

Testimony of: Theresa Takayoshi

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I was born in New York City on April 21, 1918, of a Japanese father and an Irish mother. My father was a waiter and had a great love for this country and also the Irish people. In fact, he chose to use the name of Pat. When I was two years old, my father took sick and he and Mother packed up their little family of myself (2 years) and my sister who was 7 months old and came to Seattle to be with his brother thinking that he would get better if he left the extreme weather of the East Coast.

When we came to Seattle he got worse and soon was admitted to Firlans Hospital which was the TB Sanitarium where he passed away when I was 3½ years old. My mother had to go to work to support her two children and being an uneducated immigrant, the only work she could do was work as a maid. She put my sister and I in the Maryknoll Convent which was staffed with Maryknoll sisters and all the children were Oriental and so my sister and I learned the language and spoke very good Japanese by the time we were able to go again to live with our mother when she remarried.

I look back now and really feel sorry for the prejudices my mother had to endure such as being turned down time and again when she would go out to find a house to rent. She was very self conscious when we would come home and tell her

that someone on the bus or in the store had asked what nationality we were because we did not look like 100% Japanese children.

When I was 14 years old and going to an all Caucasian school, I hurt many times when I found that someone in the class had a party and had invited all the children in the class, but me. It was at that time that I met some Japanese-Americans and they accepted me for what I was with no questions asked. That was when I made a choice to stick with the Japanese-Americans and from then on all my friends were Japanese-Americans. I realize that the mood in the Seattle area was one of prejudice and that we were not really first-class citizens.

I married a Japanese-American man in 1934 and had my first child in 1936.

My husband had graduated from the University of Washington and had a degree in accounting, but he was never able to get a job in that field. At that time, they just would not hire an Oriental in most companies.

After we married, the company he was working for went out of business, and he spent two or three months looking for a job. Things were tough, due to the depression so no one was hiring.

He finally got a job as a laborer at a sawmill about 30 miles from Seattle. We moved there and had to live in Japanese town. They would not let us rent a house in the Caucasian area. We stayed there almost eight years before the mill went bankrupt and we had to leave. We moved back to Seattle and stayed with my mother.

My mother had a small two-bedroom house so we were very crowded, but we couldn't afford to find our own place.

In January 1940, we had a second son and were still trying to find work. My husband finally decided to open his own ice creamery and borrowed money from my uncle to get started.

Business was good and we added a light lunch, chili, soup, etc., for winter. We also put in magazines and a lending library and things looked very good.

On December 7, 1941, we had an appointment with a photographer to have a family picture taken. The appointment was at 9:30 A.M. so we could be home to open the store. I'll never forget getting out of the car and one of the neighbors running up and saying, "The Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor."

I was just sick. My sister had just moved to Honolulu in May.

The days following December 7th were full of turmoil and business dropped off. Many people just wouldn't come into the store, even though they were daily customers before.

I read the papers daily to find out our fate. Every day there were different stories of what was to happen to us. Many hate letters to the editor, etc., were printed.

Finally, we were to register and we did. Then we were told to wait and watch the papers for announcements.

When we were finally told to evacuate, we were crushed. Both my husband and I did not believe until the announcement that we would be taken. We knew we had to get rid of the store.

My mother did not want my two brothers, who were 12 and 16, to go, so she applied for an exemption through her church. Department of Navy personnel came to interview her and saw my brothers and said they thought my brothers would be all right in Seattle since they did not look too much like Japanese. So they did not have to be evacuated even though the rule was a person had to be 1/8 or less Japanese to stay. There were no Japanese with that little mix.

When my husband heard this he thought I should apply too, and stay to take care of the store and keep the boys out of camp. I went to a command post which was set up at Maryknoll School and made my application.

It took about ten days to two weeks before the answer came back. The

answer was--I could stay, but my two boys, ages 6 and 2, would have to go. The Lieutenant who talked to me had tears in his eyes. He told me he was a second generation Italian, and he really sympathized with me. There was no choice--I left to be with my family.

We left Seattle May 9, 1942, and caught a bus at 8th and Dearborn Streets. My mother and brothers were there to see us off and not knowing what the future held for us, I was sure I would never see them again and it was a sad farewell.

When we arrived at Puyallup Fair Grounds, which was the Assembly Center, I couldn't believe my eyes--the barracks had partitions between families, but they did not go to the ceiling. There was about an 18 inch opening at the top so we might have well had no partition. The planks they used for the floor had about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch space between boards, so eventually the grass grew through and we used to joke about mowing our floors.

The men were given large bags to go to the back of the area to fill with straw. These were our mattresses. Our room had room for just the four cots and we were only allowed to take what we could carry, so we didn't need much room any way.

Our days were spent doing very little except eat, sleep and visit our friends.

Our oldest son who was always a good eater, had a hard time adjusting to the meals. My husband also refused to eat many meals.

One day they had hamburgers and our son ate several helpings. He acted like he was starved. During the night he became ill and vomitted all the next day. I had had a bad experience with an old doctor and when I heard he was on duty, I decided to wait a while.

