Volume 30 Number 2 April 2009

THE CALIFORNIAN

Magazine of the California History Center Foundation/De Anza College—
A Foundation Supporting the Study and Preservation of State and Regional History

Mitsuru Koshiyama:
The Story of a Heart Mountain Draft Resister

A Civics Lesson from One Generation to Another

Photo: CHCF Library

Tom Izu

Here is a civics lesson in the form of a simple question: is the Constitution and Bill of Rights of the US just "a scrap of paper?" The correct answer is a qualified, "yes." In 1942, while World War II raged on, Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy was charged with the task of expediting the forced removal and imprisonment of Japanese Americans to concentration camps. During a meeting he held with the Justice Department and the FBI, McCloy responded to questioning regarding the legality of this action by stating, "the Constitution is just a scrap of paper to me."

Years later, in 2005, constitutional law scholar and writer Dr. Peter Irons would also answer this question affirmatively in a most persuasive manner while speaking at one of many public forums and events held on the history of the internment of Japanese Americans (including one sponsored by the CHC at De Anza College during that year. Dr. Irons would hold aloft any scrap of paper that happened to be handy, use it as a substitute for the real Constitution, and proceed to rip it apart in a loud, and dramatic fashion. He would state that yes, the point made by McCloy 63 years earlier was indeed based in fact.

But unlike McCloy, Dr. Irons was not disparaging the legitimacy and power of the most important document in the life of our nation. Nor was he agreeing with McCloy's underlying rationale that suspending people's rights during times of war or crisis is legitimate. He was instead, trying to get across to the public, and in the case of our event — a gathering of De Anza College students and local community members — how fragile our most important laws are threatened. He went on to say that without diligence, without courage, and without action, our Constitution is indeed just a scrap of paper.

Remembering his lecture, I was reminded of another civics lesson that seems to be easily forgotten when we are caught in the throws of politics and controversy; that while we live in a democracy that is run by "the majority," when it comes to voting, we do have a Bill of Rights that guarantees the protection of individuals regardless of their race religion, or creed, and regardless of how popular or despised they may be in the eyes of the media or any other powerful entity. The "majority," however you define it, cannot "overrule" these rights. Our democracy comes with a profound obligation and duty to defend individuals from false persecution and abridgement of their rights. And, it takes bravery to stand up for these rights especially in the face of fear, racism, and political opportunism. While each and every one of us must tap the moral fortitude to defend these rights if called upon, it takes special people to make us remember this, to inspire us, and help us keep this most basic civic lesson deep in our hearts.

Mr. Mitsuru "Mits" Koshiyama was that special person to me. Mits was a very modest man of my parent's generation who never sought out fame or power and in fact, worked quietly as the groundskeeper at a local school for many years before he retired. But Mits had a secret story not shared for many years: As a Japanese American he had stood up for the Constitution during World War II when it was not popular to do so, even if it meant increased persecution by the powers that had put him in an internment camp in the first place, and the added burden of becoming the target of scorn and ridicule by members of his own community. He paid a heavy price for teaching us all such an important lesson about something we should already know and understand. Mits also thought that the Constitution could easily become just a "scrap of a paper," as it had when he was imprisoned, but Mits also demonstrated with his actions how to make it more than that, "always stand up for the Constitution no matter what and make it more than just a scrap of paper, make it really mean something for yourself and others" as he said to a group of De Anza students a few years ago.

On February 6, 2009, "Mits" passed away. While we have lost this extraordinary member of our community, his story, fortunately, has been saved in various forms including in documentaries and books of various sorts that record the World War II experience of Japanese Americans. I am also glad to say that the CHC has captured, here in this issue of *The Californian* through its oral history work, a "chapter" of this story.

Here is another civics lesson in the form of a simple assertion: local history and oral history are key to understanding some of the most pressing and significant issues facing our nation, right now! And there are many other people right here in our community – perhaps you know some – waiting to tell other stories just as important and inspiring as the one in this issue!

Also in this issue, please be sure to read about two exciting events happening in April: our new exhibit on the Saratoga Community Garden is detailed on page 18, and you can find information on the April 14 California Studies Conference on page 3 and 20.

Cover photo: Heart Mountain residents are bidding goodbye to friends and neighbors as they return to their homes or depart for new homes and work throughout the nation, 1945. Photographer: Yone Kubo. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

CALENDAR

Apr. 6	First day of Spring Quarter instruction
Apr. 22	Big Basin's Advocates class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Apr. 23	Yosemite class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Apr. 24	California Studies Conference 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Campus Center De Anza College
Apr 25-26	Yosemite field trip
Apr. 29	Big Basin's Advocates class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Apr. 30	Old Berkeley class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
May 2	Big Basin's Advocates field trip
May 7	Yosemite class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
May 9	Old Berkeley field trip Saratoga Garden Exhibit Preview, 2:00 p.m., CHC
May 14	Old Berkeley class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
May 15	Big Basin's Advocates field trip
May 16	Old Berkeley field trip
May 21	Bay Area Public Gardens class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
May 25	Memorial Day Holiday observed, campus closed
May 28	Bay Area Public Gardens class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
May 30	Bay Area Public Gardens field trip
Jun. 4	Sea Traders in California class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Jun. 6	Bay Area Public Gardens field trip
Jun. 11	Sea Traders in California class, 6:20 p.m., CHC
Jun. 13	Sea Traders in California field trip
Jun. 20	Sea Traders in California field trip

CHC to Co-sponsor California Studies Association Conference "Debugging the Silicon Dream: Real Life in the Virtual World"

The CHC in conjunction with De Anza College will host the California Studies Association's 29th annual conference on Friday, April 24, 2009 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at De Anza College.

This year's conference focuses on Silicon Valley, its history and politics, as well as the many environmental, social, and cultural issues facing the region. This event is open to the public with a suggested donation of $35.00 and no charge for De Anza students with a valid student I.D. card.

For registration information see the CSA website at: www.californiastudiesassociation.berkeley.edu/conference or call Tom Izu at (408) 864-8986.

Please see the ad on page 20.

Featured Speakers:

Sarah Lacy, *co-host of "tech ticker," Yahoo Finance*

Chris O'Brien, San Jose Mercury News

Terry Christensen, *San Jose State University*

Glenna Matthews, *historian*

Matt Hammer, *People Acting in Community Together*

Blanca Alvarado, *former Santa Clara County Supervisor*

Raj Jayadev, Silicon Valley De-Bug

Ian Kim, *Ella Baker Center*

Mark Linder, *Cupertino Parks and Recreation*

Shiloh Ballard, *Silicon Valley Leadership Group*

Dennis King, *Hispanic Chamber of Commerce*

Patrick Dillon, *author,* The Last Best Thing

Ellen Ullman, *author,* The Bug

Paulina Borsook, *author,* Cyberselfish

Carol Lamont, *Destination: Home*

…and others

California History Center
State and Regional History Academic Program

The following courses will be offered Spring Quarter 2009 through the California History Center. Please see the History class listings section of this Schedule of Classes (http://www.deanza.fhda.edu/schedule/) for additional information or call the center at (408) 864-8986.

BIG BASIN'S ADVOCATES

Mary Jo Ignoffo HIST 54X-952 ■ UNITS

This "eco-history" class examines the environmental movement at the turn of the twentieth century which resulted in California's first state park opening in 1902. Big Basin Redwoods State Park and its old-growth giant sequoias could have fallen to the logger's ax if not for the efforts of an unlikely group of allies who formed the Sempervirens Club. Those who will be discussed in detail are photographer and artist Andrew P. Hill, Santa Clara College president Robert Kenna, S.J., U.S. senator James Phelan, journalist Carrie Stevens Walter, and Stanford University president David Starr Jordan.

Lectures: Wednesdays, April 22 & 29, 2009
6:20 to 10:00 p.m., CHC
Field Trips: Saturday, May 2 & Friday, May 15 (TBA)

Yosemite Valley from Artists' Point.

YOSEMITE: CROWN JEWEL OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

Chatham Forbes HIST-107X-95 ■ 2 UNITS

Yosemite Valley, evolved over eons by geological upheaval, running water, and glaciers, inspired a Progressive Era campaign for wilderness preservation. The great beauty of this Edenic region has motivated generations to protect it as a National Park. The struggle continues today in both the economic and political arenas.

