

Hideko Aoki

Widowed, I lived in Seattle, Washington running a small grocery store while raising five sons. With the government's orders we were taken to the Puyallup Assembly Center and from there to Minidoka, Idaho. Right after camp we went to Salt Lake City, Utah to begin an apartment business. With the relocation orders we lost about \$10,000 (1942 value). Of course I wasn't happy with what the government was doing but it was their decision. So by law and government policy we had to go to the relocation camps.

We were given about fifteen days to prepare. There was nothing I could really take other than necessary clothing. But I decided to take a sewing machine. So I put it into a box so I could hold it. In this way I could sew my family clothes and my friends could then borrow it to sew for their families too. Over the camp years my sewing machine saved us because we were able to sew.

We left behind our furniture in a warehouse near the highway. Other personal items and plants I left with a neighbor. But when the war ended there was nothing left in the warehouse or at our neighbors. Most were everyday type items and/or seemingly meaningless items to non-Asians, so I left them thinking no one would want them. For example a mochi pounding stone, a big hunk of stone, what would any one want and/or use it for? Things that were pretty important to me I left with friends but just as one would expect things were not returned. Nobody knows where they are. But there's nothing we could have done because it was war. Items are now valuable which weren't back then.

My first reaction when I went to camp was the sand. Everywhere you looked, it was all over. All the dirt just got imbedded into everything. First we even had dirt floors until we covered them, then the grass began to grow inside the barracks. Right through the floors!

It wasn't very pleasant because all the guards were there and we were surrounded by the fence so so one would venture near. Just having the fence there was very uncomfortable - we weren't going to run away.

The living conditions were very carefree. Camp water was assigned camp duties. So all the food was prepared by the camp interns. All you did was line up for food, eat, and go back to the barracks. So camp life was very carefree. The food was tasteless, not the way I would prepare and season it. They would just toss the food on to your plates. It became so tasteless that I soon forgot to eat. For example they'd take a piece of boiled cabbage and carrots seasoned with salt and throw it on your plate, so I just went to the garbage and threw it away. A friend of mine was working in the food line and saw what I was doing. She told me I would die if I didn't eat, so she'd make me a rice ball with an umeboshi and slipped it to me. Every once in a while one of my boys would bring a report to prepare.

One of my sons wanted to go to war to fight for his country but there were a lot of people at camp who opposed it so it was very difficult to accept his decision. My son decided on his own to enter the war and joined the army. My son-in-law tried to convince my son that the U.S. was lying and that the U.S. was losing the war. He said they were only drafting the issei to go to Hawaii to translate and to do more combat. My son did leave with the U.S. army and ended up in the Japanese language department.

I was in camp for about three years. I didn't stay in camp for the entire time because everyone in my family was leaving. One son left for the army and another was running the camp grocery. My third son wanted to leave too but I wanted him to stay here to be safe unless he planned to go to school. So he too left to go to school. With the advise of a camp teacher, he went to a state college in Idaho to rebuild his study habits before he entered college. With camp life his study habits and skills had fallen far behind. My youngest son was still in high school so I decided to move to Salt Lake City to allow him to finish high school.

The family lived together except for my son-in-law who was taken immediately because someone at the barber over heard him say, "Japan's going to win the war" and reported him. Therefore he was taken immediately as a pro Japanese. I remember him protesting later that they should have taken me because I spoke more highly and more often of Japan than he did.

Because my children are American, I remained loyal to the U.S. But if I didn't have any children I would have returned to Japan. My son who joined the U.S. army told me I could return to Japan as he would help the younger brothers, but I wanted to be close to my family so I stayed.

Because of the war I didn't get to raise my children the way I wanted. I couldn't cook for them and I couldn't make them eat food I wouldn't eat. More so family unity was destroyed. After the war half my family remained inland while the rest returned to Seattle.