

16 NOVEMBER 1981

From: Mrs. Yuriko Lily Matsuda Porter
605 Water Street
New York, N. Y. 10002

To: Director
Commission on Wartime Relocation & Internment
of Civilians
726 Jackson Place, NW - Suite 2020
Washington, D. C. 20506

Subject: Evacuation of 120,000 Japanese Americans to
former Ten U.S. Concentration Camps as a result
of World War II; submission of Oral and Written
Testimonies thereof

Reference (a): Executive Order 9066
(b): Request by CWRIC for submittal of J-A evacuees'
testimonies during WWII internment
(c): NYC Hearing scheduled at The Roosevelt Hotel,
Madison Avenue & East 45 Street, New York City
on 23 NOVEMBER 1981

1. As a result of reference (a) and in accordance with references (b) and (c), here is my testimony on the subject evacuation.

2. My name is Yuriko Lily Matsuda Porter. I was born in Tacoma, Washington, of Japanese parents. My professional career is cosmetology. I went to American schools in Washington State and California and enjoyed the freedom which all Americans have as our birthright. But on SUN, DEC 7, 1941 when the Japanese military power attacked Pearl Harbor the freedom of all Japanese Americans, living productive lives along the Pacific coast and Alaska, came to a disastrous halt by Executive Order 9066. This E. O. 9066 was the document which forced us to evacuate from our homes and incarcerated us into ten scattered U.S. Concentration Camps located in remote areas of Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah and Wyoming. The first concentration camps in American history and hopefully the last ones. This precious freedom, which all American patriots live and die for, was denied to us by war hysteria and racism foamed by the Hearst press years prior to World War II.

3. In the summer of 1942, my parents, two sisters, a brother and I were sent to a prisoner-of-war camp at Gila River, Arizona. By the latter part of 1942 all West coast Japanese Americans were behind barbed wire fences under military surveillance. Camp life and our sudden uprootment from our home atmosphere was a very traumatic experience after years of secure family life. We were no longer individuals, only nameless government numbers.

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4. Camp life was like a sealed tomb, there was no space in which to breath the precious life of freedom. During the first six months of our internment, most of us were stricken with very painful diarrhea. It was especially pitiful to see our elder Japanese folks and newborn babies so ill. There was hardly any provision for medication at that time. Other vivid incidents occurred and one was in the mess halls. Sometimes when we were having our meals, a heavy windstorm would come unforeseen and uncontrolled like a tornado, the whirling sand and dust would come through the cracks of the mess halls covering the food we were eating, and therefore, had to be garbaged. Thus, our regular meal for that sitting was incomplete. These were day-to-day happenings, but there were long-range conditions and tragic situations as in the case of my sister, Merry, who had a mental breakdown and is still under psychiatric care and supervision.

5. After a yearly interval in these camps, it was established without a doubt by our Government that we evacuees didn't commit one act of sabotage! Then official word was given that we were to be released. However, we were forbidden to return to our former homes along the West coast. So my family decided that since I was the eldest and over 21, and an American, that I would be the first in our family to leave with my younger sister, Tamako. We left Gila River camp on FEB 1944 for New York City. We had wanted to leave the latter part of 1943 but we were informed that the NY hostel 'wasn't ready'. Years later I learned that former Mayor LaGuardia apparently didn't want us evacuees to settle in the NYC area. One of the reasons I chose NYC was because I was a cosmetologist and this state didn't require a cosmetology license to practice at that time and I needed to find a job as soon as possible. The only alternative in leaving camp was for Tamako to get a job as a live-in domestic and I had to stay with her so that we could both have a place to live and eat since we were each given only \$25.00 by the Government when we left the Arizona camp. As you can see, fifty dollars between us certainly doesn't go far.

6. As my sister and I rode Eastward on the train from Phoenix to Chicago, we could feel the tense atmosphere brought on by the war and felt the object of antagonism on this troop train which were composed mostly of White military men. When we changed our train in Chicago for NYC, we felt a warmer attitude from our various fellow passengers and we were relieved at the pleasant response when we spoke to them. People didn't stare but held friendly conversations with us. This made us feel glad that we had chosen to come East as our future home. Once we became settled in NYC, I noticed a vast difference with the New York people who weren't prejudiced towards the Japanese as in CALIF.

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I was able to get a good paying job as a cosmetologist in several 'White' beauty salons here; something I could never attain in CALIF although I had a license and applied for several jobs offering to work for free just to get experience. However, being in NYC made me confident to say that I was a Japanese American to others. I felt that it was time for me to go on with my life here as normally as possible. Tamako and I enjoyed our freedom immensely and learned to adjust to Big City life. Freedom is exhilarating when it was denied to us for so long. Four months later my mother and brother joined us.

7. Being in NYC put the whole world at my feet and I felt suppression lifted. I was amazed that I could enter any place without seeing hostile and suspicious White faces. In fact, the people acted human as they should be and this took me some time to become adjusted to. So I 'did' the theatres, movies, restaurants, operas, ballets, recreational places, the parks, night clubs and any other public places where I tested to see whether I was dreaming. I even traveled to Washington, D. C., Philadelphia, Florida and Canada, and it was pleasant. Does anyone know what it is to be able to go any place and the people don't stare at you with hostility? No, they were terrific in the East coast. All I wanted to do was work and be the best trained cosmetician. This I was able to accomplish here in NY with much excitement and confidence.

