

50 YEARS: REFLECTION AND RENEWAL
 DAY OF REMEMBRANCE/FEBRUARY 23, 1992/ BUDDHIST CHURCH, NEW YORK

In commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the issuing of Executive Order 9066 which began the process of our imprisonment during World War II, it is fitting that we are remembering non-Nikkeis who not only supported us, but showed exemplary and courageous loyalty to ~~us~~ a people who in 1942 were distrusted, hated, feared, ostracised, and evacuated out of the entire West Coast. It was these "loyal friends" who stayed with us during our darkest hours.

One such, that our own Michi Weglyn had hoped could have been brought here to New York this year to be honored and thanked, unfortunately died on January 1st of this year. We cannot present him here, but we still can honor him.

He is Ralph Lazo, a Mexican American, who as a 16-year old teen-ager, voluntarily went into Manzanar, staying 2 1/2 years because he loved the Japanese people and felt it was so wrong of the U.S. government to incarcerate ~~them~~^{us} like criminals.^{he said} He would not be satisfied by just supporting us from the outside. He wanted to go through whatever the Japanese would undergo. His mother had passed away. His father gave him permission to go.

How did the other internees react to the presence of the non-Japanese adolescent? he was asked. "Beautifully," he replied. The Isseis became my parents. They would straighten my bed when I didn't have time to make it. Sometimes I couldn't find my dirty laundry. I'd find it later, cleaned and folded on my bed. His only discomfort was at the beginning ^{getting used to lack of} his lack of privacy when using the latrine. "There were other physical discomfort," he said, "but we made the best of it. We all did. We made the best of everything." He always used word, "we" as he felt such a part of the whole group.

"Did Lazo identify with his Japanese friends?" "Without question. Outside I'm Hispanic, Latino, Mexicano, Chicano, but inside I'm Kikkoman!" he would laugh.

And like all the JAs, he was also subjected to the two-question test of loyalty. To the question of whether he would ~~serve~~^{swear} allegiance to the U.S.; he answered, "yes." The question

of serving in the U.S. armed forces wherever asked, he answered "no," explaining he was a teen-ager and wanted to first finish high school. However, Lazo later did serve the U.S. Army as a combat infantryman in the South Pacific and was decorated with a Bronze Star.

When asked how had the camp experience affected or influenced his character, he answered: "I think it's made me a much more sensitive human being; a stronger individual."

After the war, Lazo attended UCLA and graduated with a degree in sociology. He also earned a master's degree in counseling and guidance at Cal State Northridge College. Hew became a counselor at Valley College; he also served as one of the first Hispanic teachers in the San Fernando Valley in the L.A. Unified School System. Lazo supported the efforts of the Japanese Americans in the long struggle in seeking redress/reparation. He also made a generous contribution to Bill Hohri's National Comm. for Japanese American Redress and became a Ronin.

Lazo's life was truly unique. He must never be forgotten.

He is one among others who made unusual contributions--like ^(H.H. Mount. film / Steve Okazaki) Estelle Ishigo, Earl M. Finch, Dorothy Day, Attorney Wayne M. Collins, Walt & Mildred Woodward, Col. Young Oak Kim, Thelma McBride, Hyman Bravin, former U.S. Rep. Mike Lowry, Cong. Merv Dymally, Doug Colbert, Franklin Woo, Jack Herzig, Walter Weglin, Preston Wilcox, Heywood Burns, the Pauite Indians, the Cong. Black Caucus, the Quakers, the Brethren Service Committee, the B'nai Brith, Asian American and Third World Students from the 1968 ~~on~~ ^{period on down.} ~~down~~ Ethnic Studies.

Many ^{of these friends} ~~have~~ passed away. ~~If any are sitting here, we hope they will rise to be identified.~~ They must not become "unknown soldiers" in the struggle for justice. They were the "winter soldiers" who fought in the harshest of seasons--themselves often targetted as the "enemy lovers" or even "traitors."

We commemorate this 50th anniversary of an Executive Order that marked, as Michi Weglin called it, "some years of infamy" but appreciative that we had non-Nikkei friends who gave of themselves quietly, diligently, and courageously.