Lectures: Thursdays, April 23 & May 7, 2009
6:20 to 10:00 p.m., CHC
Field Trips: Saturday & Sunday, April 25 & 26, 2009 (TBA)

ECCENTRICS, HEROES AND CUTTHROATS OF OLD BERKELEY

Betty Hirsch HIST-107X-96 ■ 2 UNITS

The title of this class is taken from a recent book by historian Richard Schwartz. Berkeley's enduring reputation as a haven for eccentrics has contributed to the community's rich cultural heritage. The legacy of these eccentrics has become part of the foundation of one of the country's most vibrant intellectual communities. From the outset, Berkeley was a place where new ideas were tested. The class will meet a variety of characters such as the "Boss Baggage Buster of Beautiful Berkeley" and a hotdog maven with a sign that reads, "Eat here, Die at home." Come meet this community of visionaries and individualists.

Lectures: Thursdays, April 30 & May 14, 2009
6:20 to 10:00 p.m. CHC
Field Trips: Saturdays, May 9 & May 16, 2009 (TBA)

BAY AREA PUBLIC GARDENS

Betty Hirsch HIST-53X-95 ■ 2 UNITS

The Bay Area is enhanced by a vast array of public gardens that are creations and outgrowths of the personalities of such historic figures as James Duval Phelan, William Bourn and John McLaren. The class will visit a variety of gardens and discuss how gardens serve as art form and as symbols of the Bay Area, display what is grown here, and reflect the cultures of different ethnic groups. In addition, students will address some contemporary concerns brought about by limited rainfall and water rationing and their corresponding impacts on environmental, political, and social issues.

Lectures: Thursdays, May 21 & May 28, 2009
6:20 to 10:00 p.m., CHC
Field Trips: Saturdays, May 30 & June 6, 2009 (TBA)

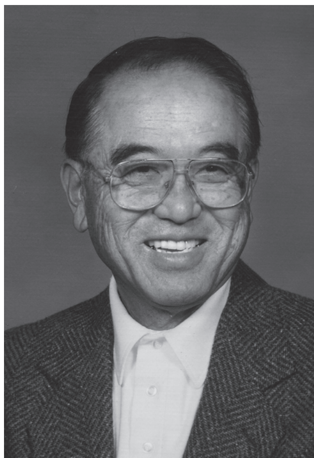
SHIPS AND SEA TRADERS IN CALIFORNIA

Chatham Forbes HIST- 52X-96 ■ 2 UNITS

Furs, cowhides, tallow, and other commodities lured increasing sea traffic to California over the nineteenth century, and led foreign traders to settle in the seaports, thus diversifying the culture and enriching the economy. The Gold Rush and Silver Bonanza brought definitive transformation on a grander scale.

Lectures: Thursdays, June 4 & 11, 2009
6:20 to 10:00 p.m., CHC
Field Trips: Saturdays, June 13 & 20, 2009 (TBA)

Mitsuru Koshiyama: The Story of a Heart Mountain Draft Resister



Mitsuru Koshiyama 1998. Courtesy of Mizue Koshiyama.

The following is an essay based on an oral history interview conducted by Tom Izu in May 2000 with long-time Sunnyvale, California area resident, Mitsuru "Mits" Koshiyama. Mr. Koshiyama passed away on February 6, 2009. His story contradicts the image of local history as being "parochial" and "quaint," demonstrating how the oral history of a single individual can connect us to issues of profound national significance.

When Japanese American Mitsuru "Mits" Koshiyama was in the 7th grade, he tediously copied excerpts from the US Constitution and Bill of Rights. He also spent hours laboring on essays with titles such as, "Why the US Constitution is Important to Me," and "Why I am Proud to be an American." But Mits was not an honor student honing his skills to get good grades and deliver a valedictorian speech; he completed his work while in detention, to atone for alleged misbehavior on school grounds. Sixty-five years later, Mits chuckles when he recalls his early school days and wonders what his stern-faced teacher would have thought of him now: a former prisoner of a US concentration camp, a convicted felon, a draft resister, and a self-proclaimed "rabble-rouser" in the Japanese American community.

"But I got into all of that trouble during World War II because I really did believe in the Constitution and my rights as a US citizen. In fact, I was fighting for the Constitution and for my rights." Mits insists in an interview in his San Jose home.[1] Mits gives a broad, beaming smile, breaking out of an otherwise solemn mood, and laughs, "I guess I really did learn something in detention after all!"

Mits was one of 63 young Japanese American men imprisoned in Heart Mountain Internment Camp during World War II who refused to heed draft orders and were tried and convicted in the country's largest draft resistance trial. Mits's story is especially significant in the context of the growing number of works that document the World War II internment of Japanese American. Many works have tended to portray Japanese Americans in a one-dimensional way, as victims who stoically accepted their situation, or as heroes.[2] Few have documented the actual internal conflicts and the actual resistance that took place in many of the camps. This paper is an oral history of one of the Heart Mountain draft resisters, Mitsuru Koshiyama, focusing primarily on the World War II period. The paper will demonstrate through one person's story, the rich mixture of conflict and resistance that make up the Japanese American experience.

Koshiyama family, pre-World War II, Sunnyvale. Mits is in the back row, first from the right. Courtesy of Mizue Koshiyama.

Pre-war Period and Growing Hostilities

Born in Mountain View, California on August 7, 1924 to a Japanese immigrant couple, Mitsuru was one of seven children. He had an older brother and sister, and following him came two younger sisters and two younger brothers. Mits felt his family was a "typical" Japanese American family of the period. His parents were sharecroppers who grew raspberries. They moved several times, farming plots of land in Sunnyvale, and in what currently is the city of Cupertino. Thinking back on the years of his life, he remembers them as quite difficult and still feels hurt by the tremendous hostility he feels Japanese Americans faced in

[1] Interview by author with Mits Koshiyama on May 6, 2000 and May 7, 2000 in San Jose.

[2] Nelson, Douglas W., *Heart Mountain: The History of a Concentration Camp* (Madison: Wisconsin Sate Historical Society, 1976), pp. 78-79.

California: "When I was growing up things were very bad. Everywhere you go you heard, 'Jap, Jap, Jap,' even when you go to a store and buy something. give them your business and money, they still call you a Jap to your face!"

The Koshiyama family faced the continuation of the intense anti-Japanese persecution that had begun in the early 1900s.[3] Legislative acts had banned Japanese immigrants from owning land and had eventually excluded all immigration from Japan. "Yellow Peril" stories had painted the Japanese as a dangerous race bent on domination of California. Over twenty years of legal limitations and prejudice had preceded Mits's birth and created the world he found so hostile.

Mits and friends at Heart Mountain Internment Camp, Wyoming, 1942. Mits is in the middle of the second row.

Mits used to burn with anger inside as he watched his father being humiliated by the white farmer who owned the land Mits's father cultivated. The daily barrage of insults and slights his father endured while going about his business in town further added to the shame he felt: "My father was a typical Issei[4]…He tried to ignore the treatment, and to persevere. He and my mother never ever spoke about 'racism' as a social issue. My father hardly had much to say to us at all, except when he was sent in to discipline us. My mother tended to smooth things over, but she, like my father, never really talked about our family's treatment by the whites."

The Issei-Nisei[5] intergenerational relationship Mits describes fits well within those documented by writers of Japanese American history.[6] There were serious barriers to communication, given that many Nisei such as Mits did not speak fluent Japanese, nor were they raised in an exclusively Japanese culture. Additionally, each generation had different strategies of dealing with the effects of racism. This comes out clearly when Mits talks of his older siblings' reaction to racist treatment: "We use to drive through Sunnyvale in the back of a pick-up truck. The whites in town standing on the side of the street would yell, 'Hey you Japs, go back to where you came from!' And sometimes they would try to throw rocks at us. My older sister would get quite upset and shaken. My older brother seemed to take it in stride and kind of shrugged it off…" Mits felt quite close to his older brother. He was the only one he talked to about their predicament. His brother seemed to try to act like the Issei outwardly, but was able to express the same anger Mits felt inside: "My brother explained why we always got treated badly in town by telling me, 'They hate us…they hate all Japanese…so what do you expect, that's just the way it is,' and seemed to be telling me – do what father does, take it – but I knew he felt the same as me inside."

