

T E S T I M O N Y

of

Hiroshi Matsuo

For presentation to the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, Roosevelt Hotel Terrace Room, New York, New York. Monday, November 23, 1981.

Please understand that the following is from my memory and is strictly my own experience.

On December 8, 1941, Monday, it was rather early in the morning, two gentlemen came to my apartment above the Katagiri & Co., Inc., at 224 East 59th Street, Manhattan, New York. They showed me their identification cards (F.B.I.) and asked me who had the key for the store. I said I have, as I am the Manager. They said that is good and asked please open the store because we would like to check a few things about the store. I asked them to wait a little while until I changed my clothes and had breakfast. They said all right -- I suppose had no choice but to wait.

I opened the store for them around 8 o'clock. They asked who is the owner. I told them the owner is Mr. Joe Katagiri, who was born in New York. He lived in Woodside, Queens, and usually came in at 9 o'clock.

While we waited for Mr. Katagiri, one of them said that he went to Japan some years ago and found very nice people, beautiful places, about Fuji-yama, Yokohama, Tokio, and many other places.

Mr. Katagiri came in so I explained to him about the two gentlemen and introduced him to them. Now, they asked him for his birth certificate and some legal papers of cooperation. They examined them carefully and seemed satisfied; then no further questions.

They called their office, explaining the status of Katagiri & Co., Inc., and gave us a brief statement of notice to the public regarding the store. I do not remember the exact wording but the important point was that the owner of the store is an American citizen, not a Japanese enemy alien, and suggested we place it on the window for protection.

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Roosevelt Hotel, New York City

They said to us that they were very sorry for their disturbance and apologized and left. They did not ask any questions of me and never searched my apartment.

I would like to report about two incidents that happened to me that speak for themselves. They show how much freedom I enjoyed for the duration of the war.

One -- I wanted to do something worthwhile during the long evening hours so I talked with my wife. She suggested I should learn more about the Bible. I agreed and entered the evening school of the New York Bible Institute on West 55th Street, New York, at that time. I also enjoyed attending the Japanese Christian Institute of New York on East 57th Street every Sunday service and Thursday evening prayer meetings with my family.

Two -- I anticipated that business of the Katagiri Company might not be able to support all of us for much longer so I left the company voluntarily and started a business with my partner, Mr. Isidor Ben Wolfset, an American citizen, to handle domestic toys and dolls. The manufacturers understood my situation and inescapable circumstances, and were very sympathetic and helped me all they could. I really appreciated this and was deeply grateful for their understanding, kindness and encouragement shown to me, for which I cannot and will not forget, all the days of my life.

By: Hiroshi Matsuo

85 years of age