the air conditioner went off, the dust filled the air that was getting hotter and hotter. Through my fatigue I better understand what the internees experienced. Through the window I see the sign announcing our arrival at Topaz. I saw the soldiers standing beneath the Army tent, their truck parked nearby. I was awash in sadness.

The program began. Under the hot sun the speakers were mercifully brief and soon we were freed to enter the camp. I wished I were here with my family, that my dad had come with me. I am searching for Block 34—Building 5—Apartment F. I saw the foundations of the washhouse, toilets, and mess hall. I started to cry. I had to find it, to claim their place as mine. Roy Shimada came along and told me how the buildings were laid out, numbered, and lettered. He showed me the gravel paths and how one path served two buildings. He showed me where he lived, where the door was, the windows, the stove. Then I found my grandparents’ apartment. It was just across from Roy’s. I wondered how many hundreds of times they saw each other.

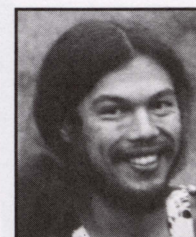
At the Delta dinner I wanted to announce the raft trip I was organizing and the Sansei Legacy Project, but I held back. *Enryo* (restrain from, be reserved)—so that’s what that is. Curious how *enryo* is so selective in its manifestation. Then it was time to say goodbye, and we sang *Auld Lang Syne*. We then sang *God Bless America*. I was stunned. This patriotism exemplified the nisei spirit and the spirit of the 442d. Many voices joined the chorus; I felt the power of the moment sweep me up, and I joined in.

July 7, 1993—Topaz was a mythical place—illusions elusively dancing through my childhood mind, a mirror of my father, Thomas Shuzo Yamamoto. Topaz was not discussed, but the specter of camp was with us all the time. In Vermont, especially during the '60s, there was little space for understanding the nikkei experience. Now I have been to Topaz and have touched the barbed wire. I identify more clearly with the Nikkei who were dehumanized and herded into concentration camps. The trip helped me fill in more of my father’s family history. Thank you. ■

BRUCE
YAMAMOTO

Son of Thomas Shuzo Yamamoto
[Block 34]

San Francisco, CA



“Topaz was a mythical place . . .”



RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

KAY YATABE

Daughter of Mitsie and Mot Yatabe
[Blocks 4 and 11]

San Francisco, CA



As the bus started making the turn toward Topaz, excitement, fear, and horror welled up in my chest. Our bus was among the last to arrive at the site. I was impatient. It took so long for the bus to park.

Getting off the bus, passing some friends, communicating wordlessly, I put my hand to my chest—heartache and grief.

It was hot, and the light was extremely bright. I was intent; I felt a strong sense of purpose. Take it in. This is Topaz—the place I heard referred to so often in my parents' conversations, but about which I knew so little.

I looked hard at the land. Take it in. I took pictures. I took water to my mother. I stood with my father, way behind the crowd. I listened intently to the speakers: Please give me some understanding of what happened here.

But I don't remember anything that the speakers said. I guess I just couldn't hear, couldn't take it all in. Too busy keeping my emotions under control. ■



Artwork by Yonekichi Hosoi



Block 23

Mess Hall



Block 39

Go and Shogi games

Artwork by Yonekichi Hosoi



Year of the Monkey



Block 41
Sparrows flying on a
spring day

**RICHARD
KYOICHI
CHUNG**

Son of Elsie Uyeda Chung
[Topaz High School Student; Block 9]

Los Angeles, CA



Where there was once the sound of laughter and conversation, there was now quiet. Tension and nervous anticipation had conquered celebration and taken its throne as the reigning mood of the bus. Bittersweet memories and specters of long dormant emotions permeated the air like the dust that rose from the ground and mated with the dry desert winds. This is my most vivid memory of the Topaz reunion of 1993. It occurred in a matter of seconds, this emotional changing of the guard, as our bus passed the first road sign indicating that we would soon be at Topaz.