The intense hostility aimed at Japanese he felt in town didn't seem to be carried over to his grammar school in Santa Clara, where he started public education. But he attributes this to the fact that his first school had a, "lot of Japanese kids. There were a lot more Japanese farm families in the area there so there were more of us and we kind of stuck together." When his family moved to the Cupertino area, and he was transferred to a school that had a lot fewer Japanese, the hostility again intensified: "Everyday I heard the words, 'Jap, dirty Jap, stinkin' Jap' while going to school, while in school, and while walking home. Even some of my teachers said these things."

[3] For a description of the anti-Japanese movement, see Roger Daniels, *The politics of prejudice: the anti-Japanese movement in California and the struggle for Japanese exclusion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977)

[4] The term *Issei* refers to the first generation Japanese American immigrant.

[5] The term *Nisei* refers to the second generation Japanese American who was born in the US.

[6] For a discussion of Issei and Nisei relationships, see David K. Yoo, *Growing up Nisei: Race, Generation and Culture among Japanese Americans of California*, 1924-49 (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2000).

While in middle school, Mits began to act against his persecutors: "I wasn't like the other Nisei. I just couldn't walk away and 'turn the other cheek' whenever I was called a name or someone insulted my family." As a result he got into a lot of fights. He remembers bitterly that that the teachers never took his side and he spent a lot of time in detention after school: "The one good thing about detention, is that I learned all about the Constitution, because one of the teachers – a real mean one – thought making me write about the Constitution was a good way to punish me, and it was… most kids at that age sure didn't want to hang around and write essays and memorize things like that." Perhaps Mits's teacher thought she was helping to assimilate a troublesome Nisei boy who didn't act like the others and didn't back down.

While attending Fremont High School in Sunnyvale, Mits felt the tensions between whites and the Nisei escalate after December 7, 1941, when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. "My older sister and I were working in the fields. When she heard about the attack, sister said, 'Oh I know something awful is going to happen to us now…' she sensed it and felt the dread I felt. I knew it was going to get a lot worse for us…"

Mits's dread was well founded. At school he felt so tense, he always felt sick to his stomach. He does remember that the Nisei who didn't challenge the name-calling and threats didn't seem to get picked on: "I just couldn't back down. There were a few other Nisei like me who said that we were Americans and should be treated the same – white students couldn't accept that – if we answered back to their taunts we got picked on even more." During all of this time, Mits doesn't remember talking about the situation much with other Nisei, his siblings, and especially not with his parents: "Everyone seemed to keep all of the bad feelings inside, everyone seemed to keep to themselves."

For Japanese Americans on the West Coast things rapidly grew worse after Pearl Harbor. Following the attack, President Roosevelt signed Proclamation 2525 pursuant to the Alien Enemy Act of 1798, which gave the government the authority to detain enemy aliens and confiscate enemy property wherever found.[7] The FBI, using information gathered on the Japanese American community by the Bureau and other military intelligence agencies starting back in the 1930s,[8] had already created lists of Issei to be questioned and detained including: "aliens who led cultural or assistance organizations, slightly less-suspicious aliens, and those who donated to ethnic groups, Japanese language teachers, and Buddhist clergy.[9] Based on these guidelines the FBI began a series of raids on the homes of Japanese Americans, confiscating personal documents and taking into custody Issei who had played leadership roles in their community. By February 16, 1942, the Department of Justice had 2,192 Japanese Americans in custody in special detention centers throughout the West.[10]

Mits remembers the shock and fear many Japanese Americans felt. He remembers families burning their records and photos for fear that the FBI would connect them to Japan. He also thinks that most Issei and older Nisei did not want to protest this treatment because they were afraid they and others would be separated from their families which would further endanger their families and community. One of his cousins was, in fact, picked up by the FBI. While he doesn't remember much about him, he thinks, "He was a harmless guy, active in the local Japanese Association which was sort of a chamber of commerce group not a spy organization." Mits has his suspicions on how the FBI came up with their lists of individuals in the local area to detain: "There was a rumor that a local Nisei was an informer for the FBI. He had been fairly well-liked before the war but due to his many associations with the white community – even becoming some kind of 'honorary sheriff's deputy' – we all knew he had turned in innocent people to make himself look good." Mits has no proof and doesn't want to "name any names" because of this. But outside of identifying specific informants, his suspicions in general are not off base. Incidents of Japanese Americans working with military and FBI agents to spy on their community and help draw up lists of suspects (sometimes for direct personal gain) has been documented in a confidential report commissioned by the Japanese American Citizens League to study its organizational role during the internment period[11]

The removal of the Issei leaders crippled the community. Older Nisei were thrust into leadership roles. Mits felt that the community tried to band together and remembers his parents relying heavily on his oldest brother to find out "what was going on." He remembers going to meetings of the local Japanese Association, called the "Tri-City Association" due to the fact that it included the Japanese Americans who resided in the Sunnyvale, Mountain View, and the Cupertino areas. As a testament to the tight-knit nature of the local Japanese American community, the association had even considered moving the entire community out of California in the hopes of finding better treatment in Utah. Mits recalls that the, "association sent three representatives out to the Salt Lake City area to see if this would make sense… I think they went in January and saw how cold it was and how harsh the conditions were there in general. They reported that it wasn't such a good idea after all."

---

[7] Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. *Personal Justice Denied: Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians* (Washington D.C., The Civil Liberties Public Education fund, 1997), p. 54.

[8] For a description of the pre-war surveillance of Japanese Americans see Bob Kumamoto, "The Search for Spies: American Counterintelligence and the Japanese American Community, 1931 – 1942" *Amerasia Journal* 6 (1979).

[9] Commission on the Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. op. cit., p. 54.

[10] Ibid., p. 55

[11] A copy of this report was provided to the author by Mr. Koshiyama. It is an internal organizational document written by Debra Lim for use within the JACL only.

The new Nisei leadership were members of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), an organization founded in 1930 by Issei and Nisei as an advocacy group for Japanese Americans. Central to the JACL ideology was a belief that American institutions promoted economic and racial progress, and an unquestioning loyalty to America; in fact one of the predecessor organizations of the JACL was called the "American Loyalty League."[12] In addition, membership was restricted to American-born Japanese Americans. A state department special investigator charged with determining whether Japanese Americans represented a threat to national security described such Nisei as exhibiting a "pathetic eagerness to be Americans."[13] With the Issei leaders gone, the JACL Nisei began to run the meetings of the local Tri-City Association. Mits recalls that, "The JACL was trying to get everyone to become members and were always encouraging everyone to keep together for protection. We all joined."

As a younger Nisei, Mits was not privy to the discussions taking place within the JACL leadership on the local level, let alone on the national level. The JACL in fact, had become one of the only national Japanese American organizations having FBI authorization to continue operation after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.[14] In addition, when the War Relocation Authority (WRA) was established by Executive Order 9102 on March 18, 1942, to oversee the internment of Japanese Americans, the JACL national leadership was invited to work directly with the WRA administration.[15] Clearly, the authorities felt that JACL views aligned best with the growing move towards expulsion and mass imprisonment of Japanese Americans.

Mits witnessed the unveiling of a carefully orchestrated plan for the expulsion and imprisonment of Japanese Americans and recalls following the succession of orders and restrictive curfews made against his community: "When the executive order was announced, I knew something really big was up and I began to suspect the very worst." On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 authorizing the Secretary of War or any military commander designated by the Secretary, to establish military areas, and to exclude therefrom "any or all persons."[16] The "any or all persons" was clearly aimed at Japanese Americans but mention of race had been purposefully left out in order to "enable the military, in absence of martial law to immediately circumvent the Constitutional safeguards of over 70,000 American citizens and

Evacuee mothers, with their children, at Santa Anita Assemly Center, 1942. Photogrpher: Clem Albers. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

to treat the Nisei as aliens."[17] Once the military command was established over the West Coast war zone, various restrictions on travel and strict curfews were established, all governing the movement of Japanese Americans. Mits doesn't remember specific incidents of his being hindered by the curfews and travel restrictions, but does recall some of the ridiculous situations some of the older Nisei and Issei who had farms and businesses were placed in: "Some farmers needed to travel from their homes to get to their fields but couldn't because of the way the restricted zones were set up. Others needed to go from the 'country' to various towns to get things they needed like medicine, but had a hard time because of the restrictions."

