

REMINISCENCES

Growing up in Portland

I was born on 2 January 1924 in Portland, Oregon, delivered at home by a Japanese mid-wife. I was the third child and first son born to my parents. The first of the children was a sister who died in infancy. In a letter she wrote to me years later, my mother blamed herself for my sister's death for not giving herself proper pre-natal care. She wrote that after that every precaution was taken in pregnancy and in the children's nurture. We, therefore, lived a very sheltered life guarded from physical harm and social injustices.

My parents were isseis. They were immigrants. My father started working in America at the age of 18 as one of the men in a section gang in railroad construction in Oregon and Washington. It can truly be said that he participated in the building of the West. When he fell backwards from a hand car whose handle broke and he injured his shoulder as the car ran over him, he had to quit that work. There were no workmen's compensation in those days. He went to Portland and into the kitchen. He washed dishes and then eventually became a cook. By the time of the evacuation, he had become a first cook in a downtown University Club. He worked hard. He would get up early in the morning and come home late at night, for in those days the cooks worked every meal. He may have had a short break after lunch and before cooking dinner, but that was when we were in school. We saw very little of him. My mother spent our early years caring for us, and when we were old enough to go to school, she worked as a chambermaid. This led to our parents going into the hotel business. Before the war they bought the hotel which was on the corner of First Avenue and Salmon Street; after returning from the Minidoka Camp of the War Relocation Authority, they bought the hotel which was located on the corner of Second Avenue and Clay Street. These were clean, very low room charge hotels catering to the working people. The buildings no longer exist today.

The isseis through their hard work in various occupations into which they went became an economic threat to the majority population. As they prospered the anti-Oriental feelings grew. This was especially true in farming areas. Since many of the immigrants came from farm backgrounds, it was natural for them to go into farming. They even took swamp lands and made them into profitable truck gardens. Very quickly in and around Portland, the Japanese farmers were outproducing all others. They banded together in cooperatives for the advantage in buying farm supplies and in marketing their produces. They became very prominent in the early wholesale markets. Their successes were seen as a threat, and this was very much the underlying basis of support for the evacuation by organization such as the Sons of the Golden West.

We had been sheltered well in pre-school years by our parents, but as we grew up we came to learn what discrimination was all about. Most residential areas in Portland had Restrictive Covenants. No Orientals could buy property in such areas and live there. We were forced to live near skid rows. There were two islands of Japanese communities in Portland: one in North Portland and the other in South Portland. Earlier we lived in North Portland and later we moved to South Portland when our parents bought their first hotel. Our grade

school was Atkinson School to which we walked half a mile every day crossing some very busy streets. I started the first grade, but in mid-year went with our mother to Japan for a period of 10 months. Upon return from Japan I went to the same school again. Grace and I graduated from that school. In my last year there I was the head of the School Patrol. I applied myself in studies. In one subject a teacher gave me a grade of "pluperfect". I combined the work of the 5th and 6th grades in one year at the suggestion of the teacher because both classes were in the same room and she felt that I could handle it without any problem. Thus I made up the year lost in going to Japan. Atkinson School was a totally segregated school with only Japanese-American and Chinese-American students. The facilities were very poor. The school building was an old wooden structure, and it had been condemned as a fire trap. When we moved to South Portland, Grace and I walked two miles to school. Yosh and Henry transferred to another public school closer to our home.

Our school days were very busy. Public school started at 8:30 in the morning and went to 3:30. Then from 4:30 to 6:30 we attended the Japanese Language School. That was also in North Portland so that from the time we left home to when we returned home in South Portland, we had spent 12 hours in activities involved in education. The Japanese Language School also held classes on Saturdays, and it went one extra month in the summer. Grace and I completed 10 years in that school.

The high school Grace and I attended was the Lincoln High School in West Portland. The students who went there represented the diverse neighborhoods nearby. There were fairly large number of Asian Americans, students from Jewish communities and children from the more affluent families from the West Hills, among others. The school was more racially and religion-wise mixed than other Portland schools at the time. Grace was a year ahead of me and she paved the way for me. My transition from the segregated grade school to the integrated high school was abrupt, and I had some adjustments to make and adjustments I did make. The teachers were dedicated and they were there to help. My first English teacher was Miss Maureen Brown, who later became Senator Neuberger, having married the man who became a U.S. Senator and succeeded him upon his death. Hers was a honors class, and I had to struggle there because all the students were exceptionally bright. Miss Arbuckle was the math teacher in one of my math courses. Math was one of my favorite subjects and I did well. She had me in one of the math competitions among the schools. Mr. Foulk was my biology teacher. I remember him for having us dissect cow's eyes, laying the parts on a paper and labeling them. There were nine parts, but we could only find eight. The ninth was the pupil. Mr. Green was my chemistry teacher who gave me the name "Smoky" because I caused a lot of smoke while conducting an experiment that went astray. I did not have Mrs. Southwick for class, but she was my sister's social studies teacher. She was especially kind to us during the pre-evacuation days and in the days that followed. Mr. Baldwin was another of my math teachers. He had me serve as a teaching assistant at times in freshman math classes. He was also the faculty adviser to the student government, and this gave me numerous opportunities to work with him in the two years that I served successively as Assistant Treasurer and Treasurer of the Student Body. With my mother's constant encouragement I did well in school. I made honor roll each semester and graduated at the head of my class. In athletics I earned a letter for gymnastics. I was elected to the prestigious service group, the Hi-Y. All

