

FILE COPY

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF WITNESS

1. Name: Mabel Takako Ota

Mabel Takako Ota
July 7, 1981

2. Address: 3805 Grayburn Ave.,

Los Angeles, Calif. 90008

Phone: 294 4522

3. Place of birth: San Diego, California

4. Date of birth: Sept. 13, 1916

5. U.S. citizen: yes

6. Generation: Nisei

7. Internment during WWII Yes, at Poston, Arizona

8. Residence before internment: Los Angeles, Calif.

9. Occupation before internment: Library clerk

WORLD WAR II INTERNMENT, LOSSES

10. Assembly Center: none

11. Concentration Camp: Poston, Arizona Dates: April, 1942 - 11/ 1943
April, 1944 - 6/1944

12. Res. after camp: New York, N.Y.; Denver, Colo.; Los Angeles, Calif.

13. Estimate your monetary losses due to the incarceration:

Less than \$10,000.00 in material possessions

14. Nature of the testimony - oral and written:

Tragedies caused by lack of medical facilities:

1. Brain damage to Madeline Ota at birth

2. Misdiagnosis of my father, Suetzo Kawashima's illness

I am

MABEL T. OTA : I appreciate this opportunity to testify before ^{P. 1} this commission.

I wish to testify orally at the hearing of the Commission on
Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

* I graduated U.C.L.A. in summer, 1939 and was married to Fred Kaname Ota the following year in April, 1940. With \$500.00 in our savings as down payment, we purchased a small house in Los Angeles and settled down to married life.

Fred was employed as a salesman in wholesale produce. I worked as cashier in a retail market; took a L.A. City civil service exam. and worked as a clerk in the Fingerprint and Identification Bureau of the L.A. Police department until the war burst upon us. Then the police decided it was inconvenient to have a Japanese working in their department and transferred me to the Jefferson Branch Library for a six weeks assignment, and then terminated my assignment without cause.

When I read and heard rumors that all Japanese would be interned --I couldn't believe it. I kept saying that I was a loyal American citizen and that it just couldn't happen in a Democracy.

I was raised in Imperial valley and had left to attend U.C.L.A. My father and mother ran a small grocery store in Holtville. When it became apparent that all of us would be incarcerated, my parents wrote me a letter asking us to return to Holtville to help them liquidate the store and home.

As Fred and I, fortunately, were able to find a renter for our furnished home for the duration (The rental covered the mortgage payments), we rushed to Holtville before the 30 mile curfew was to be imposed. ~~My only sister, Margaret, also returned to Holtville.~~

* There we we helped my father liquidate the grocery store--fixtures and all--at great loss. ~~We were also able to find a renter for our Holtville family home.~~

The War Relocation Authority announced a call for volunteers to go ahead to Poston, Arizona to help prepare the place for re-settlement. Since we would end up there anyway, Fred and I decided to volunteer to go early. We sold our car to a young man who worked at a neighborhood gas station and he agreed to drive us to Poston. We did have an advantage in that we could load up the car with many personal belongings including pots, pans, and my sister's sewing machine. - Margaret stayed behind to evacuate with mother and father.

~~Peston was a very hot, dusty and desolate place. There was not a single blade of grass because the hastily built barracks were placed on freshly plowed soil. Clouds of dust rose with every step taken and when the wind blew the dust was so heavy it became difficult to see. The dust would blow into the barrack rooms through the cracks in the walls and between the floorboards.~~

* We were very busy preparing the camp. Fred was assigned as general manager of Community Enterprises and I became Head Librarian. Fred's job was to open stores, barber shops, beauty shops, etc.--whatever was needed in a community. I opened crates of discarded books sent to camp and set up a public library.

By the latter part of 1942 the administration began encouraging people to leave camp if they could find a sponsor. Fred was offered a job in New York by the Quakers as as'st. manager of Cooperative Distributors, a mail order house. He left camp but I stayed behind because I was pregnant and expecting a baby in May, 1943. The baby arrived a month early--after 8 months gestation on April 13, 1943.

When I arrived at the hospital, a nurse checked me in. She stated the Dr. had delivered 3 babies and had collapsed so he had returned to his barracks for a much needed rest. There was only one O.B. Dr. for the entire camp. The nurse checked me infrequently. At one time she said that I was bearing down incorrectly. I had long, long hours of labor. I must have looked ghastly because my sister came to visit me in labor and left the room abruptly. Later she told me I looked so awful that she went outside to vomit. After 28 hours of labor, the nurse became concerned and sent for the Dr.. Dr. Wakamatsu examined me and said: "Your baby's heartbeat is getting very faint. I will have to use forceps to deliver the baby and I will have to give you a local pain killer because we do not have an anesthesiologist. We can't wait any longer because we do not have a resuscitating machine to revive the baby."

