KAZUKO (TAKAHASHI) KATAYAMA

Life was beautiful. I was the loved and cherished oldest daughter of parents who had passed through some rough times, and had taken major steps in their quest for family security. My father had gained economic stability and was a leader in the Seattle Japanese community. My mother, in accordance with Japanese tradition, complemented my father's life, gave him encouragement and support, and doted on me and my three younger sisters. I felt safe and protected in the serene world my parents had created for me. Then, on the morning of my 11th birthday, a sudden intrusion shattered my sense of security and shoved me unprepared into adult responsibilities. My father was taken from us, and although I did not know it at that time, we were not to live with him for almost three years. Within two months of this disaster with my father, we learned that the rest of the family was also to be forced to leave our home.

Although I was sound asleep, I thought I heard a sharp knock on the door. Then my mother's anxious voice got nearer as she came into our bedroom, telling my younger sister to hurry and get dressed. My sister had a habit of sleeping naked, and we were all embarrassed when three or four strange men followed my mother into our room. They started looking around--through the closets, underneath the beds, behind the curtains--and paid no attention to us until one of them picked up a toy gun out of the toy bin and asked me "Does your father have one of these?"

The men said they were from the F.B.I., and I was really scared as I watched them search our entire house. I felt squeamish seeing one of the men dip his hands into the rice and sugar bins. They took some things. When they got ready to leave, they told my father that he must go with them. We all cried and cried.

We cried for a long time following my father's departure in the aftermath of the ramsacked house. As he was leaving my father told my mother, "Don't worry," but I knew she was worried. "Today's my birthday," I told Mama. "Papa must come back in time for my birthday party." The look on my mother's face told me that I wasn't going to have a birthday party.

After lunch I packed my father's pajamas and some toiletries and walked for a mile or two to the U.S. Immigration Office, where we heard my father was being detained.

I waited a long time after telling the officers I needed to see my father and was feeling less hopeful I would be able to see him. But finally I was told to follow one of the guards. We walked down a hallway stopping to unlock gates before us a hearing them slam shut behind us and lock. I was terrified. I worried that no one would ever find me again if I was not allowed to leave. What would happen to me? I wanted to tell someone that I didn't do anything bad. Luckily, the next guard was a nice man. He smiled and asked me if I wanted to see the "fat Takahashi or the skinny Takahashi." I felt a bit of the tension drain from me when I identified my dad for him as the 'fat Takahashi.' Seeing Papa was even more assuring. Papa acted like he just saw me that morning, which was actually the case. He thanked me for the pajamas and even remembered to wish me a happy birthday. I sure was relieved.

I was proud to tell Mama I accomplished getting the pajamas to Papa. I wanted to ask her what Papa had done. I felt the guilt of Papa's crime and wanted to know what he committed. But I could not get myself to ask.

I called the father at the Catholic School I was attending. He said a lot about "these troubled times and all," but all I got from him was to put my trust in God. I didn't find him helpful at all.

Troubles seemed to mount by the week. Mama made crates to store some of our goods. She sawed and pounded nails well into the night. I wished I wasn't the oldest so I could go to sleep like my younger sisters. Moving day itself I was tired. Mama put me in charge of the baby. My arms ached and ached, but no one could help me. My sister Nobie, was in charge of the 5-year-old sister and Mama had our belongings. It was an eternity before the bus came and I could rest my arm. I was sure my arm would never be the same again, but I was proud I "made it" without complaining. Mama's load looked even heavier than the baby.

Puyallup Assembly Camp and Minnedoka Relocation Center were a series of miserable, dreary, lonely days for my mother and the children. We had all counted so much on my father for every kind of support--emotional, spiritual, physical and economic. We missed him and needed his support so desperately to help us through our new experiences. As my mother was in poor physical health, I tried my best to be strong, in essence, to be the substitute for my father. I found it nearly impossible. The pain of forced separation from my father made life unendurable. Due to past stresses and hardships, my parents had lost seven children. I had been the first out of eight pregnancies to survive. Thus, my parents who loved children, treasured me beyond imagination. My father had taken me everywhere he went. There was nothing in camp that reminded me of places that my father took me; nothing reminiscent of the good times we had shared--yet I thought of my father constantly, and longed only to be reunited with him.

Wow! Rows and rows and rows of barracks. I though how can we possibly live in this little room? Where are we going to eat? I learned; with hundreds of other people in the mess hall. How are we going to sleep? In cots, laid side by side, with my baby sister in the middle cot, so she couldn't fall off. As bleak as these partially petitioned rooms were, at least they had wood floors. When the whole family was quarantined because my sister had the measles, we were put in a horse stall, the five of us, and there were straws covering the dirt floor. I was happy to get back to the small room with the pot-bellied stove in the middle.

