

SHOKICHI TOKITA, Colonel, USAF (Retired)

Subject: Testimony for Commission On Wartime Relocation and Internment Of Civilians, September, 1981

I am Shokichi Tokita, a retired United States Air Force Colonel, presently employed by the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle, more commonly known as Metro. I am 47 years old, and am testifying on behalf of my mother who had originally intended to appear before you but decided at the last minute, not to do so.

I would like to focus my testimony on my parents and the hardships they encountered as a result of the evacuation and subsequent incarceration in concentration camps. Primarily, how my mother became widowed with eight children and the undue hardships she endured to raise us without any governmental assistance.

Let me start with a little background and then move into chronological events that provide the history of our family.

My father was a sign painter by trade, as well as one of the ten best artists in the Northwest. My parents were well aware of the hazards and dangers of continuing to work as a painter and made preparations for him to find another line of employment. It came in the form of running a small business, a hotel with 63 rooms located at 168 Jackson Street on the outskirts of the immediate downtown area. It was a very lucrative location being close to the downtown area as well as the proximity to the waterfront. They catered largely to the transient labor market and did extremely well saving \$16,000 in the five to six years they had the business. That was in addition to providing a family of seven (five children) with the luxuries of the day which included a Model A sedan, a GE refrigerator, and a modern clothes washer complete with agitator and wringer.

The business, and the hard earned luxuries were lost as a result of the evacuation. My father had to resort back to being sign painter and that's what he worked as, in camp, being paid \$16 per month to support a family that had grown to seven children.

We were interned in Minidoka, Hunt, Idaho, and returned to Seattle in the fall of 1945. My father found employment as a sign painter and died three years later after suffering a prolonged illness. He had many of the symptoms of lead poisoning, a common malady afflicting those who work in and around paint, paint fumes, and similar occupations.

He left my mother widowed with eight children ranging in age from 1½ to 14 years. I was the 14 year old. Fortunately, my parents were able to buy a small hotel business in the Chinatown area prior to his death. This hotel or roominghouse had 38 single room units and catered to the derelicts of skid row. They used the last \$1,000 of their savings to do this.

My mother had the strength and will to raise the eight of us, sending all of us to Catholic grade schools and five to Catholic high schools, while expanding the business to include two other small hotels. We all worked ever since we could start delivering newspapers and gave her all our earnings. It's a virtual impossibility to relate the trials she must have gone through to do so. I wonder how many nights I awakened her as she slept slumped over her bookkeeping at the kitchen table; I wonder how much easier it could have been for her had her husband, my father, lived another five years?

She never remarried - and never received any type of welfare or assistance from governmental agencies. She was determined not

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to be a burden on society and insured that none of us would be. Of the eight of us, five have finished college, one is a medical doctor, two are engineers and four won their own businesses. All are law abiding citizens and contribute positively to our society.

The literature explaining Public Law 96-317 (the establishment of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians) states that the Commission is tasked to gather facts to determine whether any wrong was committed against those who were affected by Executive Order 9066.

I am totally convinced that your task is not to determine whether any wrongs were committed. Your task is to determine how to compensate those who were wronged!

I fully support monetary redress for all who were forced to evacuate. Especially, my mother, and those like her. They should be compensated for the business she and my father lost as well. I feel all have suffered undue hardships. Some, like my mother, more than others. I would give my share to her.