this culminated into my being awarded the T.T. Davis Award as the outstanding graduating student, even though I had been evacuated six weeks prior to the end of the school year. The support that my teachers gave to all of us Japanese-Americans in those difficult times has been remembered with great thanks. When some functionary in the Portland School Superintendent's Office attempted to withhold the cash part of the T.T. Davis Award, Mr. York, the principal, fired back to the Office a note stating that the decision to give me the Award was Lincoln High School's, that the fund had been set up to be used by the Lincoln High School, and that the Superintendent's Office had no right to countermand the decision. This was an affirmation of me in a time of encircling gloom.

There were few outside-the-school activities in those days. One evening a week I practiced judo at the Portland Judo Club and won many matches in area tournaments. My sister taught me to dance, and I attended few dances interestingly held as part of our Buddhist Church socials. After finishing the 10 years of Japanese Language School, but still in public school, I had more time for other pursuits, and I worked in the Flowers Tommy Luke shop with my friend and classmate, Tommy, Jr. That was my first paying job in which I contributed to the Social Security. I was proud to have the card.

My summers from age 10 were spent working on the berry farm of Mr. N. Fujimoto in Gresham. He and my father came to the U.S. together from the same village in Japan. He was very kind to us. My sister and I picked berries; strawberries first and then progressively Logan berry, Young berry, Boysen berry and black berry. That work was piece work. When the berry season waned I helped to plant cabbages, Brussel sprouts, and cauliflowers. My pay at first was 10 cents per hour, and our days were 10 hours long. Child labor laws did not apply to farm work then. In the summer of 1941, although I had only six summers of farm work under my belt, Mr. Fujimoto made me the "straw boss" of the 40 acre rented farm in Gresham. The Fujimoto family had moved to their 60 acre farm in Boring that they had purchased. They had much to do to make that farm into a profitable venture.

A study of history will reveal that the U.S. expected to be in the war before we got into it. The selective service law was already in place, and our trouble with Japan had been foreseen. In 1941 I was 17 years old, and I was concentrating on studying, judo, and my expanding extra-curricular activities. So concentrated was I on my personal life that the outbreak of World War II was a tremendous shock to me. Right after the attack on Pearl Harbor, a curfew was clamped on all Japanese and American citizens of Japanese ancestry. The curfew order said we could not go more than five miles from our places of residence and we had to be in from 8:30 PM to 6:00 AM. That clipped my wings. There were so many things important to this high school senior that had to be curtailed. Often I had to leave the Hi-Y meeting at the YMCA 15 minutes before 8:00 PM and run home just making it under the wire. I tried to obey the letter of the order. Yet, on holiday times when I worked at the branch shop of Flowers Tommy Luke near the West Hills, Tommy, Sr. had me work late into the night and then took me to his home to spend the night. He reasoned that the spirit of the order was met. He also thought that the law was rather stupid. The U.S. military under General DeWitt was, however, so wound up that it had us even turn in all short-wave radios, and we were all fingerprinted and given numbers. The numbers were not, however, tattooed on our forearms.

When the order to report to the Pacific Northwest Livestock Exposition grounds came, it was done with two week's notice, and we were permitted to take only what we could carry on ourselves. The evacuation order gave the signal to the unscrupulous people who came to our places of business and our homes and bought up furnitures, refrigerators, pianos, and all the many appliances for five and ten dollars. Our parents were over a barrel. They had to sell and sell quickly. The transactions were literally steals. No other word in the English language could describe what happened.

Amidst all this there were friends who remained fast and believed in us. Tommy Luke, Jr. was one. After serving in the Navy, he returned to Portland and went back into the florist business but died prematurely, yet a young man. Another was Clifford Leonard who later in life went to Japan as a missionary under a faith group. Marion Saltness went to California, and there met and married Bernie Koodlach and raised a family. She and I renewed our friendship at our 50th high school reunion. Bill Peterson made it into the Naval Academy at Annapolis from high school, stayed in the service, rose to the rank of a Naval Captain and retired in Portland. When I was still in the Assembly Center they came to see me on several occasions and brought me the description of the graduation exercise I could not attend and best wishes from my many classmates.

With the evacuation to the desert in Idaho, my roots in Portland were temporarily severed. I still think of Portland as my hometown and even today it holds for me memories of joys and sorrows.