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RE: June Oyama Takahashi
Pre-Evacuation Days in Petersburg, Alaska

My name is June Oyama Takahashi. I am presently residing in Seattle, Washington. Our family consisted of myself; my sister, Rose Komatsubara who now lives in El Cerrito, California; my brother Kenneth Oyama, also residing in Seattle; and my mother and father, now deceased.

At the time of Pearl Harbor, I was a student in my second year of high school in Petersburg, Alaska. My brother was a student at the University of Washington in Seattle. Our family was in the hand laundry business, and my father was the local photographer. Exact dates have escaped me, but I do remember that it was soon after Pearl Harbor that my father was the first man to be 'picked up' by the local authorities and taken to the Petersburg jail for reasons unknown to us. Papa became ill in jail, and Dr. Benson was called in to examine him. We feel his illness was aggravated and intensified because of this period of internment. He later was to become seriously ill requiring surgeries and a long period of hospitalization while interned in Lordsburg, New Mexico.

It was not long after my father was taken, that the remaining first generation, or Issei, Japanese male were to be 'picked up' also. Then amid the bewilderment and fear, although they were not suppose to, within the next few days the authorities in their hysteria picked up all remaining Issei's, who were all the women! We were the only Alaskan town where the women as well as the men were jailed. Nobody offered to help, and no explanations were issued. My brother could not leave Seattle to come home to help us out. His very

presence would have been tremendous support.

This then left me and the other Japanese children to fend for ourselves. Other parents brought their young children to our house since I was the oldest person left to look after them, all under the age of ten. I had Frank Kaino; George, Lily and Jiro Osawa; and my niece, Rose Komatsubara Wayne. She was not quite five years old. I myself, not yet an adult, didn't know much about anything at all, or have much knowledge about housework, or cooking, or anything related. I was left with the children, and going to my classes, as well as cooking and caring for the kids.

It was very bewildering, the women and the men all thrown in jail. Besides the fear and anxiety our parents were feeling, I don't know how the situation was there. At one time my mother and another of the mothers came home to pick up some food or clothing, and also to look in on us, I'm sure. A traumatic scene followed which resulted in everyone's being reduced to tears because we were all so frightened. We were afraid of what was going on, and not knowing what to expect. They were glad to see that we were well, but it was bewildering for them to have to leave us and go back to their confinement. After several days our parents were allowed to make some arrangements for an adult to come and stay with us.

Prior to that time I was doing the cooking for the kids and being the first time at culinary arts, it was not much for them, or me. I was told that "My mother doesn't fix it like this," or "I don't like it this way." But at least we had something to eat.

I should also state that I did have another family member besides my mother and father who was jailed also. They took my oldest sister, Rose Komatsubara, who was born in Japan but had lived most of her life in Petersburg, and now considered an enemy alien. She took her infant daughter, Patsy, and another daughter, Nancy, for whom they observed a sad third birthday there. I had my sister's oldest daughter, Rosie, who was not quite five, at home with me. There was a night when I was awakened by what I thought was the bark of a dog. Then I realized it wasn't a bark, it was Rosie coughing. She had a croup attack. Not knowing what to do, I did the best I could to make her comfortable.

The women were released from jail after about a week or ten days. It was a miserable time for all of us. The little Indian children were calling us, "Jap, Jap," and nobody would venture to speak to or associate with us. I am sure that the men, especially my father, being in his line of work a photographer, were considered spies for the Japanese government. My father was taken first so had the longest time in confinement. When I used to go home from school, I walked by the jailhouse, and there was a little barred window from which my dad used to call and wave to me. I am ashamed now to say that I would take another route home because it was "embarrassing" for me. I am left with terrible guilt about avoiding him, and regrets about not being able to talk to him about this. He was removed from Petersburg, along with the other men, a very ill person.

Our family had a radio with a shortwave band from which they used to enjoy musical broadcasts from Japan. In order to receive by shortwave, the families had gotten together and put up a very high

pole for an antenna from which to receive. There was a time or two, very late at night, when the local authorities, sneaked around the beach where this pole was implanted, digging around it. I can't think of what they had expected to find, but it shocked and hurt, as well as frightened everyone.

The men in the meantime were transported by military transport and taken to Annette Island, picking up more Issei men along the way. Some ended up in Lordsburg, New Mexico, and some in other Internment camps. We were not to see them again for a year and a half. This left the women, whom eventually learned that they would be evacuated to the Seattle area, alone to do all closing up chores. A tremendous job to pack a life-time into small crates and a few suitcases. We realized nothing from our home though it was being used in our absence. We had only the belongings we could carry.

We left Petersburg in the "hold" of a freighter for Annette Island. From the time we left Petersburg, everyone became sick confined in the hold. At Annette Island we learned we had missed the steamship for Seattle since they were late in getting us there. We stayed in Ketchikan until a military transport ship arrived. They put us in the "hold" again to Seattle. We slept on layered bunks in the hold, everyone became ill from sea-sickness. We ate from military mess kits standing at the rail of the transport.

It was in April, 1942 that we arrived in Seattle. We went to the Assembly Center at Puyallup and there met up with my brother, Kenny. Eventually we were sent to the Relocation Center at Minidoka in Hunt, Idaho.

To this day when I think of those pre-evacuation days in Petersburg, I have mixed emotions. It was a traumatic time with unpleasant memories. It was very difficult for me to recall and write this statement, but people need to be aware that this happened to those of us who were, and are proud yet to be, U.S. citizens.

08/23/81