

Day of Remembrance -- February 20, 1982 -- 1:00-3:30 pm -- Japanese American
United Church

The following is the testimony which I submitted as a written statement at the Commission Hearing in New York for which I received a short letter of thanks from the Special Counsel to CWRIC, Angus Macbeth. ~~xxxxxxximpressed~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ He said: "To the extent that the Commission creates a record of those years, please be assured that your letter will be part of it." I subsequently gave my testimony under the sponsorship of the Asian Students organization at the Hunter College School of Social Work which was a revision of the original testimony because I felt I had to give some background information so that the social work students would be able to understand what the whole issue was about. Apparently I assessed the situation correctly since the statement was received very warmly. Now, again I am revising the statement because I will be going beyond the redress question. I said the following:

Thank you for this opportunity to present my case against the U.S. Government. The irreparable, deep-seated psychological damage that I suffered as a direct result of my incarceration during World War II deprived me for many years of my right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I was only in my teens when I was incarcerated so my material loss was minimal. I lost something infinitely more important: time. Once time is gone, it is gone forever.

Eventually a victim such as I will come around to realizing that I've been had. I am entitled to petition for redress. It has taken me a long time to come around to this realization, and, along with the sansei, I keep asking myself why? One reason may be my Japanese background. Certain values, customs, traits, along with behavior, were taught me by my parents which I absorbed by osmosis. They expected their children to carry on their tradition because they may have planned to return with their children to their homeland. This dream was not to be. The years went by and I experienced a conflict between

two cultures, east and west. I could not reconcile our parents' behavior at home and finding another reality at school. I did not know how to balance the two in a way in which I could be true to myself, in a third place so to speak. I would have to block off and deny a part of myself to fit into the American world whose values and standards are based on western culture. As I had no firsthand experience of the land of my ancestors, I was confused about who I was. I could not hide my background even if I wanted to because of my physical appearance.

Being a sensitive and thoughtful child, every incident of discrimination and other adverse conditions during my childhood and youth was not lost to me. I took them to heart and was terribly hurt and confused. At the same time, other forces were at work in insidious and overt ways to undermine my spirit. From this background, it is not too difficult to understand why I allowed the incarceration to happen without protest. It was just another overt act against me as a person. I had been socialized to believe that I was a second-class citizen in this society; I was not entitled to be a whole person in my own right. In fact, it was worse because it was my government that was telling me that they could take away my rights with impunity, not just society alone.

The incarceration and its repercussions would dog my footsteps and color my behavior for the next quarter of a century. When I came out of camp, the change from a small town mentality to the big town was overwhelming. I was so caught up trying to cope with big city life, which anyone who has had a "normal" life would be able to weather in time, that I had little strength or resources for other growing-up activities. Recently, I happened to be in Washington at the National Archives doing some research on the camp experience now that the information has been declassified when, as I looked through the files, much to my surprise I came across my name in a memo. On closer scrutiny it was a memo addressed to the director of the regional office of the internal security division in Chicago prior to my arrival there and the memo in part read: "The records of this office disclose sufficient derogatory information

to indicate possible danger to the war effort by the employment of any of the following subjects in plants or facilities important to the war effort."

My name was included along with 45 others who had arrived in Chicago. With the help of people who know the ways of the government, I was able to locate my file and I requested its contents. What kind of information could a person in her teens have accumulated against her that could possibly be considered derogatory before she has become a full-fledged adult, I wondered? I tried to recall those days in Chicago for possible consequences of this damning information. The only thing I could remember was that I had gone down to the recruiting office to apply for the Women's Army Corps because I thought I should be doing something toward the war effort. I was told to pack a suitcase and that I would be picked up at my residence. Nobody showed up. This incident jogged my memory when I saw this letter stashed away in the Archives and I wondered if it had played a role in my not being accepted. When I received my file, there was nothing in it to indicate any derogatory information outside of the controversial loyalty question which, you guessed it, I must have answered incorrectly. I have always had trouble with questionnaires because of their ambiguity and since I am a literal person I answered the question this way. As you know, the question came in two parts: "Have you forsworn any and all allegiance which you may knowingly or unknowingly have held to the Emperor of Japan?" Since I had never sworn allegiance to the Emperor in the first place, either verbally or in writing, I answered "no." The second part read: "If not, do you now repudiate such allegiance?" to which I answered "yes." Those responsible for the formulation of the question must have realized it was unclear since the question was later revised two times. When I was later interrogated in Chicago because my answer was unsatisfactory to the powers that be, this time the question was changed to read: "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor or any other foreign government, power, or organization?"