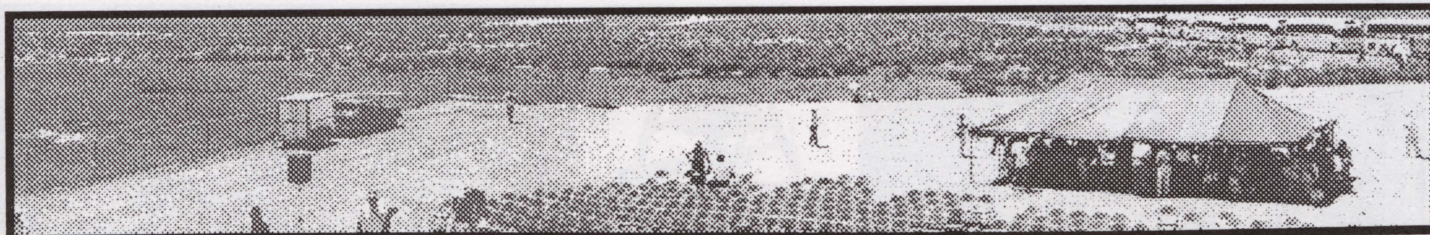
I can vividly recall the looks that washed over everyone's faces. For those who had spent a part of their lives at Topaz, those last few miles were marked with ambivalence. There was a nervousness about them, like people who were soon to be reunited with an acquaintance whom they had not seen in years. I remember the attentiveness of their eyes as they scoured the landscape, searching for something familiar, something different. I began to wonder how much Topaz survivors had changed. I asked myself what part of themselves they'd left behind the barbed wire when our government could no longer detain them. I couldn't help but ponder what they would find when they finally confronted this desert community they were once forced to call home.

I had never been to Topaz. I was excited with wonder and anticipation. I didn't know what to expect. My pilgrimage to Topaz began as an opportunity to add a personal facet to the history I had studied in school and the books I had read. I wanted to find answers to some of my own questions. I returned to Los Angeles feeling less knowledgeable. My mind was burdened with even more questions than before, but my resolve to find answers was reinvigorated. I knew the trip had been a success.

Taking part in this homecoming; watching Issei, Nisei, and Sansei reclaim the years that had once eluded them; listening as former internees faced personal demons—I pledged to remember what so many would like to forget. Working in the community, I have heard much talk about how the time has come for Japanese Americans to put behind the camps and move on. As a Yonsei I, too, understand the need for the Nikkei to diversify and deal with other issues. It is true that if we are to survive, we must embrace the future with the same fervor with which we grasp the past. But at the same time, I cannot discount the role of our history and its importance in setting an agenda for our future.

Franz Fanon wrote, "Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it." We are accountable to the struggle against institutionalized racism. It is our duty to battle recent attacks against the civil rights of others. We must not sit complacent in the belief that a little financial success is equivalent to racial equality. In short, if we are to ensure a strong nikkei community in the decades to come, we must not forget where we came from. We cannot deny our history just as we cannot shun the battles that are to come. If we allow ourselves to forget the camp experience, if we never let future generations know the personal stories of life behind the guarded gates, then we will have already failed our first trial. ■

"Where there was once the sound of laughter and conversation, there was now quiet. Bittersweet memories and specters of long dormant emotions permeated the air like the dust that rose from the ground . . . It occurred in a matter of seconds, this emotional changing of the guard, as our bus passed the first road sign indicating that we would soon be at Topaz."

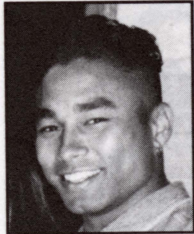


RETURN TO TOPAZ '93

ASKIA EGASHIRA

Son of Pam Egashira
[Born in Camp]
[Grandson of Toie Katayanagi and
Hiroji Egashira; Block 37]

San Francisco, CA



*Damn! You're all citizens,
so we can't execute ya.*

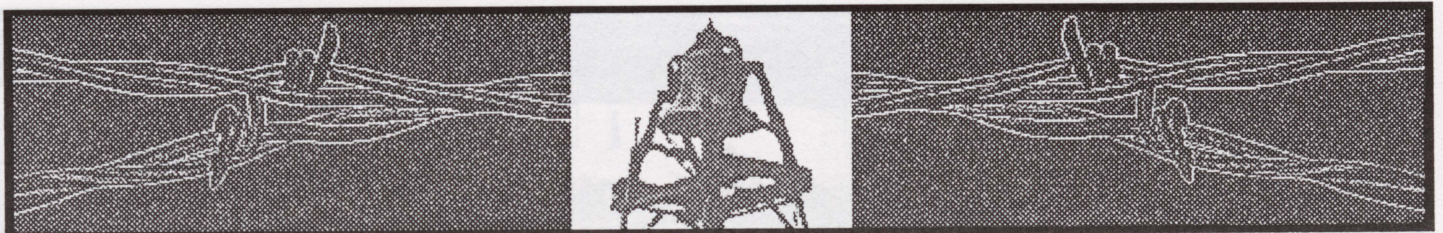
*A Holocaust in America,
but we won't gas or shoot ya.*

*You've committed no crime,
but we'll still prosecute ya.*

*To be raped as a people
and robbed of a future.*



*some thoughts on a warm night
tucked away in the Marriott Hotel
in Salt Lake City, May 29, 1993,
visions still fresh of the VFW color guard
sweeping by the tables of banquet food,
the smell of food mixing with Nisei memories.
Yonsei questions.*