What seemed to Mits to be never ending announcements of new restriction orders fed the suspicions and hostilities of the white community against the Japanese Americans. Every day, Mits would read in the local paper of wild rumors involving Japanese, enemy landing fields, and transmitters being put into operation. He, along with all other Japanese Americans, were eventually ordered to turn in any radio equipment they had as well as flashlights and instruments that could be used to "signal enemy aircraft." In high school, Mits's teachers began to use the term "Jap" all of the time and whenever one of them said "Jap" they and all of his non-Nisei classmates would glare at him. This treatment was just too much for Mits: "I finally felt so bad that I just had to quit school. I was only a few months away from graduation. I had a friend who also quit a month later." Many of Mits's peers – even those who decided to stick it out – would soon be unable to graduate.

[12] Takahashi, Jere. *Nisei/Sansei: Shifting Japanese American Identities and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1997), p. 60.
[13] Weglyn, Michi. *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1976), p. 41.
[14] *Mercury Herald*, February 28, 1942, (San Jose).
[15] JACL internal report by Debra Lim, section entitled, "War Relocation Authority." Ibid.
[16] Bosworth, Allan R. *America's Concentration Camps* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), p. 65.
[17] Weglyn. op. cit. p. 69

Expulsion and Imprisonment

Mits remembers seeing the notices that appeared everywhere overnight. They read, "Instructions to All Persons of Japanese Ancestry," and stated that he, his family, and every Japanese American would be "evacuated" from the area. Mits wasn't surprised. There had been rumors of an "evacuation," and given the growing tangle of various restrictions and increasing tensions, he could see it coming. He doesn't remember a lot of the details after this, though he does remember the arrangements that had to be made. Included among these were decisions regarding what to bring because the orders limited family possessions to only "that which can be carried by the individual or family." Mit's family was poor, and now would lose most of what little they had.

On May 26, 1942, all of the Mountain View area Japanese Americans converged on the Mountain View train station and waited to be sent to an assembly center.[18] No one seemed to know where they were going or how long they would be gone. Mits thinks some of the local JACL leaders may have known, but, "nobody was talking about it, and nobody seemed in the mood to talk about anything anyway." Mits's family, relatives, and other community members waited at the train station for several hours with all of their belongings piled up around them. It was getting hot and the children were hungry and crying. Mits recalls that someone brought in some food – perhaps prepared by a local church or service organization. He is not sure who donated it, but the officials in charge had apparently left it out in the sun and it was obviously spoiled: "They had given milk in containers, and they started to explode! I felt so bad for the children, the older kids and grown-ups could take it, but not them." Finally the wait was over and they boarded the trains. Mits and his family had now become "evacuees," a euphemistic term created by the Wartime Civil Control Administration that now was in charge of their lives. They couldn't see out the windows because the curtains were all drawn tightly closed and armed military police officers told the "evacuees" not to touch them.[19]

Mits did not know it at the time, but his train was headed for Santa Anita Race Track near Arcadia in Southern California, one of fifteen "reception centers" or "assembly centers" built by hastily converting race tracks, fairgrounds, stadiums, and whatever venues the Army could find.[20] These were meant to serve as temporary detention points to gather the Japanese Americans while more permanent concentration camps could be completed. Under the supervision of the War Department with Works Progress Administration staff, the assembly centers were initially plagued by food shortages and poor housing conditions. The "evacuees" had to subsist on Army rations and due to a sudden price increase in fresh fruits and vegetables, local produce was not added to their diet. Ironically, the skyrocketing prices for the produce was caused by the mass dislocation of Issei and Nisei farmers and farm workers. Santa Anita Assembly Center was the largest, with 18,719 men, women, and children forced to endure these conditions.[21]

After a long, hot ride on the train, Mits remembers arriving at Santa Anita Assembly Center, "We took the few bags we had and they put us on trucks and took us to the horse stables…we were shocked to realize that this is where they were going to make us stay. They had whitewashed them and put asphalt on the floor boards but they still smelled of manure." Mits recalls being in a continuous state of shock for the first week. Being a farm boy, he had never seen so many Japanese crowded in one place. In the assembly center, Mit's family was separated from other Mountain View area families: "Our community was broken up and we had no leadership at all. We just waited to see what was going to happen." He was soon put to work making camouflage nets for the military and without anything else to do, he was grateful for something to keep himself preoccupied, although the contradiction didn't escape the young man: "Here we were making something to protect American armed forces when they didn't trust us and thought we were the enemy."

Mits, who had never been able to back down when being treated unfairly, felt he could do nothing. The disorientation and uncertainty hemmed him in. He thought it best to take a "wait and see" attitude and believes most felt the same, "I think the average age was somewhere around 17 years of age… a lot of us were just too

MPs at Santa Anita Assembly Center, 1942. Photographer: Clem Albers. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

[18] *Bittersweet: Memories of Old Mountain View* (Mountain View: Mountain View Public Library, 1980) photo section.

[19] Ibid., p. 129

[20] Weglyn, op. cit., p. 79

[21] Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, op. cit., p. 138

young and inexperienced to deal with something on this level." Mits's feelings surely were not out of the ordinary for most Japanese Americans, although it is interesting to note that some organized forms of resistance did take place in the assembly centers – albeit short-lived – including at Santa Anita. Some 800 Nisei who had volunteered to make the camouflage nets organized a sit-down strike in protest of the lack of food.[22] Communication in the assembly centers was tightly controlled and the swift action taken in many of the cases by Army personnel to remove "trouble makers" makes it understandable why Mits didn't know of this strike.

Looking west on F Street with Heart Mountain looming in the background, 1942. Photographer: Tom Parker. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

In September 1942, after four months at Santa Anita, Mits's family got on another train. He had heard rumors that they were being sent to Wyoming, but no one he knew seemed to know for sure. The rumors had been correct, and Mits found himself in Heart Mountain, Wyoming, one of the ten "relocation centers" run by the newly established Wartime Relocation Authority (WRA). Mits remembers the feeling of gloom among the train's passengers as they looked out over the desolate, barren, and wind-swept landscape. Moreover, winter had come early to Wyoming that year and they would face one of the harshest winters in a long time, with heavy snow and temperatures of colder than 20 degrees below zero recorded regularly.[23] As with the assembly centers, the hasty construction of the camps and poor planning translated into severe hardships for the internees. The rows and rows of barracks had not been insulated and insufficient coal and food rations meant many of the camp's prisoners went to bed at night cold, hungry, and sick. As a Californian, Mits was not used to the cold and especially remembers literally having his wet hair freeze whenever he made the trek to the latrine one–half block away from his family's room.

As an able-bodied young man, Mits was put to work right away. He remembers being put on an "ash crew" – they gathered the ashes from the coal burners in a truck and drove the load out of the camp and dumped it. Perhaps unfortunately for Mits, he did not know of the efforts made by fellow internees who had come to Heart Mountain camp before him to demand better working and living conditions. Workers who were responsible for unloading the coal delivered to the camp by train had walked off their jobs demanding higher wages (they were paid $12 to $19 per month) and work clothing including gloves. Their strike was broken by the administration's recruitment of volunteers from the internees and the anti-strike position taken by the JACL-run camp newsletter, the *Heart Mountain Sentinel*. Sometime soon after that, the hospital workers also walked off their jobs, with the Japanese American medical staff complaining that they were paid less than the white staff and were forced into a subordinate role even it they were better qualified than the non-Japanese American staff. The administration broke this strike by rounding up the ringleaders and shipping them off to a special detention center that had been set-up in Leupp, Arizona.[24]

"Loyalty Oath"

Heart Mountain was described by some historians as a "happy camp. (Girdner)"[25] However, organized resistance and continuing conflict that actually took place there belies that image. Besides the short-lived strikes, the first internees to arrive at the camp organized ad hoc groups to protest the overall poor living conditions in the

[22] Weglyn, op. cit., p. 82

[23] Nelson, op. cit. p. 24

[24] Daniels, Roger. *Concentration Camps: North American Japanese in the United States and Canada During World War II* (Malabar, Florida: Krieger, 1993), p. 128.

[25] Girndner, Audrey, and Anne Loftis. *The Great Betrayal* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 247.

camp. Most significantly was the direction the protests later took as they left the issue of camp conditions and began to target the very essence of the internment: the violation of constitutional rights.

