

To; U.S. Commission
Wartime Relocation
Internment of Civilians

My name is Chiyoko Yasutake. I lived with my husband in Norwalk, California at the outbreak of the war with Japan. I was 20 years old at that time. We relocated voluntarily to Fort Lupton, Colorado in the early spring of 1942. We now reside at [REDACTED], Seattle, Washington, 98118.

This is my Written Testimony.

It happened 40 years ago but it seems like an unbelievable dream. After 40 years--you try to forget but it's always in back of your mind.

It started with Pearl Harbor. When I used to go to Japanese school on Saturdays, my teacher would always tell the class that there would never be a war between America and Japan. He was a political major at U.S.C. and this is what he believed. He told us that once he even argued with his professor that there would not be a war.

But it happened. We had only been married 9 months. On December 7, 1941, we heard it on the radio of the attack on Pearl Harbor. I remember Tom, my husband and I were in the front of our spacious garden raking up the leaves. We had just purchased our small but charming frame home with its spacious garden with another lot full of fruit trees in the small town of Norwalk, California.

I wondered what would happen to us. Would all this be the end of the world for us? How would our friends react towards us.

My parents owned a grocery store right in Norwalk and this is where my husband Tom worked.

The day after Pearl Harbor, we all gathered at my parents home. My brothers had a store to open and I can still see the worried look of my brothers as they wondered how our customers would feel towards us. The town of Norwalk had lots of small truck farms owned by Japanese, both Isseis and Niseis. Also there were many dairy farms owned by Dutch Americans.

Our neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Vohs, were very sympathetic and realized that we were good neighbors and citizens. (Even after 40 years, we still send each other Christmas cards with newsy letters. They now reside in Hoisington, Kansas).

My parents neighbor and landlord, Mr. and Mrs. Lee Seabridge, had known us for many years. Mr. Seabridge was the Commander of the American Legion of the Norwalk Post. He had fought in France in World War I. Lee and Bertha, his wife, invited us over for dinner many times before the curfew hours. With all the news media writeups accusing us of many things which were untrue, many people were hysterical and suspicious of the Japanese race. I remember one unfriendly neighbor coming to Mr. Seabridge and telling him he saw my brother in his garage making something. Mr. Seabridge told this neighbor that he had known us a good many years and he had no basis for his suspicion. Mr. Seabridge's brother, Arthur Maddox helped us in many ways and even helped to drive our truck to Fort Lupton, Colorado. (While Arthur Maddox was stationed in Colorado during the war years, he came to visit us. After the war, the Japanese from Norwalk got together and presented the town of Norwalk with a beautiful gift for the new park. My brother went to see Mr. Seabridge and talked about this presentation and when they heard about it they were very happy. Mrs. Seabridge was a very good friend of our family and when she passed away with a heart attack, I was sending a few dollars every Memorial Day to put flowers on her grave. Mr. Seabridge really appreciated this small gesture).

After Pearl Harbor, the FBI were picking up some of the Issei men in the town of Norwalk. They were being sent to Montana--a cold state compared to sunny California. My father who was in the grocery business for many years in this small town of Norwalk was worried that he might get picked up--maybe for just being born in Japan. He heard of friends he knew being picked up so he went to J. C. Panny and purchased some warm underwear, wool shirts and sox. He heard they never gave them time to pack anything so he had a small bag packed just in case they came around. Dad was more civic minded, doing many things for the town so I guess some of the townfolks gave a good word for my father--who was known as 'Uncle' by everyone in town in those days. He never was picked up.

My parents heard that they were feeding the people at the Tule Lake Camp, Cottage cheese and prunes, and he didn't want none of that for a steady diet.

Mom had a classmate many years ago in Japan that lived in Fort Lupton, Colorado. She took a chance and wrote to them, Mr. and Mrs. Funakoshi, and asked whether we could evacuate to their place. The reply came back---YES. There were 8 of us, counting Tom and I. Other relatives also wrote and wanted to evacuate to their place. Mr. and Mrs. Funakoshi were very good Christians and had a big heart to take a chance on all sort of relatives moving in on them. There were over 30 that went to their farm and goodness knows how long they would stay there. It was not just like having week-end guests--the length of stay was uncertain. The war might last a long time--heavens knows how long and these kind folks took us all in with their big hearts. I will never forget them as long as I live. (After the war when Seattle had their World's Fair, they wanted to visit Seattle. I told them to stay at our apartment and told them to help themselves to anything they wanted. They enjoyed their visit to the Worlds Fair, and were so happy in their retirement. After they returned home from Seattle, both of them were killed in an auto accident on their way to a fishing trip. It really saddened me when I heard the news, because they opened up their hearts and homes to us when we desperately needed it).

