

Takao Aoki

At the time evacuation orders were given, I was a seventeen year old student at Garfield High School. I was stunned at the evacuation orders but being young I didn't know any better to protest so I followed the orders along with my family.

We were not given much time to prepare. We were instructed to take everything we could carry which was not very much. Most of our belongings and mementos were left behind in storage and/or with neighbors. These items were never recovered as storage owners and/or neighbors sold our belongings and/or soon claimed no knowledge of ever holding our things. Items as my kendo equipment and gi were confiscated.

We were first situated at an assembly center at the Puyallup Fair Grounds in Washington from April to September, 1942. From there we went to Minidoka, Idaho. I don't remember the exact dates of my stay because I was drafted before the camps were closed out.

We were transported from Seattle to the assembly center by the drab olive green military buses. We didn't know where we were going. The authorities just said, "We're going to take you to a center." We were taken there for the reasons that we were classified as enemy aliens even though we were naturalized citizens. From the Puyallup horse stalls we were transported by train to Minidoka. There in the train all the shades were lowered so we couldn't see where we were going. It was a miserable train ride, humid, hot, muggy and overcrowded.

Upon arriving at Minidoka, all we saw was a sandy desert where most of our accommodations were incomplete. Our initial quarters were in a recreational hall where families were assigned bed space in a barrack like atmosphere. There were no rooms it was just an open barrack where the beds were lined up. There were just so many beds per family and the next family started up from the next bed and so on. Of course there was no privacy at all. The women had to dress late at night and get up early. We later moved into tar papered, dirt floor barracks. Each family was assigned one room and was separated from the next room by tar paper and an open ceiling. Therefore voices and family discussions were heard by all.

My father past away before the war. It was just my mother and five boys. Our older sister was already married and was down in the Portland Assembly Center because she and her family had been living in Yakima. Her husband, an Issei, was classified as alien and was taken to Texas someplace. Since he was a non-citizen enemy alien, he was interned immediately at the conception of war. My sister and her two children were then taken to the Portland Assembly center. Because she was alone with two children and pregnant with her soon to be twins, we were able to have her rejoin us in Minidoka as a family.

Since my sister and her husband were separated for about two years, the new born twins never saw their father until they were about two years old. So consequently the children rejected their father at the beginning.

At camp my family life was broken up. We lived in one room barracks. Our sanitation and meals were provided in different buildings. We generally had to stand in line to get our meals. Naturally being a family of five boys we all sat and ate among our friends and so there was no real family unity.

At camp I went to high school, a make shift one. Everyone in our family went to school except our oldest brother who worked as a butcher in the food center. He'd cut and portion meat to each of the mess halls. At camp all the cooks, etc. were interned persons. It was a self sustained operation, everyone had to do their share. Teachers and/or university students were teachers. It was difficult to adjust to the lifestyle because it was barrack living. Most children became uncontrollable. It was very difficult for parents to have any control over them because there wasn't anything for them to do. As a child you were rather free to run in a big desert, all fenced in with military guards posted.

The people who came to visit us had to talk through barbed wires. Whenever they handed anything over to you or you shook hands there was always a guard there to watch every move. If they brought any gifts they were usually opened. The guards were very suspicious of what transpired between visitors and us prisoners. No one could ever come in nor could we go out.

The loyalty oath had no effect because I had no knowledge of Japan. The only national loyalty I could have was to the USA because I had no knowledge of any other foreign country. I was born here, raised here, had no contact with Japan so it made no difference to me. If I were kibeï or from some other country possibly I would have different feelings. Up till camp high school, I never lived anywhere except the city of Seattle. I was used to that environment so what difference would Japan have made to me?

Since I was drafted into the USA army, I left camp and resettled in the US army. I traveled with them and studied Japanese until I was released from the service. I worked with them for about two and a half years. During that time I was in Japan with the occupation for about a year and a half and that was the first time I had been to Japan.

The World War II incarceration affect my life by destructing my education and my family life. Those that should be compensated are those who directly experienced camp life, those that lost their livelihood as adults, the adults whose lives were directly disrupted, and Isseis who worked hard and lost everything and had to start from scratch again and generally never made it. They should receive direct monetary redress.