What caused the internees to take their resistance to a higher level was a series of events that happened early in the history of the camp. Soon after the first wave of internees arrived at Heart Mountain, the camp officials began to build tall, barbed-wire fences between each of the nine, evenly-spaced, 40 foot guard towers that had originally served as the primary deterrent to escape. A series of meetings and protests were organized demanding that the fence not be constructed. A petition signed by roughly half of the adult population of the camp was sent to WRA authorities in Washington D.C. Internees used the barbed wire fences as a symbol that exposed the hypocrisy of the WRA's claim to build "normal communities" that would retain for the Nisei "former status in respect to citizenship, freedom of movement, and speech."[26] They felt that the construction of the fences demonstrated that Heart Mountain was indeed a "concentration camp" and they were clearly "prisoners of war."

The camp's military police aided in the agitation of the internees towards this new course when, acting overzealously, they arrested thirty-two internees for trying to escape. The "escapees" were children, the oldest an eleven-year-old, who had gone sledding on a hill outside of the newly-built fences. A series of protests and open letters printed in the *Heart Mountain Sentinel* questioned the constitutionality of the entire internment.[27] While nothing came out of these actions immediately, they did set the stage for a serious showdown over the so-called "loyalty oath" and the attempt to draft young men out of the camp and into the armed forces. And, out of this episode arose particular spokespeople for the resistance, including Frank Inouye, Kiyoshi Okamoto, and Isamu Horino.

Mits doesn't recall the turmoil over the fences and the children's arrests, but does remember Inouye, Okamoto, and Horino. Frank Inouye formed the Heart Mountain Congress of American Citizens charging the WRA and JACL with not allowing true representation of the internees' concerns. Their first target was what became known as the "loyalty oath." Both the Army and WRA had begun to discuss ways of documenting the loyalty of the internees. Both admitted, "that only a small minority of the evacuees, if any, constitute any threat to the country's security." The Army was interested in drafting Nisei into a segregated combat unit, and the WRA wanted some way to segregate the "loyal" from the "disloyal" so that some Nisei might be allowed to resettle in parts of the country outside of the Pacific War Zone. Both the Army and the WRA drafted questionnaires and in late February 1943, pressured all internees to fill them out. The key questions were numbers 27 and 28. In the Army version they read as follows:

> #27: Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States, wherever ordered?
>
> #28 Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attacks by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?[28]

Many Nisei resented being subjected to a loyalty questionnaire that implied that they had a previous "allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor." Others were critical of the "Jim Crow" like segregation of the proposed combat unit they would be place in. Inouye, chairman of the Heart Mountain Citizens Congress, urged the internees not to cooperate until the government agreeded to fully honor their citizenship rights. In the February 13, 1943, issue of the *Heart Mountain Sentinel*, Inouye wrote: "We should, we must demand now our true status in American life… We must demand that our names be cleared; and have it read to the world that there had never been a justification for our evacuation."[29]

Mits vividly recalls the sudden explosion in the level of discussion. He had thought the young Nisei didn't want to talk about anything, but when the possibility of instituting the draft came up: "Everyone was discussing it, and most Nisei of draft age were mad and felt that it was ridiculous that they should be forced to answer this so-called loyalty oath and serve in the Army when they had their rights taken away." Organizing efforts successfully kept the number of Nisei respondents to a minimum. Efforts by the WRA administration and JACL were unsuccessful in convincing the Nisei to comply. The Army decided to make concessions to the opposition and announced that they would allow "qualified" or "conditional" answers to questions 27 and 28 rather than a simple "Yes" or "No" answer. Mits decided to give a conditional answer on his loyalty oath: "In answer to question 27, I said, yes, I will serve in the armed forces, if you give me back my rights and let my family free. For question 28, I answered, yes and wrote that I never had any allegiance to the Emperor in the first place!" Mits also wondered what validity the questionnaire had: "You could answer it any old way you like, so how could it be used to tell if you were loyal or not? It was ridiculous!"

In March 1943, the Army decided to postpone initiating the draft and instead announced that it would take volunteers into a special segregated combat unit, including loyal Japanese aliens. Out of the

[26] Nelson op. cit., p. 84.
[27] Ibid., p. 85.
[28] Ibid., p. 99.
[29] Ibid., pp. 105 – 106.

Assembling and folding the Heart Mountain Sentinel*, 1943. Photographer: Tom Parker. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*

1,800 Nisei and 500 aliens eligible, only thirty-eight volunteered, with half failing their physicals.[30] Faced with failure, the Army and the WRA had to re-evaluate their approach and next embarked on a segregation program aimed at isolating "disloyals" into the Tule Lake Camp near the California-Oregon border. Using the information gathered by the questionnaire, the Army began to separate the "loyals" (those who answered "yes, yes" to both questions 27 and 28) from the "disloyals" (those who answered "no, no"), and by September 1943, 903 internees deemed "disloyal" were shipped from Heart Mountain to Tule Lake.[31] Mits felt that during this period things were at a lull: "The excitement had died down and the Nisei were feeling bitter." He doesn't remember much about the segregation policy, but does say that: "I was not a 'no, no' and made it clear that I would serve in the Army if they gave me back my rights."

If the Army had hoped that their segregation policy would stop the resistance and clear the way for the draft, they found out how wrong they were. On January 20, 1944, War Secretary Henry Stimson announced that "normal selective service procedures would again be applied to Japanese Americans, both inside and outside the camps."[32] Mits recalls the uproar this caused at Heart Mountain and the formation of the Fair Play Committee: "Kiyoshi Okamoto was a Hawaiian-born Nisei who had been going around calling himself the 'Fair Play Committee of One' while making a lot of demands about the conditions in the camp, the injustices and all, and when the draft issue came up again, I guess his Fair Play Committee of One became a new group with a lot more than one!"

Okamoto began running open forums throughout the camp, agitating Nisei to demand that their status as citizens be clarified. He began to draw sizable crowds and the level of opposition increased dramatically. By March 1944 the Committee was distributing hundreds of anti-draft circulars and sending out speakers to any group interested in discussing the issue. This incited the *Heart Mountain Sentinel* to wage a month-long campaign against the Committee resulting in a plethora of name calling and accusations that Mits remembers well: "I think the JACL, especially Bill Hosokawa (editor of the *Heart Mountain Sentinel*) saw Okamoto as a real danger because his committee was refusing to go along with the JACL view of cooperating without question, so they really got into it, calling any supporters of the Committee foolish, traitors… deluded." In turn the Committee members labeled the Sentinel staff as "appeasers," and "stooging… JACL bigwigs."[33] Behind all of this, however, lay deep moral and ethical questions that young men such as Mits were required to answer for themselves: should they oppose the draft and face severe penalties either as a matter of individual principle or in the hopes that their actions would somehow force the government to admit its wrongdoing? Or should they follow the path of collaboration the JACL was promoting and potentially sacrifice their lives in hopes that the action would prove the community's loyalty once and for all?

Mits heard many other Nisei talk about how they weren't going to go into the army and how they felt it was wrong. He also talked about the issue with his older brother who had signed him up as a member of the Fair Play Committee. Mits remembers trying to go to a meeting but not being able to get in because it was so crowded: "My friend and I were standing at the doorway and there were people crowded all around. I couldn't see or hear very much. My friend got bored and wasn't that interested anyway and encouraged me to go see if there was a movie playing in the hall instead." While Mits never became active in the Fair Play Committee, the debates and discussion had a big impact on him. He began to feel that it was a matter of principle: "How could I serve in the army when my family was in a concentration camp? It just didn't make sense. How could I go fight for democracy when the were denying it to me and

[30] Daniels. op cit., p. 121
[31] Ibid., p. 122.
[32] Ibid., p. 123

[33] Nelson, op. cit. p. 131.

my family? The Constitution has got to mean more – I just kept thinking that I had to do something, that I couldn't just go along."

The WRA and Army officials became alarmed at the level of opposition and entered into the debate deciding to use a simple tactic: eliminate the leadership. Officials announced that some incriminating evidence of Okamoto's disloyalty had been overlooked in previous reviews of his paperwork. He was taken into custody and shipped off to Tule Lake. Mits remembers what happened next: "Another leader of the Committee, Sam Horino, was mad after what happened to Okamoto. So he decides to demonstrate that as an American citizen he has been denied his most basic rights...that he cannot come and go as he wants from the camp… To make this point, he tries to walk out of the camp in broad daylight. He is quickly picked up by the guards and later shipped off to Tule Lake and branded as a disloyal." Other leaders were also interrogated and sent off as disloyals to Tule Lake even though none ever mentioned support for Japan and they stuck to their belief that their status as citizens must first be clarified.[34] The crackdown was not just aimed at the leadership, however. The administration decided to make an example out of any Nisei who refused to respond to his draft summons, arresting and taking into custody 54 Nisei draft resisters by the end of March 1944.