and on the interview sheet, the interviewer acknowledged the question was revised from the former by his statement that "the question has apparently been changed from what it read on the original document . . ." and his recommendation was that "I see no reason why she should not be granted leave clearance and her indefinite leave continued."

But, apparently, even that statement left some doubt in someone's mind because the second revision was crossed out and a new question which was written in by hand read: "Are you sympathetic to the United States of America? Do you agree faithfully to defend the U.S. from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces?"

But the damage had been done because I don't believe anyone who would see my name in the memo would dig further to see exactly what had given me the label "derogatory." The rest of the file contained nothing that could be considered disloyal. To give you a flavor of the time, let me quote part of a letter of reference by my high school chemistry teacher who had written: "She was so ^Americanized and refined that the best of the white girls of the school made special effort to associate with her and to have her in their homes," etc., etc. (Personally, I don't think the times have changed that much. I think we still are trying to gain the acceptance of the majority in terms of the values and standards that the white man has laid down and the rewards of this society go to those who fit in the best.)

The psychic damage then manifested itself in neurological problems. I lost the ability to read efficiently, something which I did quite well in my childhood as I was a voracious reader. I used to walk to the library, which was over a mile away, to pick up a batch of books which I would read in a day or two, then return for another batch. I next found that my hands became unsteady and I could not carry a glass of water without spilling its contents. This became generalized to everything having to do with my hands such as writing. Much effort was spent in trying to hide this defect because the use of hands is a basic activity.

The differences that existed between the values and standards my parents taught me by example and the values and standards that society imposed on me were in such conflict that they continued to immobilize me. In trying to resolve my problems I am ashamed to say that at one point I turned my back against everything Japanese including its people. To my credit, I realized in time what I was doing. By now, you can recognize the terrible desolateness that was my existence and what a waste of human potential. I became tired of my meaningless existence and I tried to go to junior college. I worked nights and went to school during the day. I quit precipitately one day when I was reprimanded by an instructor who scolded me in front of the whole class when he saw me look into a pocket dictionary I carried around with me when he used a word that stumped me.

I eventually found myself in New York City and it was here that the cosmopolitan atmosphere helped me to let my guard down so to speak. The heterogeneity of the populace allowed for a more "free" expression of oneself. I eventually got married, gave birth to three children, but still had no clear image of who or what I was. At the age of 35, I found I had reached the end of my rope and finally sought professional help after reading a book on human behavior. I continued in therapy for the next eight years.

In the early '70s, I entered an adult college program at Brooklyn College which I attended fulltime in the evening while holding down a fulltime job during the day. It took me over two hours to get there and back four nights a week so that it was often after midnight when I got home. By this time, I got the notion that my lack of credentials was holding me back and for several years I carried on this backbreaking schedule. I majored and minored in sociology and psychology, respectively, and eventually racked up three years of credits toward a degree. Having gotten this far, my years of neglecting my family took its toll and I quit when a family problem precluded my further participation in the program. But my being accepted into this program was the beginning of

my road back to regaining my self-esteem because many adults had applied for the program and only a fraction could be admitted.

I am asking for a redress of my grievances and reparations in the sum of \$100,000 (which is not as big as it sounds in today's money) so that I can continue my quest for knowledge in the areas of my interest without financial considerations to detract me from my course. As the Commission on Non-Traditional Study pointed out in their study in 1973:

"Full opportunity to learn cannot be limited to the young; it must be for everyone, in any walk of life, for whatever purposes are beneficial. It cannot be reserved to a single period of life, it must be a recurrent opportunity; an opportunity to update a skill, to broaden the possibilities of a career whether old or new, or to add intellectual zest and cultural enrichment throughout life. No longer can it be the single opportunity of a lifetime; now it must become the total opportunity for a lifetime."