8. Meanwhile my sister, Merry, couldn't decide whether to relocate or stay so she remained in camp with our father. After awhile, she became confused and this started to affect Merry's health to the point where she felt that her family had abandoned her. Her desolation and separation from us caused her to wander all over the camp grounds looking for us in desperation. This caused a deep feeling of loss and this tragic impact plunged her into her first mental breakdown. This has affected her whole future. At that point, she required psychiatric care and was subsequently hospitalized at the Arizona State Hospital in Phoenix on March 1945. She was then 23 years old in the prime of her life. While she was hospitalized my father couldn't do any more for Merry, so he was released from camp and joined us in NYC.

9. Merry remained in the State Hospital for about five months. Then suddenly she was released out of the hospital, in the care of an attendant, to a train heading for NYC to join us. We met Merry and the attendant at Grand Central Terminal in AUG 1945, and brought her home with us to 335 Wadsworth Avenue. When she had recovered sufficiently, she later began living and working here. So our family of six was finally reunited after being separated about a year and a half.

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10. In 1946 Merry later met and worked with a fine gentleman and almost consummated a marriage with him. But, at the last moment he abandoned her because he was afraid of her unstable condition and for her future progress. This depressed her and she endured suffering and a complete breakdown again. She was admitted to Bellevue Hospital and later sent to Rockland State Hospital where she underwent a series of medications including electric shock treatments. About six months later she was released. She seemed to be all right but was never married.

11. Merry continued working in various jobs here as cashier, salesperson and her last job was in Sales Audit at B. Altmans when between 1973 and 1977 she had a series of mental breakdowns. At this point, she was at her lowest ebb and required hospitalization again. All the medications she received and prescribed by her doctors caused her to lose 50% of her hair which affected her femininity and caused her deep anguish and depression. Her nerves were completely shattered and she couldn't tolerate people nor even her family. Up to this day, every minor and major illness or discomfort she normally would suffer was beyond her capability of coping. She had suffered countless mental breakdowns, nervous and erratic behavior that at this point it necessitated our family (my mother, my husband, my brother and I) 24 hours under constant watch to prevent her from committing suicide. She has been hospitalized six times. As you can see, these medical costs ate up her funds and ours. I have been with Merry all of my life and watched her change from a happy-go-lucky person, a very attractive young lady, singing and dancing, to become a shadow of a person she is now. Her whole life wasted on account of our incarceration. You've known persons whose physical presence is felt but is so quiet that it really might be only their spiritual being? Well, that's my sister today. I favor monetary redress/reparation for Merry's unnecessary agony and for the lack of her being unable to provide for her own future adequately.

12. With a profound look to our future, I ask when and how will we receive justice that is overdue us. Must we wait another forty years? I am confident that our Government will assume moral responsibility. I favor redress for us 120,000 Japanese American evacuees with this proposal:

A. Monetary payment be provided to those in need; such as, our elderly, our disabled; provisions be made for medical and psychiatric care; provide adequate housing to the elderly and infirm, and any other emergency requirements;

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12. B. the U.S. Government provide gratis Gov't-owned land earmarked for redress/reparation which is the establishment of ten national parks located at or near each of the former concentration camps listed as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Manzanar, Calif. | 6. Jerome, Ark. |
| 2. Tulalake, Calif. | 7. Rohwer, Ark. |
| 3. Granada (Amache), Colo. | 8. Minidoka, Idaho |
| 4. Gila River, Ariz. | 9. Topaz, Utah |
| 5. Poston, Ariz. | 10. Heart Mountain, Wyoming |

C. Each of the above ten national parks be landscaped in accordance with the topography of that area. For instance, Gila River, where I was a wartime prisoner, could be a desert type park. Each park to have a museum giving a complete history of our evacuation and the purpose of these parks. To insure quality design, employ capable professionals familiar with park construction and landscaping at a reasonable cost.

13. It is suggested that this project be titled, "Project American Nikkei." There will be many new jobs created and it is further suggested to employ former Japanese American evacuees who need jobs. We heartily welcome anyone who wishes to work with us in our endeavor. This will be a cooperative effort in the name of freedom.

14. To honor our 100th Infantry Battalion, our 442nd Regimental Combat Team, our Military Intelligence Service, and our Japanese American military servicemen and women who served America loyally in spite of wartime anti-Japanese feelings, I propose that a fitting monument/memorial be erected at the site of the Japanese cherry blossoms at the Tidal Basin in Washington, D. C.

15. All of the above to be provided under perpetual federal funds to be maintained at all times and all costs to be borne by the U.S. Gov't and the funds to be allocated by said Government on a yearly fiscal basis. These active national parks will be a reminder of our WWII happening and will serve as a very elegant eulogy to all of us Nikkeis who were victims. This would give us and our heirs the proper identity and dignity and possibly erase that awful traumatic experience which exploded into our lives 40 years ago. Our incarceration was America's shameful period in history - that freedom and democracy requires constant vigilance, that our American flag must remain a symbol of freedom with, "One nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

16. I am proud to be an American and proud of my Japanese heritage. We are among America's finest citizens and it is indeed

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16. remarkable in the manner we conducted ourselves during that difficult time in our history, in having met our incarceration with deep courage, with dignity, while retaining our resolute spirit.

Respectfully submitted,

Yuriko Lily Matsuda Porter

YURIKO LILY MATSUDA PORTER (Mrs.)

Evacuee Family No. 23819

U.S. Concentration Camp, Gila River, Arizona

1942-1944