The fence next to the guarded gate bordered the street. Right across the road was a grocery store. It was frustrating to not be able to run across the street to pick out your own candy or ice cream. We handed our coins

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through the fence to kids our own age who ran to the store for us. After a few times, I stopped going near that place.

Minnedoka had sturdier barracks, fully partitioned, the same pot-bellied stoves, and larger rooms. We ate breakfast, lunch and dinner in the mess halls which were locked up at night. Some of the older kids used to hang around the laundry and earned the name of laundry room gang. Idaho was desolate, even more so than Puyallup where we were bunched together. In Idaho the barracks were spaced far enough apart to fully catch the gusts of the perennial dust storms, the howl of the coyote, the stench of the irrigation ditches.

My mother said that Papa may be joining us soon. As much as I missed and needed him, I did not want him to come to Minnedoka. It was too horrible, too hot, too dry in the summer, too cold, too boring in the winter. Then we started packing for our trip to Texas to see my father. It was a long, dreary train ride in a freight box converted for passenger use, and we were counted all the time by guards. But I was happy because we were getting closer and closer to Papa. From the train, in single file, we boarded a rickety bus, and at the end of a long, windy, bumpy ride, I ran into my father's arms.

A thousand emotions, most of them positive, flooded through me when we were finally reunited with my father in Crystal City, Texas. The strongest feeling was that of relief. I had tried my best to keep the rest of the family together; now I could turn over the reins of our family life to my father. Subconsciously, I wanted to revert to the spoiled and pampered child that I was before the F.B.I. took my father away. Crystal City was a paradise of sorts. True, there were barbed wires and guards, but we functioned as a family unit, and "Papa" was with us again.

I told Papa I wanted a horse. No one in Camp had a horse--only the guards riding around the outside of the barbed wires. I knew Papa wasn't

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going to be able to get me a horse. It was the first time I can remember that Papa could not provide me with what I wanted. I told Papa it was 'okay' but I was more disappointed with Papa than I was with the idea of giving up my horse.

Seattle looked strange for a long time after we returned here. Not only did the buildings lookunfriendly and yielding, I had never noticed before the hostility on the faces of many Seattle residents. My father's former position as a cannery foreman was closed to him. Undaunted he was determined to rebuild his life, and my mother was solidly behind him. So were the children. I grew and developed into adulthood during these "rebuilding" years. My parents were never to regain the prominence and economic security that they had prior to World War II.

My mother had the comb and ribbons I had picked out in her hand along with the five dollar bill. It was obvious the Woolworth saleslady was not going to wait on us. I was mad and told Mom I didn't want that 'junk' anymore. But Mama wouldn't listen. She kept on staring at the lady who was pretending to be busy. I ended up more mad at Mama than the saleslady. When she finally rang up our sale, she was very rude, but I was more relieved it was over and chagrined that Mama could be so stubborn. Why stand there looking ridiculous over a dumb comb and ribbons anyway?

Another time, Mama and I were at the fish market. She had asked for several fish heads. The market man bluntly told her she would have to pay for the heads. I flushed with embarassment because I knew Mama had intended to get it free. She lied when she said "of course" and paid the man. Going places with Mama had become increasingly difficult for me.

Now, almost 40 years after I had my one and only face-to-face encounter with the F.B.I., I try to provide security and comforts

to my almost-blind, almost-deaf 87-year-old father, who has lately taken turns living with me and my sister. I also tend to my mother, who has had several strokes and is partially paralyzed. I am older than my mother was when the F.B.I. took her husband from her. I have three sons and I wonder how I could have survived if I were similarly deprived of my wonderful, supportive husband.

My mother and I talked occasionally of the Camp days. Many of the stories are actually very funny now, but only because we are now so much more comfortable and safe. I never felt free enough to probe into the areas that could be more hurtful. She now has only a dozen words she is able to use and her past is buried behind her smiling eyes. There is so much unsaid and never to be stated.

I now know that the government was unequivocally wrong in incarcerating me, my family and the total West Coast Japanese and Japanese Americans into concentration camps. Nothing can undo the wrong that was perpetrated. We each will continue in our own ways to deal with the scars left from that experience.

Restitution is not too late even after forty long years. It is incumbent on the government of this country to recognize the past injustices and make an honest attempt to redeem itself. History as lived by many of us cannot be re-written, but today's action can be tomorrow's history that America at least made the attempt to maintain the ideals of citizenship and humanity. The only

restitution that would have the effect of authenticity is individual monetary reparations. I believe this to be America's opportunity to measure up to the quality of the people she had treated so unjustly. It is right.

ss/ Kazuko Katayama
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