

Beliefs and Memories of  
The Evacuation

At the time of the evacuation, I was a student at Broadway High School in Seattle, Washington. Fellow students were involved, along with their families. That life could change so suddenly and so drastically for an entire group of people is a most serious occurrence to ponder. I am glad that thoughtful persons are taking the time and effort to consider what happened in 1942, and subsequently. I hope that the actions of the Japanese American Citizens League will not only bring about redress, but will find ways to better protect groups of citizens from such unwarranted actions in the future.

I was born in Seattle, Washington in 1925, and I grew up in this community. My own background is Caucasian. During the years in question I have had friends who are Japanese American. I know some of the things that happened in 1942, and afterwards. Let me share some of my memories with you.

One third of our class at Broadway was Japanese American. When they had to leave school, it affected all of us. It happened before school let out for the summer, so that Japanese American students who were graduating could not celebrate with their classmates. Instead, a small, special ceremony was held behind the barbed wire at the Puyallup Fair Ground.

My most vivid memories relate to two friends, Teru Oka and Sachiko Akinoto. Sachiko's father had a grocery store on Seventh Avenue near what was then the Orpheum Theatre. I remember sitting in the back of the store with Sachiko as she tried to decide what to take and what to leave as she prepared for internment the next day. I was with Teru when the army truck came and took her away. I visited them through the barbed wire in Puyallup. I took sanitary napkins, pins, needles, and other small necessities to friends there. I exchanged letters with my friends when they were moved to camp at Minidoka, Idaho. I remember the descriptions of the decolation, the suicides, and the misery. I remember the return; which wasn't easy either.

This was a terrible thing to happen to a group of people. It is the kind of experience that lives with those affected the rest of their days. This hearing is a testament to that fact. That so many survived internment and returned to Seattle to build anew is to their credit.

I believe a part of the redress should give recognition to the courage and strength that the Japanese Americans showed under those most difficult circumstances, and continue to demonstrate by facing what happened and reliving it through this testimony. Their many acts of courage are to be admired. We should have a special day to honor those who serve by building and maintaining the community. To often the essential task of trying to pick up the pieces and build a good life is overlooked for something that gives the illusion of

glamour. Yet the backbone of the community is those who persevere and seek to transcend difficulties.

All of us can learn many important lessons from the 1942 experience. However, we cannot limit ourselves to how the Japanese Americans handled a difficult crisis. I think we need to ask two obvious questions: was this an act of racism? How can we prevent it from happening to scapegoats in the future? I believe the most important aspect of redress is to secure a method of prevention of a repeat performance of what happened in 1942. Whether that be to protect the children of the Japanese Americans of 1942 or others selected for internment.

For my part, I believe the evacuation is an important part of our national heritage. I believe it needs to be a required part of the history taught in our schools. Only if people are aware of mistakes can they be corrected. I think in studying these events we can consider racism, mixed emotions and motives, as well as courage and strength. Perhaps this can be an opening for more Asian studies which can help those of us who are non-Asian become more aware of different traditions, myths and history. Our goal, hopefully, is for all of us to live together cooperatively and to seek a world of peace and decency for our children and our children's children.

Respectfully submitted,

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