I remember many details in the delivery room. After using the scalpel to cut me he picked up the forceps. I thought it looked like the ice thongs used by the iceman when he delivered a block of ice--only the ends were long and flat--not curved and pointed. After much pulling he finally got the baby out. She gave one very faint cry and I thought she was not red but white. She was rushed to the incubator and I did not see her for three days. I was told that she was too weak to be moved.

When I saw her I noticed a large scab on the back of her head. She has a bald spot there to this day. Madeline is a developmentally disabled person. She is mentally retarded and has grand mal epilepsy.

When she was 3 years old she was admitted to the ^{Hollywood} Children's Hospital for 1 week of tests and observation. Dr. Lyttle, then head of the hospital, stated that it appeared she had suffered brain damage. He told me: 1. To have another child and 2. That Madeline's development would depend on the kind of education to which she was exposed.

My second daughter, Candice, was born Feb. 27, 1947. A husband and wife physician team were my obstetrician-surgeon. Through their expert care and constant attendance during labor and delivery, my second daughter was born safely in a Los Angeles hospital.

Candice, school teacher, and now Mrs. Gary Funakoshi, has two sons, Brent 8½ and Keith, 7 years old. At the time of Brent's birth when Candice went into labor, the Dr. informed us that she was not dilating properly so he must perform an emergency Caesarean section. The birth was successful. Her second son was also born by Caesarean operation.

Many, many times I have wished that Madeline could have been born by Caesarean operation. She may then have been a normal whole person. Madeline has attended private schools for exceptional children and is now attending a private sheltered workshop. We have paid monthly fees for her education for over 30 years.

The second tragedy in our lives was the early death of my father, Suezo Kawashima. My father had been a diabetic since his 30s but with insulin injections and careful and selective diet, he was living a normal life--working 6 days at the grocery store and spending the 7th at church or working in his yard. He always raised vegetables because they were essential to his diet.

At Poston, there were no special diets available to anyone. We all ate whatever was shipped into camp. Everyone ate the same meals prepared in the block kitchen and served in the mess hall. Many times our meals consisted solely of starches: bread, potatoes, rice, macaroni. Later, as the evacuees began to cultivate and grow their own vegetables, we did get better balanced meals.

After Madeline's birth, I had planned to join Fred in New York as soon as possible. However, the Dr. informed me that I must wait until Madeline was stronger--until she was at least 6 months old.

So in November, 1943 Madeline and I left Poston and joined Fred in New York and settled in a 5th floor apartment on Claremont Ave.

Early in April, 1944 I received a letter from my mother in Poston asking me to return because my father had been admitted to the hospital. We sold our furniture, subleased the apartment, packed and returned to Poston. The Dr. informed me that my father's diabetes was arrested but he was suffering from melancholia. He further stated that there were no facilities for treatment in Poston but he could arrange for father to be transferred to a Phoenix rest home where he could receive shock treatments which might effect a cure. Although transportation, cost of medical treatments and hospitalization were to be at our own expense, mother and I decided we must give father the recommended medical treatments. Charles Iwashita (future brother-in-law) had a car in camp so he drove father and the rest of us to Phoenix. Father was admitted to Clark's Rest Home. My father said to me that it looked like an expensive place to stay. I reassured him that we would take care of all the costs and for him to recover as soon as possible. 5½ weeks later, we received an urgent call from Dr. A.C. Kingsley stating that ^{father} he did not have very long to live. We rushed to Phoenix and saw him about ½ an hour before his death on May 16, 1944. Dr. A.C. Kingsley conferred with me the following day and informed me that the camp Dr. had misdiagnosed father's illness. The camp Dr. had only given urine analysis tests which showed sugar free. Subsequently, Dr. Kingsley administered a blood test and it showed that the diabetes had worsened. Father had gone into a diabetic coma and died. He did not have melancholia--so the shock treatments had not been necessary. His death certificate states that the immediate cause of death was due to diabetes. So father died at the age of 63 enduring unneeded shock treatments. ~~He saw the babe in my arms, Madeline, but never knew that she was brain damaged.~~

Both Fred and I feel that we have had successful careers: Fred in wholesale produce and I as an educator. Because of Madeline I returned to college, got an elementary teaching credential, became a teacher and then was the first Asian woman principal in California. We live comfortable, middle class lives in our retirement. However, we are always concerned--what is to become of Madeline when we are gone? She can never live independently.