The next evening he was no better, and we were very worried. I heard the ambulance go between the barracks and looked out and saw it was Dr. Suzuki, whom I had great faith in since he was educated in the United States. My cousin, who was a nurse, was with him and even though I knew it was against the rules, I went over to the barracks they had gone into. My cousin answered the door and I told her my son was very ill. She convinced the doctor that I was not easily upset, so the doctor came in.

As soon as he came in, he said the child had acidosis from vomiting, all the acid had gone from his body. He wanted him admitted into the hospital at Tacoma, which had the facilities to pump his stomach so they could see that there were cases of food poisoning in camp.

A car came after him at 2:00 A.M. and they said I could ride along. We got dressed and rode to Tacoma (almost a ½ hour ride). When we got to the hospital, a nurse met us at the door with a wheelchair. She told me I could not come into the hospital. I felt just awful leaving a six year old alone and sick.

I could not sleep when I got back to camp and was up early hoping to get a chance to call the hospital or at least the camp hospital to see how our son was. The guard at the gate refused to let us use the phone which was just outside the fence. We got a Red Cross Rep to ask, but he still refused. The Red Cross Reps were supposed to be able to use the phone.

My husband got very upset as did the Red Cross Rep and the guard turned his gun toward us. My husband told him to put down his gun and come in and he would take care of him. The soldiers' camp was directly across the street and the commanding officer seeing the commotion, came over to see what was going on.

When he heard our story he immediately dismissed the guard and gave us the phone. We were told our son was better and we could go to the hospital to get him that afternoon. It was a very long day until the car came at 2:00 P.M. to pick us up.

When we got to the hospital, they did let us in and told us the room number. When we went into the room, we saw the boy silently crying. He put his arms around me and said he wanted us to take him home because he had heard the nurses saying during the night that, "they should let the Little Jap die."

He has never forgotten this and the memory of this event still haunts me every time one of my children or grandchildren gets ill.

We were told we were to be moved to the relocation camp about August or September. This was no joy to me because my mother had been visiting me every Sunday and I felt as though I would never see her or my little brothers again if we were moved.

Finally the day came and we were put on old trains with straw seats and started our trip to Idaho. The trip was hot and miserable and the shades were drawn most of the way. We were so hot and dusty that the guards did let us open the windows for some air, but I'm not sure it helped, I think it may be worse.

After a couple of days and nights on the train, we began to slow down. The shades were raised and I couldn't believe what I saw. Nothing for as far as you could see. Sagebrush and dust. Everyone was standing pointing to a water tower in the distance saying that was the camp.

It seemed like we were miles from no where. I crumpled in my seat and began to cry--I just knew I would never see my family again.

When we got to the camp, we found out our barracks were not ready. They told us we would have to sleep in the Rec Hall. When we went there, we found lots of people were there busy setting up beds and putting blankets up for privacy.

Again, my husband became very angry. He told the soldier standing there he refused to have his family put into a situation like that.

My husband's brother and his wife had a small room across the way (since there were just three of them), they told us to come and stay with them. We put up our four beds in addition to their three beds in one of the small rooms. Our beds were so close that in the morning when my sister-in-law and I made beds, we had to pull one out, make all the beds, and then slide the bed in again.

My husband got a job in the Accounting Department and was classified skilled, so he received \$16.00 a month pay. I worked in the mess hall and received \$12.00 a month.

With the little money we had when we left Seattle we thought we could get by without spending too much money. This was not true, because the first winter we did not have proper clothing and spent a lot on warmer clothes, boots, etc. Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward must have made a million on the people, because that was the only way we had to buy things.

When the 442nd was formed, my husband was one of the first to enlist. Because he was an older Nisei and had been involved in sports in Seattle, he had quite a bit of influence so was asked to go from block to block giving recruiting talks. I remember Mr. Shaffer, who was Assistant Director, telling the boys, "It's either put up or shut up."

My husband was 40 at this time, so he had a hard time getting into the Army. He wrote to our congressmen and finally was accepted.

Soon after this, Mr. Shaffer talked to me and advised me to try to leave. He felt I had a lot of spirit and would probably lose my initiative if I stayed.

I asked his advice about trying to return to Seattle where my mother had said she would be glad to take care of us. He made the request and again I was denied the return.

I wanted to leave the camp, but I was afraid of what I would find outside. I finally decided to go to Omaha where my sister-in-law lived. I lived in Omaha until my husband received a medical discharge in early 1944 and then we moved to Indianapolis, staying until 1967 when my husband's health began to fail. We returned to Seattle at that time.

I feel that for all the indignities we suffered of which there were many more than I could write in this testimony, the Commission should find that this was an immoral act and should be brought to the attention of all the American people plus put in all history books.

There also should be compensation of \$50,000.00 for each person interned and or their heirs. Payment for each day in camp would be fair since some were able to leave sooner than others.

Theresa Takayoshi 8/4/81

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