

My name is MASAO TAKAHASHI. I am presently 87 years old. Forty years ago, I held a job as a cannery foreman for an Alaska Fishery Company. My earnings were considered high wages among my fellow immigrants. I had many friends and a good standing in the community. I lived in a comfortable house with my wife and four daughters. After twenty years of struggling to subsist in this country as a waiter, logger, maintenance man, etc., I considered my lot just prior to the war to be very fortunate.

On the very day of my eldest daughter's eleventh birthday, February 21, 1942, I was roused from my sleep very early in the morning. The FBI, along with four Seattle Policemen, searched my house, ramsacking closets. I was allowed to dress, but under observation even in my morning toiletry. I was placed in the Immigration Detention Center. Apparently, I was part of the second group of men to be taken by the authorities. I am a perennial optimist and the anxiety of my fellow inmates had little effect on me. I recall feeling confident that I would be released in time to eat birthday cake with my family that evening. However, when we were stripped naked and thoroughly inspected, my optimism was shaken by the very humiliation of the process. I assumed that cooperation would lead to an early release and resolved to accept the inevitable. But that was not to be. The days were added on to days. Tense boredom, terrible food, and wild rumors were our daily preoccupation. I remember breakfast consisting of coffee, toast and jam. From the window of the Detention Center, I could see our house. Many thoughts

would enter my mind as I looked out the window. My family came to visit with regularity. I remember a friendly guard teased my visiting five-year-old daughter by slamming the barred gate closed and telling her she was now a captive. She flew into my arms joyfully, saying, "Oh boy, now I can stay with Papa." Mama had tears in her eyes and I wished I could cry, too.

After approximately a month and half, my family came to the train station when a group of us were transferred to Missoula, Montana. I was allowed a few minutes to walk to the fence to say goodbye to them. I was at loss to find comforting words. Boarding the train, I heard my daughters crying out, Papa, Papa. I cannot describe how I felt at that time. I can still hear the ring of their crying in my ears today. This was the first time it occurred to me that I might not see them again.

I remember being given an egg with breakfast at Missoula. This was our first egg since being incarcerated and it caused quite a stir. I never thought I could appreciate an egg so much. From the camp in Missoula, I was shunted from place to place for two years. I remember one camp guard spoke Japanese and greeted us with, "Yoo koso, oide kudasai mashita." The irony of that gracious welcome had a very depressing affect on us.

From somewhere in Louisiana, I wound up in a camp in New Mexico. It seems I was kept constantly on the move with little rhyme or reason. It was from this camp in Santa Fe that I was able to make arrangements to go to Crystal City, Texas where I

would be reunited with my family . My numb feelings were revitalized. I had tried to imagine what their lives were like since their incarceration in about April of 1942. My wife was never a physically healthy person and with four small children of 11, 9, 5, and 1, I often wondered how she was really faring. My anticipation of seeing my family again, became an obsession. My two-year forced separation became more acutely painful just prior to our reunion. I feared the cruel punishment of possible cancellation.

The reunion was the most joyful affair of my life. The girls had grown so much I mistook my second daughter for my eldest. My wife had aged. The baby was now walking. Her prepared speech was, "Otoo san watakushi wa Midori. Desu ookiku natta deshyo? (Father, I am Midori. I am big?) She managed to make her speech well for me, but it was months before she stopped hiding from me. What a strange feeling--my own daughter afraid of me. The second two years of camp life were a thousand times better than the first two, lonely and hard years. The administration of the camp was infinitely more humane than the previous ones, but more importantly, I was with my family. Here in Crystal City, we were addressed with the titles of Mr. and Mrs. Meals were cooked and served in individual families and a much greater degree of privacy was maintained. I participated in the operation of the camp by volunteering for the job of meat butcher. Even under the parameters of these limited conditions, we had a healthy sense of community in this camp.

There was a barbed wire fence close to the back side of our housing unit. I remember one incident that innocently rose from

the mouth of my four-year-old daughter. She excitedly reported to Mama the capture and demise of a rat caught by our neighbor. She finished the story with the carcass of the rat being tossed far "inside" the fence . . . Again, I saw tears in Mama's eyes and I wished that I was able to cry. Instead, I mumbled to Mama that she was a fool.

The end of the war brought an unexpected dilemma. As a Japanese citizen, it was always my intention to return to Japan. My wife strongly favored the immediate repatriation to Japan upon release from Camp, but I thought the prospects for employment were better if we returned to Seattle. I felt guilt forsaking the country of my birth and education. Mama and I had many arguments regarding our future prospects, but I prevailed. We were delayed in leaving Camp after the war because of reported housing shortages in Seattle. I came home to Seattle in April, 1946, and I came with both feelings of relief as well as fear. My bank account left with Mama was with a balance of four thousand dollars before the war. It was reduced to two hundred dollars when we returned to Seattle four years later. I did not receive any money from the government upon release from Camp as I heard others were given. Jobs were next to impossible and I borrowed money from a friend to start a small business of a grocery store in partnership with a fellow-internee. I changed businesses several times with very little success. I was never able to regain the financial comfort nor the social standing of my pre-war days.

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Today, aside from my old age affirmities, I am very comfortable in my late years. Despite the fact that I was unable to give my daughters the support I wanted to in their growing years, they have given so freely of their time and resources to keep me comfortable. My beautiful eight grandchildren are a great comfort to me. I live as a Lord in my old age, due to their grace and largely at their grace. I am very happy that the government of America is looking into the past. I think it takes a great country to admit its mistakes and make proper restitution. America has that greatness.

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MASAO TAKAHASHI

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