

TO: THE COMMISSION ON WARTIME RELOCATION
AND INTERNMENT OF CIVILIANS

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY: Josephine Shizue Sakamoto

In the serious consideration of the effects of the incarceration on the Japanese Americans and all Americans, it is not enough to look merely at business and economics. In my situation as wife and mother at the time of being ordered to the camps, I saw the social-psychological outcomes as perhaps even more devastating.

I was 27 years old then. My husband and I had four children, ages 5, 4, 2, and 8 months. In spite of the rumors, we maintained the belief that we wouldn't be interned since we were citizens. Word to the contrary came early in the year of 1942. In the end, we were given about two to three weeks to handle all business and report to the "Puyallup Assembly Center."

Even as we arrived at the Fairgrounds, we still held that they wouldn't keep us long; that we'd be home for Christmas. Months passed and the hope dwindled and we learned that we were being sent to Idaho. The belief that we were first-rate or full count citizens under the law began to fade.

The very fabric of our family life was threatened by life in the camps. Parental authority and family unity were undermined by the institutionalism and the communalism of the camps. One had to devise ways to develop and maintain family unity. In fact, we chose to bring meals from the mess hall to our barrack cubical and eat on the orange crates in order to have a simple, one-family meal.

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The close conditions of the camps invited ready interference by others in what would normally have been our family life. The makeshift units in the barracks at Puyallup were not private. The walls were only partial walls and did not reach the ceiling. One could not have simple conversations without being heard by everyone else in the barracks. Our relationships suffered in the camp situation.

Besides a lack of audible privacy, the thin, green, wood material used to hurriedly construct compartments within the barracks soon dried, leaving open knotholes and causing a lack of visible privacy as well. Things were so public that families as much as three or four units away could tell when one of my babies needed a diaper change. The relocation and isolation from majority society was an extreme degradation inflicted on the Japanese American adults. Moreover, this created unnatural modeling for our children and for children of all ages in the camps.

I sadly recall one day when my oldest daughter came home from school in a dust storm. Arriving home, she was powdered with dust and remarked, "I look like a Caucasian. Maybe now they'll let me out of camp." Even she, at age six, had figured out the racist implications of the incarceration. Our attempts to instill pride in oneself and in one's heritage meant little to her in the face of being plucked from our home, forced to live in camp conditions, and kept guarded and isolated as though enemies in our own country.

The lasting effects of the camp experience are still being

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overcome by Japanese Americans today. The self-consciousness, the sense of betrayal and violation, and the lack of confidence in the protection of one's rights under the law, are but a few of the attitudes that I would not have chosen for my family. These are the direct result of the imposed incarceration of the Japanese Americans by the U.S. government in 1942.

Only responsible government can beget responsible citizenry. Redress and reparation must happen. The real questions are HOW and WHEN.

Josephine L. Sakamoto