

Part 4:
Mae's Internment Experience

Finally, I was able to interview my Great Aunt, Mae Horiuchi. She had some information and stories from her mothers diary. These notes from the diary also sparked many memories for Mae. I appreciate her sharing these memories with me.

Mae was fifteen years old when the war first broke out. By the time they were evacuated Mae was sixteen years old. She and her family lived in Auburn Washington. At that time it was a small town south of Seattle, populated mostly by farming families. Her life was mostly helping her family in the fields, planting and picking everything they cultivated.

On March 2, 1942, the FBI went to their house to search for fire arms, cameras, short wave radios and other "suspicious" items. I asked if the people dug through everything, making a mess? Were they rude and hostile towards you or your family? Mae told me that they were very nice people, very polite, and didn't make a mess. She said after that, "Farm life went on as usual.". Even though there was talk of the Japanese Americans being evacuated from the west coast, all of the spring plantings and clean up had to be done. She got to plant the strawberries, prune the blackberry fields, and plant the lettuce.

The next thing that really stood out in Mae's mind was the time when everyone was ordered to get typhoid shots. She thought this surely meant, "Okay, this is it.". So her family started getting ready for the move. Her brother tried to sell their cars, horses and farm. Her family and friends brought potential buyers to see the farm. Her father, who worked for the railroad company, was given notice that he was on leave. In May, a packing company that they

used to sell their produce to decided to buy their farm for nine hundred dollars. This was not much at all, but it was all they could get on such a short notice. Her mother kept all of the kids in the fields hoeing and pulling weeds until the day they left for the Pinedale assembly center.

On May 18th, they all got their physicals and packed their household goods to store at a relatives warehouse. On May 22nd, at six o'clock in the evening, they were on their way to California via Portland. They arrived in Fresno, California on May 24th, and from there they were bussed to the Pinedale assembly center. Mae said they were lucky because they arrived to brand new buildings, constructed just for them. They were much more fortunate than the people before them who had to use the horse stables as their temporary homes. Mae said there was dust there up to your ankles, and it was 106 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade. Being from Auburn Washington they were not used to such hot weather, she said it was really hard to get used to. She said "It got so hot there, it was amazing, the tar floor got so soft that our steel Army cots would sink into the floor almost to the springs!". Her family stayed there in Pinedale for two months, then they were on the train again, this time for Tule Lake California.

When Mae's family arrived at Tule Lake, there were already evacuees living there. The others got there months before them so the streets were already put in and it was not as dusty. She heard that before the streets were put in, the dust was up to your ankles almost every where you walked, sometimes even in your home!

Mae had a different view than my Jichan of camp life. She said, "When you are sixteen years old and can socialize with all of your friends by just walking around the block, or by going to the recreation hall, life was great. You didn't have to do anything. No more weeds to pull, no more berries and beans to pick, no more lettuce to cut and pack. The only work you had to do was clean our two rooms allowed for our family of six, and do the laundry. It was a great life for a teenage girl!". Mae told me the laundry room was first come first serve. They would grab the next available scrub board and wash tub. "You didn't have to do anything, but it got boring, so I had a job as a waitress.", said Mae.

Mae remembers a time when everyone who was sixteen and older had to fill out a questionnaire. It asked if you were loyal to America or Japan. Mae thought this was pretty ridiculous because most of them had lived in America all of their lives. She said that she was also surprised that some people did say they were loyal to Japan. This created a segregation situation between the people who were loyal to Japan and the people who were loyal to America. (See the segregation document.) The people who were loyal to Japan were shipped out. I asked where they were shipped to, but she did not know.

Once again Mae and her family were on the train, this time headed for Utah. By that time, Mae said they were one member less. Her older sister got married and was living in Ogden, Utah. Mae and her family were relocated again, this time in Topaz. In June, 1944, Mae graduated from Topaz High. She told me she felt guilty for taking the easiest subjects available just so she could

graduate from high school. She had her sights set on going to cosmetology school in Ogden. She wanted to become a hair stylist. She told me a story about when she was much younger, "There was only one Japanese hair dresser in Auburn and she was my mother's friend. So my mom and I decided that I was going to become a hair stylist. I guess in my mom's eyes I did a pretty good job fixing hair. But by the time I graduated from high school, the quota for accepting relocating Japanese from camp was filled and I could not move to Ogden Utah."

Mae said she was very proud that her family was always very close knit. They always stayed in touch. Her mother saw to it that her brothers and sisters would send them care packages, and in turn would make something and send a care package back. Mae said " My mother was a great cook. On any family member's birthday or if anyone came to visit from out of camp, or left camp, she would always make sushi and other goodies and we would have a party.". She told me about the oven her father made on top of their pop bellied heating stove so she could bake cakes. Mae thought this was really neat, even though her cakes didn't always turn out.

Her father and brothers worked in camp. Her father worked in the kitchen and her brothers were in construction. Mae's brother Frank got a temporary permit to leave camp to go to work on a farm in Idaho. There he received a substantially greater monthly wage. Her brother Kiwamu volunteered fro the U.S. Army. Her Sister Lola left for Ogden to help her sister Yukimi, who was now expecting a baby. Mae left for Spokane, Washington to help

her sister in law Florence because she was also expecting a child soon. Florence's husband, Mae's brother Takao, was in Europe serving in the U.S. Army. With talks of the camps closing Mae's brother Frank went after their brother Ben. He took Ben to Spokane to get his high school education. All of the children were out of Topaz at that time. Finally Mae's parents left Topaz on October 6, 1945 to relocate back to Auburn Washington. In route, they stopped in Spokane to visit all of their children and decided they should stay as a family in Spokane.

After returning from the camps it was hard for Mae to find a job. The same went for her brother Ben. Her brother Frank got a job at a furniture store refinishing furniture, and her father luckily got his job back with the railroad. Later Mae got a job as a baby sitter and a cleaning woman. She told me she wished she would have kept after her goal of being a hair stylist. She told me not to give up. She gave up on her career goal and regrets it. She told me "Its not good to give up, what if we all (Japanese Americans) gave up in the camps? Where would we be? Where would you be? Probably not here. We (Japanese Americans) have learned not to give up, if you believe in something like we believed we were Americans, stick with it and you will over come anything that stands in your way."

This is the pamphlet that everyone recieved if you were sixteen or older. This gave the back ground for the questionare which you were to state if you were loyal to America or Japan. If you were loyal to Japan you were shipped out to Tule Lake. Mae and her family were sent To Topaz from Tule Lake.

SEGREGATION

of

Persons of Japanese Ancestry

in Relocation Centers



WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

August, 1943

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