

TO: THE COMMISSION ON WARTIME RELOCATION
AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY: Kimiko Nakamura

When the war broke out in 1941, I was a working woman, 22 years of age. Though I had successfully completed high school and business college, I was doing factory work at Buffalo Sanitary Wipers, a company in Seattle. It was the only job I could get at the time.

I was going about my life with the attitude of any young woman, confident in myself and in my future. Even after the declaration of war, I could not have dreamed of the treatment that would be inflicted on me, an American citizen. I was certain that I was secure in the United States.

Then, in February or March of 1942, without prior notice to our family, with no explanation, the FBI came and took my father from us. He, along with many other immigrant Japanese, was taken from our house and imprisoned at the Immigration Station in Seattle. I say imprisoned, because he was behind bars and locked doors and was looked on as a criminal.

The family was allowed visitation rights. But, after they jailed my father, we were scared. He did not know why he was imprisoned; neither did we. All we knew was that other men had been taken, too. We were never able to find out why. We never knew and were never told.

By this time, I had met Ned Teiji Nakamura, the man who

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AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS

later became my husband. He had been drafted in October of 1941 and was taking his basic training at Fort Lewis. I was not allowed to visit him due to the curfews, involving time and distance. It seemed that things were continually being imposed on us.

We were soon ordered to report to Puyallup, the "Assembly Center." Our family had to go without my dad and my courtship with Ned, despite the events, continued to grow with written messages.

However, news of my dad was difficult and scarce. They kept moving him around. We rarely knew where he was, it seemed. WRA officials at the camps could tell us nothing about him. There was no legal aid office and it was impossible to keep track. I think they moved him three or four times and when the rest of the family was moving to Puyallup and then on to Idaho and all written communication was being censored, we were little able to maintain or foster current, meaningful communication.

As mentioned above, our family, minus my dad, finally ended up in Idaho, Minidoka Camp. My mother had had a stroke prior to the evacuation. Being the oldest, I felt that I had to keep the family together. I took a job in camp. I think I got \$8 per month. Many of the men sought seasonal work outside the camp due to the poor, poor wage scale. The youngest in my family was only 10 years old in camp and I feel very strongly that he lacked

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the discipline and responsibility of a well-knit, close family. It was very difficult in camp.

As things developed, I was able to get a 5 day pass in September of 1942 and married Ned Teiji Nakamura in Twin Falls, Idaho. We went back to camp for a week before Ned had to return to duty. It was not until October of 1943, that I was able to join Ned at Fort Riley, Kansas and it was then that he was able to spend time with our daughter, Janice, born to us on June 3, 1943 at Idaho. At last, at last we could be the family that we had intended.

But, soon enough, in August of 1944, Ned was sent to Europe, so my daughter and I returned to my family in Idaho. Shortly before then, my father had been released and had joined the family there.

In November of 1944, I received a telegram stating that Ned was missing in action. In December, I was notified that he was killed in action as part of the invasion in Southern France. I still remember the funeral service in camp with poinsettias.

The reports that came back to camp from people who had already relocated back to Seattle were not good. Friends reported rocks being thrown to homes of Japanese returnees and the difficulty of obtaining a job. Things did not sound safe. So, when the U.S. Army came to recruit workers for the Ordnance Depot in Sidney, Nebraska and promised me and my sister jobs and offered all of us housing, we moved to Sidney.

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We stayed there until one of my brothers returned from the service and came to Nebraska to help us come "home" to Seattle.

I think back to the evacuation and I feel bitterness. I think that perhaps we did not speak out enough then; that we should have protested our treatment; that we should have fought for our inalienable rights as American citizens. So I feel that I must speak out now.

Throughout the war, the government did many things to us without ever explaining, without any information. We lived in fear of our own government. We had nowhere to turn for help, for information, for support. There was no recourse for any of us in my family. We were young. We were mistreated.

I am bitter. For the forced incarceration during the war which did much to thwart my relationships with others, I am bitter. For the fear instilled in me at the hands of my own government, I am bitter. For the unnecessary feelings of shame inflicted on my father and my family for unfounded and never explained reasons, I am bitter.

When will the U.S. government accept the responsibility for its decisions and actions toward the Japanese Americans during the War? When will the government be accountable to the American public for its behavior toward citizens of this country? When will the government realize that it is not above the people but of the people and when will it acknowledge that the continuing negative effects of the imposed incarceration of the Japanese

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Americans during the War stand to be corrected today? When will government act in a conscientious manner, admit its mistakes, and correct whatever wrongs it had intended? Only when there is redress.

Kimiko Nakamura
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