

vacation, a happy time. Four families in one house was not that unusual either. People slept in shifts to fit into Chicago apartments. A friend of mine, as a young girl, made her bed in a chair for many months following her family's release from internment. Many of those trying to find their way back into life on the "outside" lived in trailers. Mrs. Tsuneishi described her resettlement:

After the war, we were allowed to return to Hawaii. But there was no home for us. Our store and our home were confiscated by the plantation. And we were to start a new life in Honolulu. Without funds, the only place we could afford was under a house -- not a basement, but underneath a home. The landlord's washtub was our bathtub, our kitchen sink, and even our laundry tub.

Charles Hamasaki

Witnesses struggled with their writing. Most of the testimonies were grammatically correct. One singular recollection, however, though grammatically flawed, was authentic in idiom and content. Charles Hamasaki, eighteen at the time of expulsion, lived on Terminal Island and had just graduated from San Pedro High School. (Only the name "Charles" does not sound quite right. Most Terminal Islanders I knew went by their Japanese names.) Charles spoke ex tempore:

As far as I remember, in 1942, February second I think it was -- you know -- two guys walk in my house. And they came to my bedroom. And they said, "Hey! Hey! Buddy, wake up!" I wake up. And I asked them, "Who the hell you guys are?"

You can laugh right now. But I wasn't laughing. You know. "So, let me see your I.D." Then they flashed FBI. He say, "FBI." So I say, "What the hell did I do?"

Then they look at each other, and they say, "Hey! Hey!

We got a young one here." You know. They were running into a lot of old guys, you see. So, one of the guys says, "Hey! Get your coat on, man. I'm taking you in."

I said, "What for?"

"You are an enemy alien," [they said.]

I told them, "Enemy alien?" Man, I told them, "The enemy aliens live across the Pacific Ocean." I told them, "Don't take me in."

He says, "Get your coat."

So I got my coat. And they took me to Terminal Island -- the immigration station, over there. It was like a jail, over there, you know. At that time, they didn't have that Terminal Island Federal Penitentiary. It was next to that thing.

So, they took me in over there. Four days I stayed over there. Meanwhile, I know how to talk both languages. That's why I interpreted for this other fisherman friend, and translated everything. So, I thought that maybe they might let me go, since I was doing them a favor.

Hell no! Man!

(Wait a minute! Give me time, man!)

Then, they took us all from the Terminal Island Immigration Station to the Union Depot over there. I remember that. And there was about ten or twelve cars over there. And they herded us into that car. When we walked in, they told us to pull the blinds down, you know. So, I said, "What the hell for?" You know.

He said, "Never mind. That's an order. Put the blind down!"

We can move. For four days we traveled.

During the time we was traveling, these guys, you know, they asked me -- you know, old man -- he say -- old man, you know, "Hey! Where we going?" When I peeked, it was Fresno. You know. And they stopped.

They stopped. And they put more guys on. And then, they keep on going. It took about a day to go over there.

The next thing I know, it was Stockton; Sacramento; Redding; Portland; Seattle; Tacoma; and Spokane. And

we couldn't move from where we sat down -- except to go to the head, you know. And, you know, what happened?

You know, my feet start swelling. You do nothing but sit down. You know. You guys try that. You guys never did, because you don't know.

Then, when I looked -- the next thing I know -- we was in Montana. The train stopped. They cut the train in half. And half went further east. So the next place we stopped at was Bismark, North Dakota. Fort Lincoln. Fort Lincoln.

And, they told us to get off. Well, before that, you know. One thing I got to say. On that train, they fed us real good. Yeah. You know, we are a poor family -- poor fishermen at Terminal Island. And all we eat is fish, you know. On the train, you know. The first time I ate a steak. Yeah. I'm serious, man.

You know what some of them old men said? The old men say, "Hey! They are feeding us, because we are going to die. They are going to kill us." You know, just like the execution chamber -- before you die. That's what he said.

I said, "No! No! No! This country -- they ain't going to do that kind of stuff, man. You know, this is a democratic country -- Bill of Rights, the Constitution, and all that stuff. And the Japs go with it. You see, they not going to do this. This is democracy."

You know what my old man say? "No! This is not democracy. This is democratic shit!" he said.

"So, by God, maybe this guy got a point," I said. He might be right.

Then, we get off that train. When we got off the train -- hey! Twenty four degrees below zero! Man! I'm from Southern California. I had my moccasins -- not a shoe -- moccasins with me -- and a T-shirt and an overcoat. In that time, bell bottom trousers was in style. You know, forty-one.

So, when we got off the train -- it snowed there: ten feet high. Cold like hell! Twenty-five degrees below zero! And they line us up in the freezing weather to count the head, so nobody escaped.

They got to have an exact count. And we did that every morning -- every morning, man, for one month. During that time, we stayed -- that's what I call a concentration camp. That one. They had barbed wire. They had

towers, machine guns, and searchlights -- and everything. That's a concentration camp, you know -- not like a relocation camp. I call that a concentration camp. This Lillian Baker or Barker or whoever she is -- she said, "Not concentration." But, I call it "concentration camp."

At first, you know, when these guards -- there was about five guards every night -- they got to come inside the barracks, you know, to inspect. You know, when you have the brain so cold, you put your blanket over your head. Then, when they come, they say, "Hey! Buddy, stick your head out." They got the rifle, and they go like that.

