

Part 3:
Jichan's Internment Experience

The second family member I was able to interview was my Grandfather, or Jichan in Japanese. At first he did not have very much to tell me. I could tell it was a subject that he did not often talk about. My Grandmother, or Obachan, helped me out a great deal. She started asking questions, actually reiterating what I asked and Jichan started telling me a little about his life during those times. Even though my Obachan helped a lot it was still hard to get much detailed information.

My Jichan worked with his father and brothers on a farm they owned in Yakima. His mother and sisters worked at a hotel with a restaurant that they owned. Jichan wanted to go to a trade school, so he saved up all of his money and paid for the first year of schooling. Unfortunately, the war came and a week after he paid for school he was sent to the Portland assembly center. He was never reimbursed. He told me that they had to sell everything for cheap. His car was sold for 600 dollars. He said that was a pretty good price considering it was pretty new, and he was a Japanese American going to camp. The family left many things behind, including the farm and hotel. They left most of their valuables with one of their white friends who they thought they could trust. When they finally returned, everything was gone. The farm land was built on, and the hotel was gone totally. All of the things they entrusted with the friend were never seen again.

Jichan told me that some of the Japanese American's farms were bombed. These people didn't even get a chance to sell their things for cheap, he said. He also told me that there were shootings. He thought the curfew was a good thing because he was

fearful of the violence vented towards the Japanese Americans at the time.

My Jichan had a story about himself and his two brothers that was very interesting. The night before they were to be relocated his brothers went out to a party. Jichan tried to tell them that they should not go because the curfew was still in effect. His brothers said no, it is not. Jichan did not go with them, luckily for him. The brothers were arrested and had to report directly from jail to the train taking them to the Portland assembly center the next morning. Jichan got a call late that night from his brothers. He had to run down town during the restricted curfew hours and beg a friend of his to borrow his truck so he could go to the house to pack and take all of his brothers things to the jail because they needed to take the stuff with them but could not get out of jail to pack. So he ran around town and got everything together and had his friend deliver all of these things to his brothers. The next day they were off to the Portland assembly center.

The first night at the assembly center he remembered making a mattress out of a bunch of straw. After that he said they all just went to the mess hall and ate some burned rice. The next day one of the head people at the assembly center said they needed some experienced farm laborers. Jichan and some of his friends volunteered to work on a sugar beet farm. They each worked well over 60 hours a week, and each received fifteen dollars a month. The people at the farm really wanted Jichan to stay and work for them. Why not, he was a very hard worker, good at what he did, plus they only had to pay him 15 dollars a month. The owner of the

farm pleaded with the government to keep my Jichan, but all of the pleading did not help. He had to go to the internment camps with all of the other Japanese Americans.

Jichan was sent to No No camp by his father. His father thought this would be a good thing for him. Separated from his whole family, my Jichan was sent to Heart Mountain. There he got a job delivering food to the kitchen. He received nineteen dollars a month, which was very good. Jichan said he really liked this job. He was able to get off of the camp, he only had to work half days on Sunday, and he had access to the camps delivery truck. There were twenty eight kitchens at Heart Mountain, and Jichan got to visit each one on a daily basis. Later Jichan got a job in Chicago working at a metal plant. It was authorized by the government and he started to make good money. He had this job for six month and was able to save up ten thousand dollars. He had to send this money to his sister, who did not have to go to the camps because she stayed with other relatives outside of the zone. His parents, being Issei, could not actually own any land so everything was in their daughters name. This is why he sent his money to his sister and not his parents.

During those six at the No No camp there was a lot of tension. There were meetings at which some of the people were accused of being spy's. Because of this, the No No men were not able to leave the camps anymore. Jichan had to return from Chicago. Because of this whole spy thing, Jichan said there was a lot of tension between the members of the camp. Jichan's father was very angry with him, even though he did nothing. This tension between father

and son never really healed, Jichan said. He also told me that his sister's relationship with their father never healed after the camps. His sister Yuki fell in love with a Japanese man at the camps. During his stay at the camps he decided that he would return to Japan. Yuki wanted very badly to go with him, but their father would not allow it. This made a rift in their relationship that would last forever.

I asked Jichan if the camp life was terrible. He said that it was not terrible, but he definitely liked working on the farm at home better. I asked about his parents, and how they felt about the camp life. Jichan's father didn't work much, he did a little farming at the camp. His mother worked in the kitchen. He really did not know how his mother felt about it, but his father was very bitter, and he said he took it out on the kids (Jichan and his brother's and sister's). I wish I could get more information from my Jichan, but it seemed that this was all he wanted to tell me. I'm sure there were many other stories, but they probably were too painful for him to talk about. My Obachan said later, "He had a terrible time at camp."