

Aug. 26

Dear Mary:

For years I've heard about your generosity and humanity from many sansei among the legions whom you and your husband have taken under your wings. I have since read about your outstanding testimony in Washington. I've wanted to meet you for all these reasons but also for another. I with two other nisei women have begun to ^{gather} get a collection of oral history of nisei women. A little background: In west coast cities where we have a density of Nikkei, I have noticed for some time that the nisei women are the least visible and least acknowledged in the entire community. Yet she has always been the strongest force of the three generations, quietly serving others all her life. She has always cared for, deferred to her issei parents; to her nisei brothers, whose caretaker role she had to step into during the war when they went off to colleges or into the services; then to her nisei husband; to her sansei children. Just as she comes to a time when her life should be her own now that the children are leaving the nest, aging and/or infirm parents or in-laws appear. Again she is the one strapped with the responsibility to care for them. Among my peers there are several who will be trapped in this role for an indefinite time. A few years ago I invited a few of them to my house to allow them to rap with each other and also to have a nisei woman friend, Marian Wake, a family counselor listen to their dilemma. They really loaded off their chests until Marian asked them to stop for a moment and to think of a life they wish only for themselves if they could be relieved of the burdens from this very moment. There was silence. The tragedy hit me just then. These women had never known that they could have a dream for themselves, that there even was such a thing as self. This is when the idea of the oral history struck me. These are very very special women, strong quiet fighters, quiet survivors who have held the three generations together. They need to be given affirmation, to be given validity to their great contribution. I started some interviews with these women, purposely selecting non-professional, non-college educated women.

Each started with an apology that they really had nothing to say because of their boring lives. I found each to be bright, strong women and as stories unfolded, incredible lives each coped with. These must be told to coming generations.

~~You obviously don't fit in the category of the trapped nisei woman, how-~~ ever, yours is a special story of another sort which must be recorded.

Those of us actively collecting interviews are Marian Wake, Nikki Bridges, and myself. Nikki is the only one with writing experience. It is audacious of us to think of publishing eventually but that's what we have in mind. The hearings have given me a new impetus to surge on. I don't know about the D.C. hearing but what impressed me very much here was that community type people, *women included*, whom we don't normally see at meetings and gatherings came forward. It was so rewarding. It was real feeling from people rather than the usual rhetoric from organizations who claim to represent us. After three days of the hearings and one extra community hearing one night I was emotionally sapped. I went to work the next day feeling vulnerable but then after that passed I soared into euphoria from pride for my people. I have been high ever since. I didn't get quite this adrenaline rush at the civil rights rallies in the '60's. I've not spent one day since tending to some aspect of Redress. There is so much work to be done.

In the past week I've been Phil Gotanda, Lydia Tanji, and the Morozumi family. They've all encouraged me to talk with you. Since I work for the airline I am free to hop a flight at will. I am also on vacation at the moment and plan a fast trip to N.Y. over the Labor Day weekend, the loads willing. It was to have been a family jaunt but my teenage daughter has opted to go on an overnight with friends and my husband is finding a fishing expedition more tempting. Another "perk" is a big break we get at major hotels. Grand Hyatt is most generous and so will likely stay there. If your busy time will allow I would like to have an informal interview with you. I should be at the hotel Friday or Saturday evening about 6:30, Sep. 4 or 5th. Phil and Lydia are

leaving the 4th. I will advise them about definite departure date. I'm sorry I can't be more definite. Being a free loader I'm at the mercy of the loads. The last trip we had a great bento dinner/which we had in our \$250.00 room !! ...isn't that obscene. I always carry my cannonball musubi and tsuke-mono kit out of choice. I've never been wild about hakujin food. We'll do the same this time and I would like for you and your husband to join ~~us~~.

I'm enclosing a copy of my testimony to give a small idea of, as the youth say, where I'm coming from.

I look forward to our meeting.

Sincerely,

Rita Juarez

If you're busy that weekend please don't hesitate to let me know. I can get there anytime again.