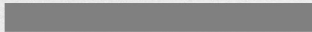


Testimony of: Misao Sakamoto



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Early in February 1942, some one from Washington, D.C., telephoned James Y. Sakamoto, my husband, to inform him that there was a bill being introduced in Congress to evacuate all Japanese from the West Coast, and asked him what he thought about it. All of a sudden, Jimmie said, "Hell no, we are going to stay right here and fight for the United States."

However, by this time the United States government had already decided on evacuating all Japanese from the Pacific Coast. So on February 19, 1942, the Executive Order 9066 was issued by President Roosevelt. In less than three months, we were to close business, home and leave Seattle.

We had no money and no place to go with family of two 80-year-old parents, blind husband and two daughters, 10 and 5 years old. Because of arthritis in her knees, mother could not walk well and father was very senile.

I went to Washington Hall to register and received family identification number and shipping tags for our luggage. I had more luggage than I was allowed tags. I argued that I had to have that many because we did not know where we were going nor how long we will be away. So the lady who registered me gave in and gave me the number of tags I requested.

Ever since war broke out, people would telephone us from 7:00 A.M. to 11:00 P.M. at home and when we reached office by 9:00 A.M. there were half a dozen people waiting to see Jimmie for advice or assistance. Taking care of office and closing up the home was too much for me and my health broke down. I had to stay in bed for three days. Maryknoll Sisters and Mrs. Nomura from across the street came to take care of me.

By the time I took sick, I had packed suit cases for each one of us with absolute necessities. When I came down stairs after three days, all the suit cases were unpacked. Grandparents decided to do their own packing. So they repacked their cases with cigarette butts for moth proof.

Our last few meals were cooked for us by Mrs. Evans, our immediate neighbor, so I could pack kitchen utensils and dishes. We left our furniture for back rent we owed our landlord.

The morning we were to go to bus to pick up point, Father Tibesar came down to give us transportation. We reached Puyallup Assembly center and were given one room for 6 of us. Friend stuffed our straw mattresses for us. Outside of straw mattresses and cots, government did not provide us anything - no sheets, pillows or bed covers.

So from that noon, we stood two hours three times a day with plate in our hand to receive our meals. There was no hot water for washing nor bathing. It took about two months before we lived half way civilized. Then trays with meals were delivered to our barrack for old folks and children ate in special mess hall for more nourishing food.

It was remarkable how people kept their one room home clean.

We were in Puyallup for three months when we were told to pick up and move to Idaho to so-called Relocation Center in August.

We were transported by bus to train from assembly center. On the way to bus, I met Mrs. Matsudaira with rosary in her hands and tears in her eyes. She could not go with her family because she was about to deliver her 9th child. She said, "Mrs. Sakamoto, please help my family because I can't go with them."

When we came to the train, mother could not climb those few steep and narrow steps into the train. She tried to pull herself up and I pushed her from behind. She tried twice and could not make it and was about to give up. I said, "Grandma, we will try just once more and if we can't make it, we won't go." I said this in English so two white men who were standing there in dark suits could hear me. But they did not lend a hand. The third time we were able to climb the steps into the train. However, she was sick all the way to Twin Falls, Idaho. Some one put the back of the seat down so she could lie down which helped a lot.

This, Minidoka Relocation Center, was built out in sagebrush desert and it was either terrible dust or mud. When we were moved, camp was not quite ready. We moved into block 6 first and a little later moved to block 8 where we stayed until we left for Indiana.

Here again, we had to wash and bathe in cold water. And go to mess hall to eat. In Minidoka, we had one room for six of us again. We were given army cots and one army blanket for each member of the family. I hung up crib sheets for partition to give us little privacy. At first in Minidoka, our diet was all starch. I remember having rice, potato, and macaroni all in one meal.

Here until winter set in, dust was so bad, we had to shake out our bedding every day to avoid breathing too much dust. Sometimes dust was so thick that next barrack was hardly visible.

To heat our flimsy barracks, we had a pot belly wood and coal stove in each room. About November, mornings and evenings became cold. Mother's knees got bad and she could not walk. I had block manager's permission to get some scrap lumber which was piled at the edge of the camp ground and made fire in the mornings to keep mother comfortable.

Also some talented people made furniture out of this scrap lumber to make living a little easier.

After coal was unloaded at the end of each clock, kind Mr. Uyeno brought day's supply of coal every day for us. He also put up two swings for the children of the block.

Each block elected manager and he looked after our needs and comfort. By the spring of 1943, each family had little plot of ground in front of the barracks and raised flowers and vegetables.

Besides regular elementary and high school, cultural courses such as music, poem writing, sewing and knitting were taught to those who wished to learn.

Thus people adjusted themselves in new situation. Men cleared the land and started farm, professional cooks took over the kitchen, young girls worked as waitresses, older women washed the dishes, etc.

On April 14, 1943, Justine Denise was born to us at project hospital. She was small and fragile premature baby. When she was 8 months old, she had diarrhea for 10 days. I was not allowed to take her to the hospital to see doctor but visiting nurse came and told me to just give her water.

About the time we became accustomed to our new home, government decided that we had to move again. We could not go back to the Coast, but that we had to move somewhere east of Cascade mountains.

Father Tibesar secured me a job at St. Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana, as a maid for elementary school dormitory. The day we were to leave in July 1944, Marcia developed mastoiditis so our departure was delayed for a month. In August we came out to Shoshone to take our train to Indiana and

found that some one made mistake on the date of our departure and our train in which compartment was reserved for us because of the children, had gone through the day before. So we traveled to Chicago on a day coach. We finally reached St. Mary's just in time for children to start school.

Sisters were kind and generous. They gave four of us room and board, paid me \$55.00 a month and allowed my daughters to attend school tuition free. We stayed at St. Mary's for two years at which time Marie finished her grade school.

War ended on August 15, 1945. The government closed the Relocation Centers in October of same year. By then, Jimmie had brought his aged parents home to Seattle and rented an apartment. I brought our three daughters home in June of 1946.

Father and mother had old age pension and Jimmie had blind pension. So they were making out the best they could.

With evacuation, we closed up the Japanese American Courier, a weekly all English paper Jimmie was publishing so we had no means of support. I had saved very carefully in Indiana and brought home \$500.00. With this money I bought some used furniture and started out with no job and no income. St. Vincent DePaul gave us some furniture and necessary articles to start house-keeping.

One day Father Tibesar took Jimmie down to St. Vincent DePaul Salvage Bureau and secured him a telephone soliciting job where Jimmie worked for eleven years until he was killed in an automobile accident on his way to work.

I could not go to work because Justine Denise was too young and parents were getting too old to look after their grandchild. Marie and Marcia went to Immaculate School to continue their education.

To this date, I still believe that the Japanese evacuation was caused by racial discrimination and for economic reasons rather than for military necessity.

Misao Sakamoto 8-18-81

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