Jail and the Trial

In the midst of the political turmoil, Mits received his summons to report for a pre-induction physical. He remembers the notice but can't recall the exact date and time of his appointment. Mits's parents didn't talk much about the draft. Mits could tell they were worried, but thought they were leaving it up to him to decide. He told his brother that he wasn't going to go. His brother decided to enlist. Mits was not surprised: "While he didn't think things were fair he thought he was being practical and realistic…he told me that if it came to a court case, I would never win in a racist place like Wyoming. He simply said, 'I'll take my chances in the Army.'" But Mits's brother didn't try to discourage him and left it up to him to decide. This made sense to Mits, since his brother seemed to follow the Issei ways of doing "whatever had to be done for the sake of the group." But, Mits felt that he had to go a different route to try and save his community. This was a "quiet" period for Mits. He doesn't remember any of the other Nisei talking about how unfair it was or encouraging each other to resist: "When we started to receive our notices, everyone became quiet. We didn't even ask each other about it. I suppose those active in the Fair Play Committee probably did but I and some of the younger Nisei I knew didn't…" The time for Mits's induction came and went. A few hours later, federal marshals showed up at his family's barrack room. One called out his name. Mits left with the marshals not saying a word: "I know my family members who were there at the time were very upset but I just don't remember what they did or what they said…I think I just felt numb."

Mits was taken to the nearby town of Powell and spent several months in the county jail there. He was placed in a cell with another resister – there were 63 now in custody. Mits doesn't say a lot about jail, other than that "it was filthy…the county jail was old from 'Cowboy and Indian' days and looked like it hadn't been cleaned since then either." Later he was moved to a newer jail in the town of Casper which had slightly better conditions. He became friends with his cellmate and they stayed together during transfers: "We didn't talk much about the case, other than we felt we were going to win. I guess I was a bit naïve then. I really thought we could prove to America that the camps were wrong, and that when it went to trial, the court would have to side with us. I was naïve, I was very young! But at the time, I thought, under the law, how could they possibly justify what they were doing? I guess I really believed in the court system and didn't understand that it too could be manipulated."

Mits and the other 62 were transferred to a jail – another old and filthy one in Cheyenne, Wyoming in June 1944 to await trial. Mits doesn't recall any meetings with attorneys or anyone else, but was kept abreast of the situation by others. He learned that the Fair Play Committee had hired Denver attorney Samuel Menin who had provided counsel to the Committee earlier. On May 12, 1944, all 63 defendants were arraigned on charges of "willful and felonious failure to report for pre-induction physical examinations."[35] They pleaded "not guilty," and waived their right to a jury trail. Mits recalls that their attorney felt that they could not get a fair and impartial jury in Wyoming and counseled them to waive their right to a jury trial. As Mits leaned more about their attorney's strategy he felt disheartened: "Menin's approach was 'Perry Mason-like': he was going to try to use tricks and legal maneuvers to get us off…I had hoped he would make it into a jury trial about the Constitution and question the whole internment itself."

On June 12, 1944, the trail began with US District Court Judge T. Blake Kennedy presiding and US District Attorney Carl Sackett handling the prosecution. At the time, the trial was the largest mass trial in Wyoming history.[36] Menin tried to persuade the court that the defendants violated the draft orders only to clarify their citizenship status, which had been rendered uncertain by their internment. He argued that they did not do it due to malicious or felonious intent. The prosecution's case was very straightforward: they presented evidence of the resisters failure to show up for their pre-induction physicals, that they were eligible for the draft, and

[34] Daniels. op. cit., p. 126

[35] Nelson, op. cit., p. 140

[36] Ibid., p. 141

that they all belonged to the Fair Play Committee which implied conscious and willful intent to disobey. The trial ran until June 20, 1944.

Mits doesn't remember much about all of the legal arguments and procedures, but he does remember some particular incidents: "Our attorney tried to fool the prosecutors by having us all dress alike and getting us to have the same haircut. They needed to have the US marshal identify each and every one of us by name. Menin figured that with 63 of us, and with us all being Japanese, the white marshal wouldn't be able to do it, especially if we made it harder. He was right and the marshal became very flustered. The judge didn't like it though and told Menin to 'knock it off.'"

Mits also recalls one particularly exciting moment that he felt was quite telling: "Near the end of the trial, Menin and Pickett (the assistant prosecutor) got into a yelling match involving some remark made by Pickett questioning why the attorney would try to defend people like us. I think Menin raised an objection and Pickett tells him to sit down or he would make him sit down. Menin throws off his jacket and yells, 'Your honor, make him try it!' and they almost get into a fight. In the meantime the lead prosecutor, Sackett was rocking back and forth in his chair with a big smirk on his face. Suddenly he rocks too far back and goes flipping all the way over and lands on the floor. We, being very young, bust out hollering and laughing and slapping our knees. We didn't like Sackett much and thought it was really funny. Well, Sackett gets back up and he is mad as hell, with his face beet red and yells at us, 'You won't be laughing when you hear what the verdict is!' We all became stone quiet. So I think he knew all along that the

Trial of 63 draft resisters, Mits is 11th from the left, front row. US District Court, Cheyenne, Wyoming, May 10, 1944. Courtesy of California Sate University Sacramento, Japanese American Archival collection.

judge would find us guilty – he let the cat out of the bag!”

On June 26, Mits remembers being brought back to the courtroom to hear the judge read his verdict. Judge Kennedy finds the 63 defendants guilty as charged and sentences each to three years in a federal penitentiary. Throughout the trial, Mits remembers his confidence gradually wearing away, and with Sackett’s outburst at the end, he expected to be convicted: “But I still felt shocked and numb. I still felt like saying, ‘How could you do this?’” While he felt he was naïve to believe the courts would be impartial and uphold the Constitution, Mits does point out that resisters in other camps weren’t treated the same: “I later learned that in Tule Lake the Nisei that refused to serve out of that camp were also tried but were not convicted because the judge was Jewish and understood their situation.” On July 22, 1944, US District Judge Louis Goodman dismissed charges against 26 Japanese Americans who refused to follow selective service orders. He, in fact, ruled that the internees were under custody by presidential proclamation and were not free agents “nor is any plea he may make free or voluntary; and hence he is not accorded due process in this very proceeding.”[37] Most telling was his closing remark: “It is shocking to the conscience that an American citizen be confined on the ground of disloyalty and then be compelled to serve in the armed forces or prosecuted for not yielding to such compulsion.”[38]

Half of the “Heart Mountain Draft Resisters” as they became known, were sent to Leavensworth Penitentiary in Kansas, and the other half, including Mits, went to McNeil Island Penitentiary in Washington. At McNeil Island, Mits and his fellow resisters were housed with conscientious objectors, mostly religiously-based, including Mennonites and Quakers. The jailers seemed to be used to the conscientious objectors and liked the fact that they were easy to deal with: “We weren’t treated that badly there, I think the jailers knew that we weren’t hardened criminals and they just wanted to get on with their jobs. The objectors we were with – even if we didn’t share their same convictions – showed us a lot of respect and we got along well.” Mits remembers being very lonely there, missing his family and community. Sheepishly he also mentions: “Well, I was a young man, so I really missed all of the social activities in camp, even if it was a concentration camp – I mean seeing young women especially.” Mits served his time there until August 1946. He was released with $25 and a “cheap suit.”

Government official addresses internees about Selective Service procedures at Heart Mountain, 1944. Photographer:Hikaru Iwasaki. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Post War Period

With the war over and the internees allowed back to the West Coast, Mits came back to the Mountain View area to find his family. They were living in Los Altos at the time in a converted “tank house.” The former internees had a hard time finding work and housing and had to start all over. Mits helped his family and never talked much about what had happened to him: “I think the community was so busy just trying to survive, they didn’t want to talk about the camps yet. Only a few times did someone make an issue about me being a

[37] Mercury Hearld. July 23, 1944
[38] Ibid.

draft resister. We were both doing some volunteer work for the community. I knew he knew who I was. He told me, he 'wore the uniform' and I didn't, and he was smarter than me 'cuz he became a lawyer. It was really childish." Mits's brother, James, being pragmatic, didn't question what Mits had done. James had served in the Military Intelligence Service in the Pacific and seemed to want to forget about the whole thing: "He just felt that we had done what we thought we should do at the time and we were both treated unfairly. He just didn't want to dwell on it anymore. I felt responsible for making sure the whole family did OK." While Mits resigned himself to keeping quiet about his experiences, he knew that some day he wanted to "set the record straight."