KANA
ENOMOTODaughter of Roz Uyeda Enomoto
[Topaz High School Student; Block 9]Student, UCLA
Los Angeles, CA

The Uyeda family is noisy. Irresistible to some, irritating to others; the sisters and their kin filled a Topaz-bound bus with songs, stories, and chit chat. As we began our journey, the air sparked with the energy of these nine incredible women. Going back to Topaz with my mother and her sisters was an opportunity I never dreamed I would have, not because I didn't want to go, but because I felt a part of them was still there. It's when my mom was fourteen and people still called her Rose. It's when people had names like "Hippo." It's when they had dances and learned to sing French songs while the war raged overseas.

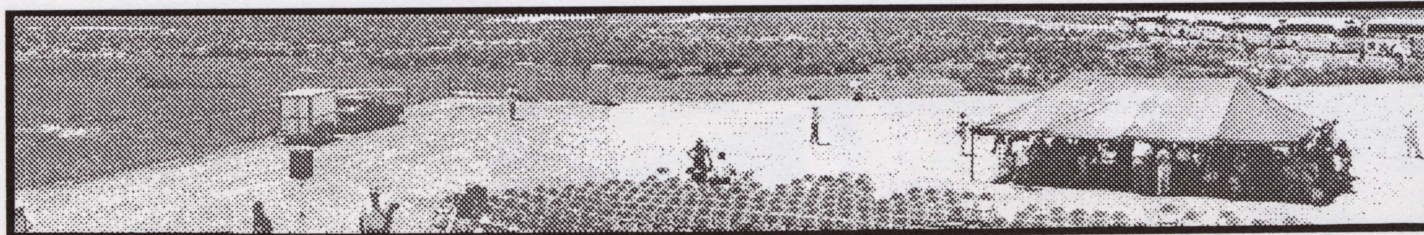
I never thought of the war raging in Topaz because I didn't think of it as a place where bad things happened. The way the aunties and my mom talked about it was usually so nostalgic. Nobody told sad stories or expressed anger or hurt. I thought of the Topaz years as the "good ol' days"—full of the hysterical escapades and anecdotes that we always laughed about at family parties.

I should have known that 3½ years in the heat and dust of Topaz, Utah, could not have been the idyllic days I imagined. But my perception of camp had been colored through the protective filter of what I had heard. I didn't know if my mother ever felt sad, mad, or confused. My imagined visions of Topaz were a patchwork of other people's memories. When I thought of camp, I always imagined fences, towers, and barracks, overgrown with weeds, tired and neglected. I imagined teenagers, music, blue skies, and cool breezes. I thought these things were still there and I was going to Topaz to see them. I came prepared to take pictures of barracks and barbed wire. I was going to document the experience. I wanted to hike to the place where my mom went to school. I wanted to find the block and barracks in which her family had waited out the war.

I was expecting to feel something important, an epiphany, a revelation about what the camp years really meant. As soon as I left the air-conditioned comfort of Bus #5, I knew I had been wrong. I could feel the meanness of the sun and desolate emptiness of the desert. There were no fences or towers. Why was I surprised? It's been fifty years. Today, there is little evidence that a camp ever existed—a few blocks of concrete, scraps of metal, pieces of forgotten things. Topaz, the Jewel of the Desert, is gone.

A large group of us searched for the family barracks. "It's over here." "No, this way." We trekked through treacherous mosquito territory and wandered until we were certain we didn't know where we were. We took family pictures on an empty plot of cracked dirt that may or may not have been Block 9-Barracks 10-Units A-C. I felt as if I had failed. I had travelled to Utah to see something and found nothing. I looked around to commiserate with my fellow pilgrims, but to my surprise I saw no fallen faces. There were my aunts, running around, talking about things they hadn't thought of in fifty years, laughing and indulging in memories of a distant past. But as I watched my aunts piece together forgotten bits of their youth, I realized that the real pilgrimage to Topaz was not to a special place, but to a special time. I shared the experience of remembering. I am thankful for the gift of family. Through our collective strength we have overcome hardship and created a bright future for ourselves and our children. Going to Topaz was a reminder that my achievements do not stand alone. My accomplishments are also those of my parents and those who came before them. Without their strength, where would I be? ■

"I realized the real pilgrimage was not to a special place, but to a special time."





- STOP -
AREA LIMITS

**FOR PERSONS OF
JAPANESE ANCESTRY
RESIDING IN THIS
RELOCATION CENTER**

**SENTRY
ON DUTY**