They was scared of fishermen, because there was a rumor that fishermen is a mean, wild bunch of guys. Hell, no! We was gentlemen.

After a while, they got used to us. Hey! These guys not bad. So, they throw their rifles and guns and everything away. "Hey! Buddy, what's doing? How you doing this morning? Cold weather, eh? No. Hot. Cold." You know. Daily, routine talk -- conversation, you see.

After that -- Oh, let's see -- my mother and sister -- they didn't know where we went. After one month, they let us write letter. But, letter was censored, you know. So, they found out where we were. And then, after that -- (I don't need this no more. Whoever wrote this thing -- there is a little error here.)

So -- oh! -- then, they had a hearing, you know. So, I told you this was a democratic country. We got a trial now -- coming up, anyway. So, we had a trial, you know, to answer: are you -- oh! yeah! yeah! "Are you loyal to this country? Or, are you loyal to Japan?" he ask me.

I told him, "No, I am loyal to this country." You know, then, okay. They ask me a whole bunch of questions.

They even asked me, "What if Japanese Army invade this land over here, and we give you a rifle -- what would you do?"

So, I told them what I do, "Japanese Army come this far in, you don't have to worry about that kind of thing." That's what I told them. So, I say, "I'm going to be loyal to this country."

So, after a couple of weeks, ... they say either you get released, paroled -- (oh! Well, one more thing,

anyway. oh!) -- interned. So I got released. So, they send me to where my mother and sister were. I came to Santa Anita.

When I came to Santa Anita race track over here -- that was in August, 1942. It must have been. You know where I slept? In a barn. I'm a fisherman. I'm not a farmer. The first time I smell that smell, that you know -- you know what I mean -- you know what I mean -- what I am referring to -- the smell. But, like me, I was a fisherman. I know how stinky fish smell. So, this wasn't too bad. That's the way it was. Life in Santa Anita, you know -- it's not too good.

Well, after that. Let me see. Yes. After that, we went to Rohwer, Arkansas. It's the same thing again. Swamp. Hot. Chiggers. All that kind of stuff, you know.

Then, this question came up -- loyalty question. "Yes, yes" or "no, no." So, I signed "yes, yes." So, they said, "Okay, you sign yes, yes. You are loyal. You can go out of the camp."

Okay. So, I went out of the camp. I went to Kalamazoo, Michigan. There, the WRA gave me that job. And what a lousy job they gave me. Nobody wanted that kind of job. It paid \$11.32 every week. So, I get \$31 or \$29 -- something like that I get. So, I quit that job. And then, I started fooling around all over the place, you know. I went to five or six different other camps.

Then -- (I'm getting to the end. Wait a minute. I'm short.) -- and now that I look back, after all these years, I'm still maybe bitter or angry. You know, arresting me as a Japanese fisherman -- just because I was a fisherman, and I knew how deep the water was, and this and that. All that thing -- you think I knew all that stuff? I didn't know nothing.

So, Lillian Baker said some Japanese is going to go to the Palos Verdes and wave flags over there for the battleship. I heard that on the radio -- that KABC, one night. Flag. Wave flag. Come this way, maybe 100 yards. Turn left, and go 200 yards. Some people, they say fishing boats getting torpedoes. Where in the hell I'm going to get torpedo? Ridiculous, man!

That's why I say I was bitter. I wasn't there with my mother and them to evacuate -- 48-hour evacuation. They lost all the property and every damn thing! You know, in 1948, when I came out of the Army, ... they pay me thirty three dollars -- thirty three bucks! I still remember. I was at San Pedro, some place, up there, and they talk, talk, talk. And they gave me

thirty something dollars! That's right! You know, this monetary reparation kind of deal.

Hey! You know. Like Senator Hayakawa -- he don't know nothing. That guy, in my opinion -- (I don't know what you are clapping for) -- my opinion of that guy; he got a lot of money. He's a rich man. If he was in my shoes, and poor like me. He says Japanese are proud. Sure, we are proud people. If you put the word 'proud -- p-r-o-u-d' and put twenty five grand on the side or fifty thousand or whatever it is -- which side you going to take? I bet if you was in my shoes, you would take the twenty-five G's. That's what everybody is going to do. Yeah. That's what I'm going to do. I don't care. Proud or no proud."

Hamasaki's grit pulverized Hayakawa's facile sophistries. He knew that he had been screwed, and that accounts had to be settled.

Lillian Baker as Dillon Myer

There were dozens of stories related at the hearings. As I read them, many seemed repetitive. They were only a sample of more than 125,000 stories. Various themes ebbed and flowed. Story-telling sometimes turned confrontational, as when some witnesses challenged the Commissioners for the lack of time, as if there existed some official device for creating time. Sometimes the unrelenting tales of woe were relieved by a welcome sense of humor, as in Charles Hamasaki's testimony. According to Frank Chin, there was even a moment of improvised melodrama:

The 100th/442nd Association president was winding up to pitch his organization's stand on redress. He was about to climax another JACL-inspired show. A good public show of Nisei veterans and vet organizations, laying their resolutions and great American slogans on the record. Kawaminami was dissociating the 100th/442nd from a letter to the editor by Lillian Baker, the blonde avenging angel. A Japanese flag, taken as a war trophy, was on display in Gardena. The Manzanar Committee objected. They took the flag as a racial slur. Lillian Baker's letter claimed the 442nd