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51 years old; occupation: secretary

Seattle, Washington is the city of my birth. At the outbreak of World War II, I was eleven years of age and in the sixth grade at Coleman School. We lived in a multi-ethnic neighborhood where the neighbors were very kind and sympathetic towards us.

I remember the extreme surprise and shock within the family when there was talk about evacuating all the Japanese (including the American-born) from the west coast. My parents didn't believe the American Government would really go through with this action. At school, the children were pretty nice, although I remember the Chinese children wearing "I am Chinese" buttons, so as not to be mistaken as Japanese.

Suddenly it was happening, we were being evacuated to the Puyallup Fairgrounds. We could only take what we could carry, the rest of our goods had to be stored away for the duration of the war.

Our family was assigned number 11414. We were directed to live in the parking lot of the Puyallup Fairgrounds in hastily built barracks. Each family was assigned one room. Each room was partitioned by partial walls, which meant no one had any privacy. All conversations could be heard by families down the hall. We were fortunate to be assigned to these quarters because other families had to live in the animal stalls in the main fairgrounds.

After three months at Puyallup, we were notified that we would be shipped to Minidoka, Idaho. In August 1942, we were on our way to Minidoka. My only recollection of the lengthy train ride was staring into the window shades which were pulled down so we could no enjoy the scenery on the way.

The first impression of Minidoka was truly frightening and depressing. The camp site was in "No Man's Land" surrounded with barbed wires, sentry towers with armed guards, rows and rows of tar paper barracks, and ankle deep sand.

Since there were six people in the family, we were allotted the largest room in the barrack. The room was bare except for the pot belly stove which was situated in a corner. The windows were not air tight so whenever there was a sandstorm, which was quite often, sand would cover everything in our room. Through the ingenuity of my father, shelves, a table, crude chairs, and a screen were built and placed around my bed for some privacy since I was the only girl.

Before camp days we were a very close knit family. However, camp life proved disruptive. Everyone did his own thing, even meals were not eaten with the family, but with friends. Problems that I would have ordinarily discussed with my mother were discussed with friends. The family bond that was close gradually was torn apart. Participation in recreation, and even

church attendance, was always with friends, not family.

Whereas school in Seattle was challenging, I soon lost my initiative and drive, consequently my grades suffered. The teachers had to cope with inferior equipment or none at all, i.e., biology and chemistry. I feel the drastic change in my environment had much to do with the change of attitude.

Pride and independence were traits valued in my family. Suddenly we were forced to rely on the federal government for all our needs. My parents were hard working people and my father would tell his children with pride that in the depression years we were never on welfare. Now they had too much time on their hands that at times they became very depressed. My father would say, "Since the government put us here, let them take care of us".

The loyalty oath which each person was asked to sign created a great controversy in the camp. My parents discussed the pros and cons of signing, and decided we would sign the loyalty oath, after all the children were born in the United States and our loyalty was to the United States.

When the war ended, the federal government wanted all the internees to move out of the camps. My father said our family would stay until the bitter end, but when it was announced school would not be opened, he decided we better get back to Seattle.

Therefore, at the end of August 1945, we returned to Seattle. My sister, who had already returned, had made arrangements for my parents to stay in a rooming house (until the tenants who were living in our house could find alternate housing). She also found my brother and me jobs as household helpers.

On our return trip to Seattle our thoughts were crowded with many questions. Would we be able to make the adjustments back to normal living, would we be able to cope with school and racism? My brother accompanied me on the first day of school to Franklin High School. I was very frightened but my brother reassured me things would work out. At school the Niseis stayed together at study hall, assemblies, and for lunch. Due to the condescending nature of the students, the three year absence from regular school, I felt inferior and did not feel accepted back into society.

The psychological and emotional impacts thrust upon me during camp life and the return to normal society have never left me. I discussed life before World War II, the war years, and post war experiences with my children many times. One haunting question asked by my children was, "If the United States was losing the war against Japan, do you think the United States government would have annihilated the Japanese-Americans as Germany did to the Jews?". I cannot, to this day, reach a conclusion.

I am in favor of direct monetary compensation.

*Marie Horiuchi Ooka*