Madam Chairperson and members of the Commission:

My name is Yoshio Tomita, age 57, a resident at [redacted] in Seattle. Due to my health, I elected to take an early retirement after giving 30 years of service to the City of Seattle.

I will be testifying on behalf of my family because both of my parents are deceased, my twin brother, Masao, died from a heart attack in 1979, and brothers, Robert and Kenneth and sister, Nancy, chose not to submit a written report.

In 1941, my family was engaged in the operation of a 20-unit apartment building under a lease. We all worked very hard to renovate every unit, the hallways and stairways and also replaced the furnace. We were ready to realize the rewards of our labor and capital investment when the forced evacuation of all Japanese came about, denying us the right to further our economic glains. Luckily, we were situated in an area that was evacuated last, therefore, we managed to obtain some of our lease money back. However, we lost a large potential income besides our initial capital investment.

We were unable to take most of our personal belongings because we were restricted to take only those items that we could carry. I remember my mother busily sewing four large duffle bags just for the evacuation. I also remember the feelings of anxiety and humiliation as we rode on top of a flatbed truck to a central gathering place, hoping none of my friends would see us with our trunks and duffle bags. We were then bussed to the assembly center in Puyallup, Washington. It was a very sorrowful and tearful trip as we all gazed at familiar landmarks through the bus windows, not knowing what was in store for us.

My twin and I were 17 years of age at the outbreak of the war and seniors at Broadway High School here in Seattle. A special commencement program was held for the Nisei's at the Puyallup Assembly Center because we were evacuated before the June commencement exercises. I shall never forget the scenario:

Two Browning machine guns manned by guards on top of a roof dominates the scene as a young man earnestly delivers his commencement speech. I cannot recall the content of the speech, but remember thinking about the irony of being American Citizens behind barbed wires because of our ancestry. Why were not the German Americans and Italian Americans placed in camps, too? The rationale of the officials at that time seemed to suggest that we were in camps just for our protection, but I did not see any concerted efforts by any group about to storm the gates to get us!

Yes, we did see a few townspeople leering at us through the barbed wire fences as if we were supposed to be guilty of something. This is when I really felt that our liberties were stripped from us.

Other witnesses have already given their vivid descriptions of camp life in Minidoka, Idaho, therefore, I will not go into that. My two older brothers, Dick and Kenneth, were handicapped not only by being of Japanese extraction, but they were both handicapped by their blindness. They had a very difficult time coping with the new and strange environment. Like the rest of us they had to deal with the cold, rain and mud in the winter and the heat and dust in the summer. They could no longer dine in the privacy of the family dinner table. My brothers could not wander from room to room as they did at home (the seven of us were housed in one room) and had nothing to occupy their time without their work and hobbies.

Dick could not weave without a loom nor play the violin and piano. Kenneth used to dabble in ham radio and make things in the woodshop at home. They had to be escorted to the mess hall, to the camp toilets and shower facilities, etc. Not only were they deprived of their freedom but of their independence and dignity by having to depend so heavily on others. Unlike my twin brother and I and others, they were unable to get jobs as fireman, dishwashers or go outside of camp as farm laborers. I

pondered then and ponder now how my two blind brothers could have ever been considered to be of danger to the security of our nation.

Before the evacuation orders came, my brother, Robert, chose to continue his education and went to Colorado to attend Denver University rather than to be sent to camp. In this way, he would have more of an opportunity to move about and help the family from the outside. About a year later in April of 1943, he was able to enroll Masao and me in a trade school in Denver. We left camp to attend this school to learn the machine shop trade. On May 30, Memorial Day, with only more than a month of training, we were both terminated suddenly. We learned that the Curtiss-Wright Company was not hiring any Japanese-Americans at this time from the school, so we were dismissed. The school was being funded by the Federal Youth Administration. We were very upset and disappointed about the whole situation. We chalked it off as just another case of discrimination and the entire unfairness of the evacuation. We did not even bother to ask the F.Y.A. why they did not keep us on until they could find some other employers.

We tried to find a suitable home in Denver for the family in Denver, but was told by the War Relocation Authority that there were too many Japanese in Denver already and told us to look elsewhere. Robert went to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area but to no avail as no realtor would sell us a home unless my father was working. My brother subsequently found out that no employer would hire anyone sight unseen or without any references. However, with the help of a Jewish friend in Seattle, he was able to find employment for my father, Masao and me in a large hotel in Omaha, Nebraska. The family was reunited in Omaha in September of 1943.

In November and December of 1944, my two brothers and I were inducted into the U. S. Army where we served in different capacities for two years. In January 1946 when the West Coast was opened again for the Japanese, the family moved back to Seattle to start a new life.

When I reflect back to those troubled times, it was the Isseis and the handicapped like my brothers who suffered the most from the injustices of forced and needless incarceration. It is for people like these that I would like to see adequate monetary compensation given.

Inconclusion, I would like to say that the mass incarceration of 120,000 persons of one ethnic group was to me morally repugnant and I trust that your committee will do its utmost to remind our nation of its past mistakes and seek to make the necessary amendments so that such miscarriage of justice will not be repeated.

After hearing so many bad comments from the public at large, I feel that a sincere effort should be made to educate our fellow citizens of the accurate account of what happened forty years ago. I am sorry to say that there is still much hatred out there!

Yoshio Tomita