Our family decided to voluntarily evacuate. We had to get the proper papers, etc. and it was awfully hectic. There was a curfew which meant we had to be home by 8PM. or we would be picked up. I remember going to May Company to pick up a few items for our trip, but at certain counters, they would not wait on me. I remember packing a few things to take to Colorado. It wasn't the usual packing. We pulled out the kitchen drawers and just dumped everything into a large box. No wrapping, etc. like the usual packing. Our relatives, Mr. and Mrs. Kazuo Mori, came over while we were packing and informed us that they would not evacuate voluntarily with us; that they would go along with the government. Other relatives and friends came over to my

parents home and begged my mother if they could evacuate with us. My mother told them we didn't know the situation in Fort Lupton, Colorado, so as much as she would like to help them, she was powerless.

My husband and I had purchased a home the early part of 1941. We had to sell the home since we had very little money to survive if we went to Colorado. Since my folks had a grocery store, there were many salesmen coming around. My brother, Henry, mentioned to Mr. Kaplan, that we would like to sell our home. Well, Mr. and Mrs. Kaplan bought it alright but at their terms, which was almost like giving it to them. They were suppose to pay us \$15.00 a month. They would write us derogatory letters and at one time refused to pay us. Tom threatened that he would take away the house if they did not make their payments. We had over 500 guests at our wedding and we received many beautiful wedding presents. These wedding presents were ours and did not go with the house but he wanted us to leave them there. Since I could not take all of them with us, I gave some to my good neighbors. We told Mr. Kaplan that we would need the mattress to sleep on when we got to Colorado. When my brother George and a few friends went after the mattress, Mr. Kaplan pulled a gun on them and threatened them. This incident was reported to the Norwalk Sherrif, but I never knew what came of it.

People like Mr. Kaplan were taking advantage of the hurried evacuation. They knew we had to leave and had the Ace card. We had no bargaining power!

The day came when we finally had to leave our home and California. There were stories of people being turned back at the different states border and harrassment but we took our chances. There were 3 cars in our caravan. Mr. and Mrs. Nakatani were going as far as Grand Junction, Colorado. One little hope was that Governor Carr of Colorado was the only Western States Governors that said evacuees could come to his state and he would treat them fairly. Our trip to Colorado went along smoother than I had anticipated. The only incidents were at some restaurants where a few young men would stare at us in a hateful way.

When we reached Fort Lupton, Colorado, we all stayed at the Funakoshi's migrant workers house. We slept on the floor on mattresses. This was my first experience with bed bugs. When we were bitten, it left large hard boils that would itch something awful. These bugs were in the walls and would come out at night. All in all, we were very grateful to the Funakoshis to have a place to stay.

Some time later, my father had a small house built right next to the migrant workers house. Our family stayed at this house for the duration of the war.

During the war years, we did mostly farm work--picking peas and beans. We even went to nearby farms to help them harvest their crops. I remember my brother Henry and my husband Tom digging ditches for 18¢ an hour.

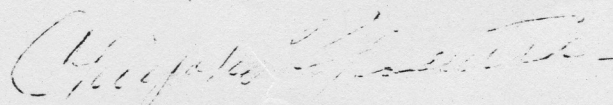
Our relatives, Mr. and Mrs. Kazuo Mori, eventually came out of the Concentration Camp, and bought a home near us in Fort Lupton. I think they didn't like the confinement of the camp and wanted to spend the rest of the war years near us.

The Japanese Americans and their parents were law abiding citizens and it seemed unfair that we were "blamed for the attack on Parl Harbor".

How could all this happen in a country that stood for democracy? Weren't there suppose to be justice for all its citizen? We only knew one country and one flag--AMERICA. One thing which I am grateful today is that I never had to live behing BARBED WIRES with a WATCHTOWER with guards to shoot anyone that stepped beyond the fence.

In conclusion, I can say "How wrong the majority of the Americans were in judging us as disloyal".

I hope this kind of experience never happens to another group of people again.



Chiyoko Yasutake
July 27, 1981