

TESTIMONY TO THE COMMISSION ON WARTIME RELOCATION & INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS

I am Rose Inouye living at [REDACTED] in Seattle, Washington. At age 53 I am a program specialist for the regional office of the Social Security Administration.

Prior to the evacuation of 1942, I was 14 years old completing my 9th grade at Elk Grove Union High School in Northern California. My father was a farmer raising strawberries and grapes on a property about 27 acres owned by my cousin who lost his parents as a child and grew up with us in the family. The crops yielded about \$5,000 each year. My father owned about 80 acres of land in Fallon, Nevada on which he had about \$1500 in mortgage. The land was lost during the war because my father had no resource to pay either the mortgage or the property taxes.

When the evacuation order came in May, 1942, we had a very brief time to prepare for the departure. I remember quite well seeing the notice posted on a telephone post next to the highway in Florin, California where we lived. I don't recall the details of the preparation, but the farm crops were left to the "American" managers of the grape shippers association in the community. There was no time to sell anything in the house or farm because most of the farmers in the area were of Japanese descent and the handful of non-Japanese families only waited for us to leave our homes. We had to leave everything behind except for a few bundles of clothing we were allowed to bring to the Fresno Assembly Center, which was a race track.

I don't recall questioning the reason for the evacuation as a teenager, but I do recall vividly arriving at our first camp "home" with name tags hanging from our lapels and finding the few bundles of our clothing in the middle of a black tar covered floor of a makeshift barrack room no more than 400 square feet in area and to be shared by two families totaling 9 persons. We had to make do with sheets and blankets for provisional partitions for a sense of privacy. We were unable to have meals as a family because we had to line up for every meal at the messhall and had to fill every table in strict order, and not by families. The menus were full of sweet food, milk, etc. which were not in our former diet and took some adjustment. Other adjustments were in curfew hours, staying within camp grounds, seeing friendly neighbors taking on hostile attitudes, idle adults gossiping about others, doing without the basic comforts of a home, sacrificing on grooming as a teenager, having no reading materials, going to provisional classes put together by camp adults, wondering about high school education and future career, etc. When we left

Fresno in October, 1942 after 5 months of unsettling doubts about the future, we were put on a train for several days with shades drawn and no information as to where we were headed or how long the trip was to take. We stopped frequently along the way and waited for other trains to pass, but we had to wait quietly in the train with the shades drawn. We finally reached the Jerome Relocation Center in southeastern Arkansas where the barracks had tar papered walls and wooden floors elevated from the ground because of torrential rains and flooding. I guess a teenager remembers best the daily activities such as the routine of shared dining and laundry facilities, which were better than in Fresno. The housing was more private and even had a pot-bellied stove. School classes finally started in January, 1943 with teachers from the local Arkansas area. We don't know whether or not the teachers were qualified to teach or whether the schools were at a standard meeting accreditation. I took what would be considered college preparatory courses, but my credits were not accepted later when I transferred to a high school in New York where Regents Board examinations were required of me. My father, who had always been a hard-working person, tried very hard to guide the family, but there were many environmental influences of close living with restrictions which were trying on everyone in the family. I know that my father's pride was hurt in the \$19 a month he received in various work around the camp because he never told us what he got. He only said that we couldn't afford to buy anything. We children found the denial hard to accept and couldn't understand it because we received no explanation then. We often wondered about what was happening back in Florin, California, but we received no news. That alone must have aged my father considerably.

After school closed in June, 1944, the Jerome camp was closed and we were transferred to Granada Relocation Center in Colorado. The details escape me now. In September, 1944, I left camp after two years and four months to attend my last year of high school in New York City under the sponsorship of the New York Church Committee for Japanese Americans. They helped me in finding a minister's family with whom I stayed and worked for my room and board. They were instrumental in providing a hospitable surrounding for me to adjust to a normal environment as a student and I don't recall any hostile experience in the school I went to.

I did encounter difficulties in having my school credits accepted both to graduate from high school and in trying to enter college. I also had a problem of finding work, not because I was only 17 years old, but because I was consi-

dered to be Japanese against whom our country was still at war then. I recall well an unpleasant interview at a Bulova Watch Co. office in Queens. The best I could find for my first employment in July, 1945 was as a nurses aide for \$80 a month at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Manhattan. Needless to say, I had a struggle to make ends meet to cover my living expenses in Manhattan.

After the camps were closed towards the end of 1945, my family returned to Sacramento, California and had to restart their life from scratch literally. The farm in Florin showed the abandonment of three and a half years with anything of any value gone and the remainder rummaged through. All the farm tools and equipments were gone while the grape vines had to be nursed back to normal growth. My father worked for a short while in Sacramento to earn some funds for basic needs until he could sustain the family on farm income. My cousin who was working briefly in New Jersey also returned to Florin to help with the farming. I don't know what community adjustments they had to make, but most of the neighbors were new families. It is not possible at this date to estimate the dollar loss, but I know that my father always had to struggle to make a living. He has died since, but some of the papers he has left behind show his payments on the property he lost in Nevada and working card from camp days among other remembrances he left for us.

Personally, my education was hampered because of substandard schooling and the inability of my father to support me while he was in camp. Plans for a career was not possible when everything was tentative. Personal pride for a teenage maturity was also affected by the artificial camplife. The banality of a restricted and confined life during youth has limited psychological development, not only towards passive acceptance of conditions, but also towards unimaginative conformity. I don't think that we should be asked to be satisfied with a good Christian attitude of forgiving those who know not what they do. We cannot be satisfied until we have done all that is possible and in all justice, financial recompense speaks more effectively than ~~caremere~~ words which are easy, and seem very cheap these days. The multi-faceted and daily trauma of living in an artificially confined environment cannot be remedied by words alone. I recommend financial recompense individually.

Rose Spruce
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