Should it not be in the cards for the government to help me personally, the following alternative would be acceptable to me: that a grant be allocated toward the full operation of a community center in New York City which is sorely lacking for our particular ethnic group. The main thrust will be toward giving all generations of Japanese Americans as well as present immigrants from Japan an opportunity to come together in a relaxed and supportive atmosphere to learn from each other about their rich culture and provide a setting in which they can "test their wings" in a variety of programs that will be offered to them. By my history, you can see why such a community center has to come into being.

It has not been easy to bare my soul as I have in my testimony, but I wanted to say something that needed to be said; something that is rarely said. I confess to being a normal human being who makes mistakes; you have no idea how liberating it is to admit to being an imperfect human being. I have been working on my neurological problems and you may be surprised to know that I am now taking piano lessons. The exercises are helping me get my small finger muscles under control and I can now play a mean Sonatina in G by Beethoven. There is nothing so satisfying as making one's own music and I use this term metaphorically. My close brush with death made me realize that one can do

if anything/one puts one's mind to it. There is no discounting the fact, however, that one must also work at it, but if one step is taken, the rest naturally follows. Talking about myself as I have done here is not a very Japanese thing to do, perhaps, but as I have finally learned, "It's the squeaky wheel that gets the oil."

Now, I would like to go beyond the redress issue and this Day of REembrance observation, important as it is in itself. I would like to go beyond it into the future, to leave one final thought with all of you and that is what I referred to in my final statement in the testimony about a community center for our ethnic group. If the Commission doesn't recommend individual reparations, they will still have to come up with some acceptable recommendation and the most logical one would be the community fund route to be used by each regional community as it sees fit. If we don't get started as a group to have a recognizable body in place, we will have no say in how the money should be used; and the responsibility for allocating it will go to those organizations that are known to exist by the government. To get the ball rolling, I would like to hear from those of you who have similar impulses of the importance of such a program so that we can pick each other's brains as to how to make this concept a reality and the activities that can be implemented. At the beginning, we can meet together on an informal basis and throw ideas around and I am willing to open my home for this purpose. It is located in an area where it is convenient to most people and to most kinds of transportation. There are people out there who are not often seen at activities that are offered by the existing institutions so that I feel their needs are not being met. Once in a while there is a unifying issue that makes its appearance and the redress question is one such important issue. Of course, there have been differences of opinion, some very heated ones, but they have all been the result of honest appraisal of the issue itself and the ways it should be handled viewed from different perspectives. Don't get me wrong; I am not

criticizing any of the existing institutions for they do address themselves to the particular needs of those who participate in them and they came into existence because they filled a need. They have a right to exist. In fact, my husband and I support most of them by paying our dues and attending their activities when a program is offered that is of interest to us and we do this because we are proud of our heritage and want to be identified with this group. But involvement once a month, four times a year, or whatever, is not really enough contact to gain a real sense of community and the necessary time to get to know one another on a more intimate basis. I am in the field of ^amental health and have worked on the educational and informational end of it for many years. My history attests to the fact that I was drawn to the field because of my never-ending search for what it means to be a member of the human species. My interest in the growth and development of the individual lies uppermost in my mind and a community center structure will go a long way toward allowing this to occur. The lot of the human species is a gregarious one. We need each other to foster a sense of our own identity. In this way, we become effective members of society, not only in ^{our}community, but in the world at large.

The enthusiastic awakening and unity that has been generated as expressed in the attendance and activities on the redress issue should be developed and fostered so that this feeling can be carried on into other activities in the future. It would be a shame to let all of this energy dissipate and carried to the four corners because it was not channeled into meaningful activities that we can all share in. That means that community members will have a say as to what activities should be implemented, and in this way we all will benefit by this democratic process.

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