

My name is Louise Crowley; address, [redacted], Seattle, 98122. I'm a native Seattleite, and graduated from Broadway High School here in 1937. Broadway had a high percentage of Nisei students, so many of my classmates and friends were of Japanese descent. The high school and college years are those in which a young person begins to make deep -- and normally, lasting -- friendships. Many of my own were prematurely and very painfully shattered by the evacuation order.

I felt, and still feel, a passionate sense of outrage, helplessness, and betrayal. There was absolutely nothing anyone could do to stop it. Suddenly, with ten days notice, half my friends were imprisoned behind a barb-wire-topped cyclone fence around the old Puyallup fairgrounds, bound for who-knew-where, without having done anything to deserve it. I guess I'd been a pretty innocent kid -- I hadn't known such despotism was legally possible in the United States of America.

Well, I learned, and I haven't forgotten.

Weekends, other white friends and I would drive down to Puyallup to visit them. We could smell the assembly center long before we got to it -- overcrowded, muddy, with open latrines, the camp so hastily thrown up there was no provision for proper sanitation. We had to talk to our friends through the fence, with armed National Guardsmen standing by. We couldn't bring them presents. I remember that Shig, who was an artist, wanted paper, paints, even just pencils, but there was no way we could give them to him. They'd expected to be in the assembly center only a few weeks until they were more permanently relocated, but their stay stretched on much longer, each living out of the one suitcase he/she had been allowed to bring.

Then they were gone. I heard, later, that Lily Yoroze's grandmother had died on the train taking her to the relocation camp. I don't know whether that's true or not, because I never saw Lily again.

The rest of us went on with our lives, myself at least (so probably others) with a lasting distrust of government. We heard very little news from the camps, none of it confirmable. I was in Berkeley, California, when the newspapers there erupted with sensational headlines and stories about a riot in the camp at Tule Lake. My landlord was a sociologist teaching at the University of California, who had been doing a study in the camp during the alleged riot, and had witnessed only a peaceful demonstration.

By the time it became clear that the exiles would be allowed to return, I was again living in Seattle, working in a small shipyard on Bainbridge Island. A resident of the island named Lambert Schuyler, who openly characterized himself as an ideological fascist, began organizing islanders to resist their return. That, at last, was something we could do something about. Some other shipyard workers and I went to his meetings after work to state the case for the evacuees. The racists didn't like that, so things got a bit rough at times, but we were still in our hard-hats and steel-toed boots, and after a while Schuyler quit calling meetings.

Meanwhile, a similar but stronger organization, the Remember Pearl Harbor League, had been formed in Auburn and spread rapidly throughout the Puyallup Valley. Before the war much of this area, stretching just south of Seattle, had been in truck farms, many of them owned or leased by Japanese-Americans. Wartime population and industrial expansion already indicated the future appreciation of land values there, particularly in those ends of the valley nearest to Seattle and Tacoma. So the Remember Pearl Harbor League had tremendous appeal to white farmers who for a pittance had glommed onto formerly Japanese- and Nisei-held land through the distress sales forced by the evacuation, and who were by then unsure the legality of those sales would be upheld in a less prejudicial climate.

Throughout this period, I and several of my friends tried desperately to

mobilize organizational support for the evacuees. Plenty of people -- just about everyone I talked to, in fact -- sympathized with them, had always considered the evacuation unjustified, and desired their safe return. But the slogan of the day was UNITY FOR THE WAR EFFORT, and that was almost universally interpreted to mean: DON'T MAKE WAVES. The only organization with the courage and independence of mind to help them was the Society of Friends. Not having a Quaker's forbearance, I went it alone.

When the Remember Pearl Harbor League felt strong enough to move into the city itself, it announced a recruiting meeting at a house on Beacon Hill. I phoned my shipyard friends, and my roommate and I went to the house, to find the door guarded by large though aging Legionaires who would be sure to recognize us from our Bainbridge Island activities. We had to sneak in a back window. Our colleagues were equally inventive, and somehow, independently and miraculously, my long-absent friend Kenji appeared -- in Army uniform, just back from Italy, bedecked with campaign ribbons. The meeting broke up in a melee before it reached the sign-up stage, and the Remember Pearl Harbor League never called another one in Seattle.

The League did try, after that, to move in on Kirkland. I went to that meeting too, but didn't have to say or do anything at all. The gathering was so hostile to the League that its floor speakers simply slunk out one by one in defeat. League members had blustered a lot about the terror they would inflict on such of the evacuees who might dare to return, but without public approval they lost enthusiasm for following through on their bluff. There was some vandalism of tombstones and the like, but the actual violence was minimal.

But I never saw any of my Nisei school and college friends again, except Gordy Hirabayashi, and him only after so many years had passed that we didn't recognize each other. In the camps, they had no way of knowing we were still their friends; it must have seemed they no longer had any on the outside, except the Quakers. But I still miss Shig and Kyo and Hisashi and Ken and Tami and Lily and Yoshi and ...

And I'm still outraged at the injustice of it. I want evidence that nothing like that can happen again. I want my friends compensated, in whatever degree they can be compensated, for the disruption that executive order imposed on their lives. I can't think of a better use for my tax money. And I hope it costs enough to dissuade the government from ever courting the risk of a repeat performance against anybody else.

Louise Crowley (nee Gregg)  
[REDACTED], Seattle, 98122  
[REDACTED]

August, 1981