In December 1947, the issue came up again. President Truman issued an amnesty for more than 1,500 persons convicted of selective service violations, including the resisters.[39] Mits remembers feeling very relieved; now he wasn't a convicted felon anymore and in a small way, the President had recognized some wrong doing: "I felt good about it, but I still wanted to hear some kind of apology and recognition that we did the right thing."

Mits and his oldest brother sharecropped in Sunnyvale and took care of their family. Eventually they both went into the chrysanthemum growing business in San Jose. They eventually sold their business and Mits, after getting married and starting his own family, took a job with a local school district until his retirement. He never talked about his experience much other than now and then with some of his fellow resisters who still lived in the area: "But most of them wanted to keep quiet about it. They didn't want to get ostracized for being resisters and going against the JACL." Mits's wife, Mizue, whom he met in Japan while visiting relatives, seemed to pick up from the other Nisei not to mention about Mits's wartime experiences: "I think the resisters' wives tried to protect their families and didn't want it to get out. They had enough of controversy."

But Mits, being one to never back down, just couldn't forget. When he attended a reunion of Heart Mountain internees during the 1970s, he remembers seeing Bill Hosokawa (a prominent JACL leader, author and editor of the camp newspaper during the internment) there and on the spur of the moment found himself walking up to him and asking: "When is the JACL going to apologize for ruining the lives of the resisters? When is the JACL going to admit it made a mistake? I just found myself saying this to Hosokawa, I hadn't planned it or anything, it just came out. Hosokawa was shocked and started trying to defend the JACL, but than just turned away." This incident made Mits realize that he still had a lot of anger inside of him, and now that he had tried to articulate it he knew what he was seeking, an apology from the JACL.

[39] Daniels. op. cit., photo section with reprint of *Star Bulletin* article.

During the early 1980s, a movement to demand reparations from the US government for Japanese Americans interned during the war began to pick up speed. A number of leaders of this movement were Sansei, or third generation Japanese Americans – the children of Nisei. Mits was quite curious about this movement and heard that a local San José organization, the Nihonmachi Outreach Committee, was holding a "Day of Remembrance" program to commemorate the date Executive Order 9066 was signed. Mits was a bit skeptical and wondered if they would know anything about the resisters. He also questioned whether they would just promote the JACL's views. His own children had shown little interest in his war experiences and he doubted that other Sansei would either. But it didn't turn out that way: "I was very surprised to see young people so interested in what happened back then. And also, they seemed so committed to justice and seeking redress for what happened to their parents," recalls Mits. He was further surprised to find out that the keynote speaker, a Sansei woman named Susan Hayase,[40] was aware of the Heart Mountain Draft Resisters and encouraged him to come and speak to the group about it. This piqued his interest and started his career as a redress activist.

Mits began to speak at community forums, workshops, and conferences. He found that there were many in the Japanese American community that didn't hate the resisters and in fact saw them as "heroes." He became rejuvenated: "I felt that I could now tell the story to people who really wanted to hear it. There were still some Nisei that would say bad things about me and the resisters, but I didn't feel so cynical anymore." One incident in particular was a real eye-opener to Mits: "At one program I was asked to speak on a panel with a Nisei veteran who had served in the segregated combat unit, the 442/100. His name was Rudy Tokiwa. I wasn't sure what to expect. I wondered if he would slam the resisters and say we were traitors as some had said." Tokiwa had lied about his age in order to get into the Army when it started to take Japanese American volunteers. He won numerous medals and was at most of the major battles the 442/100 was involved in. He walked with a cane due to serious wounds he received in combat. Mits got a chance to talk to him before and after the program. Tokiwa had nothing against the Heart Mountain Draft Resisters, and instead, thought that what they did took a lot of courage. He, echoing Mits's brother James, felt everyone had to make choices then that they felt were correct. He couldn't fault Mits for following his conscience.

In 1988, President Reagan signed into law the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 mandating $20,000 individual payments to Japanese Americans interned during the war and offering an official apology. Upon hearing the news, Mits felt ecstatic but he also had other feel-

[40] Spouse of the author.

ings: "I felt so relieved…some JACL people had told me that it would be all my fault – the fault of the resisters if Japanese Americans didn't get redress. I guess they thought that we were traitors and our existence would make Japanese American loyalty still questionable…"

In February 1992, Mits received a special recognition from the Nihonmachi Outreach Committee at a "Day of Remembrance" program. He didn't know he had been selected for the recognition until that evening when he was called up to the podium facing the 300 or so people in attendance. Susan Hayase, gave an introduction, stating: "…not knowing whether the response would be hostile or open, he has been speaking out at educational forums and conferences about his experiences. His work has helped to provide a catalyst for the recent, official acknowledgment by the JACL that their wartime labeling of the resisters as traitors was wrong. These acts have begun the healing of major wounds in the fabric of our community."[41] His award read: "In appreciation for your courageous efforts to bring to light an untold chapter of Japanese American history: the story of the Heart Mountain Draft Resisters." Mits was given a standing ovation. He was visibly moved: "I felt so good that evening...I still have the award hanging up on my wall; in fact I nailed it up so it can't be taken down! It meant a lot to me because it meant that resisters and what we did will be remembered for the right reasons."

While the JACL did admit in 1992 that it had made mistakes during the war years in calling the Heart Mountain Draft Resisters, "traitors," it has yet to apologize officially to them. "I would still like to hear the apology, but it doesn't burn me up as much as it used to. We won redress, and I have been able to tell the resisters' story…those are the most important things."

The story of Mitsuru Koshiyama illustrates how a richer and fuller appreciation of a historic event, such as the Japanese American internment, can be derived by interviewing an ordinary person. Granted he did not live in ordinary times, but Mits was not a famous nor powerful individual. He was not part of the elite of his community, and was in fact held in contempt by some of its leaders for many years. Mits represents the people who make up the "social histories from below" and whose stories can help revise our histories and bring to light and understanding a deeper grasp of the human element in all major historic events. As David Yoo states in the introduction of his book, *Growing up Nisei*: "Rather than being viewed as a people whose historical significance stemmed from their assimilation (or lack thereof) or their victimization, Nisei are portrayed as women and men who exercise decision-making power in their lives, interpreting and acting out their own history."[42]

[41] Hayase, Susan. Speech: "Day of Remembrance" – February 19, 1992, San Jose.
[42] Yoo. op. cit., p. 7

Bibliography

Bittersweet: Memories of Old Mountain View, an Oral History. Mountain View, CA: Mountain View Public Library, 1980.

Bosworth, Allan R. *America's Concentration Camps*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1967.

Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. *Personal Justice Denied: Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians*. Washington D.C.: Civil Liberties Public Education Fund, 1997.

"Conscience and the Constitution: A Story of Japanese America." Companion Web site for the PBS television special produced by ITVS, 2009. http://www.resisters.com (June 2000)

Daniels, Roger. *Concentration Camps North America: Japanese in the United States and Canada During World War II*. Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1993.

Lim, Debra. Internal report produced for the Japanese American Citizens League provided by Mitsuru Koshiyama.

Nelson, Douglas W. *Heart Mountain: The History of an American Concentration Camp*. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1976.

San Jose Mercury Herald, February 28, 1942 – July 23, 1944.

Takahashi, Jere. *Nisei/Sansei: Shifting Japanese American Identities and Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple University, 1997.

Weglyn, Michi. *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps*. New York: Morrow Quill, 1976.

Yoo, David K. *Growing Up Nisei: Race, Generation, and Culture Among Japanese Americans of California, 1924-49*. Urbana: University of Illinois, 2000.

Membership

October 2008 – February 2009

Special Gifts

Robert Grimm, Stella B. Gross Charitable Trust, Hispanic Foundation of Silicon Valley

Memberships

Patron Level — Robert Bettencourt, Audrey Butcher, William Cilker, Charles & Nan Geschke.

Sponsor Level — Elizabeth Archambeault, Vicki Atherton, Walter Barnes, Nancy Bratman, Dolores Chasuk, Elizabeth Cilker, Thelma Epstein, A.B. Farris, Louise Galindo, Cozetta Guinn, Yvonne & William Jacobson, Mike & LaDonna Kaku, Alice Lopina (Lopina Properties), Willys & Betty Peck, Ann Sebastian, Miss Nancy Weston, Edward White.

Supporter Level — Lawrence Coates, Donna Mae Flynn, Getrude Frank, Isaac Guinn, Mary Hanel, Linda Larson Boston, Charles Newman, Laverne Prentice, Linda Quintero, Doris Seney, Janet & Roger Smith, Betty Van Dyke

Family — Frances Bush, Bjarne Dahl, Jackson & Patricia Eaves, Philip Grasser, Nils & Marie Lang-Ree, Sharon Luciw, William Palmer, Eugene Ravizza, Charles Schultz, Robert Senkewicz, Gladys Thompson

Individual — Aubrey Abramson, May Blaisdell, Beverly David, John Cochrane, Laura Dominquez-Yon, Ellen Garboske, Linda Grodt, G.L. Holtzinger, Mary Jo Ignoffo, Joseph Meyers, Donna Miguelgorry, Paulette Noordhoff, Lynn Saunders, Mary Ann Skitarelic, Margaret L Smith, Marie Smith, Sue Ellen Sprague, Rose Mary Stevens, Edward & Margaret Swift, Paul Trimble

Foothill-De Anza Community College District Employee Payroll Deduction

The following employees of the college district have generously given though the college's payroll deduction plan:

Diana E. Argabrite, Gregory Anderson, Thomas Beggs, Mary Browning, Susan Bruch, Cindy Castillo, Karen Chow, Tracy Chung-Tabangcura, Judy C. Coleman, Gregory Druehl, Linda Elvin, Joyce Feldman, Denis Gates, Richard Hansen, David Howard-Pitney, Judy Miner, Judith Mowrey, Hieu Nguyen, Francisco Nunez, Robert Pierce, George Robles, Paul Setziol, Tom Strand, John Swensson, Renato Tuazon, Pauline E. Waathiq, Rhoda Wang, Pauline Yeckley

New Garden Exhibit Open for Viewing

CHC's exhibit on Saratoga Community Garden entitled "Roots & Wings, Saratoga Community Garden: 1972–1987, a Harmony of the Human Spirit and Natural Forces" will be open for early viewing by the end of April in time for the California Studies Conference at De Anza, Friday, April 24, 2009. A preview/reception for members is scheduled for May 9, 2009, 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Saratoga Garden flourished as an educational demonstration garden from the 1970s to the 1980s, promoting organic gardening and farming and connecting childhood education with the study of nature. It did this at a time when many of the concepts regarding sustainability and socially responsible food production were not widely acknowledged. The garden inspired many individuals in the Santa Clara Valley to go forth and create other gardens and projects or expand work already in progress.

Please attend our exhibit special preview on May 9th. In the meantime, please enjoy the following article excerpted from the garden's newsletter, "The Garden, " and published fall 1983. This article captures the broader social and spiritual goals of the garden as envisioned by many of its participants years ago.

You're invited...

to a preview of the California History Center Foundation's new exhibit:

Roots & Wings

Saratoga Community Garden: 1972–1987, a Harmony of the Human Spirit and Natural Forces

Saturday, May 9th, 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
California History Center, De Anza College
21250 Stevens Creek Blvd., Cupertino, CA 95014

For further information, contact Tom Izu at: (408) 864-8986
or by e-mail, izutom@deanza.edu

A REASONABLE FACSIMILE THEREOF

by

Bradley Z. Detering, Garden Director

Not to be "cliche", but I wish I had a nickel for every time I was asked, "What is The Garden?". With those nickels in hand, I surely wouldn't need to give my fond farewells to The Garden in order to finance my future travels. However, in my capacities as Garden Director and Public Relations Coordinator, I've found myself describing that which I have only recently come to know and appreciate. Yes, The Garden is a Community Service dedicated to providing education in environmental awareness and ecologically sound gardening practices, but there is much more to it than that. The Garden, your Garden, is . .

. . . A gentle reminder to people everywhere of their ability to grow and enjoy their own fresh food. A revolutionary concept? Maybe in these times, yet an age-old one practiced through necessity for much of history, and finding widespread relevance again, through necessity.

. . . An outdoor, living classroom with nature as a guide, teaching people the importance of observation and awareness of the natural world. An inspiring realization often dawns on one who learns to observe and become aware--that nature has nothing to learn from man, yet man has everything to learn from nature.

. . . A reason to appreciate man's recorded histories of wisdom and observations derived from the natural world. And, consequently, The Garden is a paradox that causes one to wonder why human beings' eternal search for a basic, beneficial relationship to the universe, the earth, our neighbors, our bodies, and ourselves has not brought us, as a species, back to the centuries of recorded wisdom learned in nature's classroom. Instead, we find ourselves "evolved" to the "age of information", where incredibly sophisticated tools process libraries of information in the blink of an eye--an age of dawning mass disillusionment and possible world-wide destruction--an interesting paradox.

. . . A never-ending ebb and flow, day to night, season to season, life to death to life, where nothing ever remains the same, and change is the only constant.

A most exciting and fulfilling discovery to be made is knowing The Garden as the richest resource imaginable for experiencing the infinite variety, interdependence, and magic of life. The Garden is a reawakening of the senses, the psyche, and the spirit, the joyous realization that fulfillment in life need not be bound to an ever-increasing set of complex variables, but instead, that fulfillment is life--unpretentious, beautiful, simple, and growing--in The Garden.

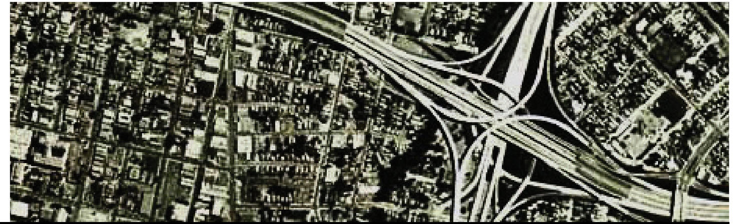
I want to give gracious thanks to all who support The Garden; their will keeps it alive. I also wish Dave, Yuval, Sally, Julie, Joe, Tina, Shirley, and Roxanne the best of my wishes and hopes. Their work will keep the greatest of places alive and growing--The Garden.

To New Beginnings,

Bradley Z. Detering

3

Scenes from a garden — collecting leaves for compost, double digging.



CALIFORNIA STUDIES CONFERENCE 2009

Debugging the Silicon Dream:
Real Life in a Virtual World

Friday, April 24, 2009 • 9am–5pm • De Anza College

21250 Stevens Creek Blvd, Cupertino, CA • CAMPUS CENTER CONFERENCE ROOMS A&B

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC • $35 suggested donation (no charge for students with valid student I.D.)

Pre-registration requested

For registration and information:
californiastudiesassociation.berkeley.edu/conference
or call Tom Izu at (408) 864-8986

California History Center & Foundation
A Center for the Study of State and Regional History
De Anza College
21250 Stevens Creek Blvd., Cupertino, CA 95014 (408) 864-8712
Fax: (408) 864-5486 Web: www.calhistory.org

Trianon Building Hours
Regular Hours:
Tuesday through Thursday
9:30 a.m to noon and 1-4 p.m.,
or call for an appointment.

Foundation Board
President — Thelma Epstein
Founding President — Louis Stocklmeir
Founding Executive Director — Walter Warren
Trustees — Vicki Atherton, Thelma Epstein, Cozetta Guinn, David Howard-Pitney, Bayinaah Jones, William Lester III, Leslie Masunaga, Willys I. Peck, Rowena Tomaneng, William Ziegenhorn

Ex-officio — Carolyn Wilkins-Greene

CHC Staff
Director — Tom Izu
Librarian — Lisa Christiansen

The Californian
Design
LeeAnn Nelson
Printing
A&M Printing

THE CALIFORNIAN

The Californian is published by the California History Center & Foundation. The Magazine is mailed to members as a benefit of annual membership in the CHC Foundation. Membership categories: $30 Individual; $40 Family; $50 Supporter; $100 Sponsor; $500 Patron; $1,000 Colleague.

Your contribution is tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. The value of goods received as a benefit of membership must be deducted from the amount of all contributions claimed as a deduction. CHCF members receive issues of *The Californian* magazine and members who contribute at the $50 level and above also receive a yearly Local History Studies publication.

© 2009, California History Center Foundation

ISSN: 0742-5465