

## Wicked Cool Stories

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Portraits, Interviews and Oral Histories

Andy Frazer

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# Molly Kitajima: Portraits of Japanese-American/Japanese-Canadian Internment

Keywords: Japanese-Canadian Internment, Winnipeg Assembly Center, Middle Church Manitoba, Camp Savage, Japanese Canadian Citizens League, Hastings Park

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Wicked Cool Stories  
Oral Histories

**Project:** Wicked Cool Stories  
**Interviewee:** Molly Kitajima (1925-2014)  
**Interviewer:** Andy Frazer  
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**Biographical Note:** Before I met Molly Kitajima, I did not know that during WWII, Canada forcibly moved people of Japanese descent away from the west coast. Molly was a native of the Surrey and Delta region in British Columbia. During WWII, Molly's family was forcibly evacuated to the Winnipeg Assembly Center, and were eventually moved to a large sugar beet farm in Middle Church, Manitoba for the duration of the war. Molly's physical energy and endurance was amazing. When I met Molly in 2011 she was 86 years old *and teaching Taiko drumming!*

**Molly Kitajima:** My father kept adding on another room every time another couple of kids were born; a two-bedroom house became like a five-bedroom house, you know? But we had a farm, and it was sufficient. We never were hungry. We didn't have a lot, we were poor farmers, but we were very, very fortunate not, you know, have to go on welfare or relief or anything else. My father said we'd never go on relief. I mean, that was something the Japanese people never did. We always helped each other if they needed any help, you know? So, that's the way our life was.

My father was very, very active in the community, and so he was the first to bring in electricity into the farm area. The water system, their co-op brought the water in from the mountains, and pipelining too so we could have water for our animals and chickens and ourselves. And so he was a very far-thinking person. My father came when he was 15 and he went to Hawaii. And his father was here working on the railroad. And when my father landed on Hawaii, he had some relatives there and he fooled around there. And when he decided to come to the United States, they closed the door.

And so my father went to Canada. So before my grandfather left to go home to Japan, he went to Canada and saw his son, only son, and told him he was sending a bride for him. So my father lived in Canada. And so my mother, who was not 16, 15, my grandfather picked

her and sent her to Canada. So she came as a picture bride, or a chosen bride. So she was 15 when she came to Canada.

The year the war broke out, the year before that, my father fell heir because he was the only son. So he fell heir to all the property in Japan. So my father took off to Japan. And he went to Japan and they were selling the property to an airfield or something like that. So my father went there. And he thought he was going to live in the life of luxury, so he had not planned to come back to Canada. But when he saw they were taking ironwork and steel and everything from his house and everything, he said, "Oh gosh, they're planning for war against the United States." So my father, the big mouth that he had, he said, "You think you're going to fight against the United States with all those tin can bolts and stuff like that?" You know, because he could see that they were taking in, you know, all the metal they can get from all over the place. So he was saying, you know, "You're not going to beat the United States with those kinds of ammunition," and stuff like that. So they gave him an ultimatum: "Either you get out of here, or we're going to throw you in prison." So my father took the fastest boat he could get out and he came back to Canada.

But the next boat turned around in September and went back to Japan. So my father was on the last boat that came from Japan to Canada.

### **Growing up in British Columbia:**

[My mother] didn't have any children until she was 19, but after she came and my oldest sister - who is now 95 - she was the first born. And my mother had six of us every year. So I was 10 years younger than my oldest sister. And then my mother didn't have any children for seven years. And then she had one every year for four years. So there was 10 of us in 20 years, yeah. So it was a big family. But we were not wealthy or anything, but we were not poor either. I mean, I didn't think of us poor, you know.

But that year, it was the first time that strawberry was \$1 a crate or something, and eggs were 15 cents a dozen. We were really, really, very, very happy with the economy in British Columbia. We couldn't hardly believe, you know, that...

### **Outbreak of War:**

When he came home, he was saying, "They're preparing for war, they're preparing for war." He's the one telling us, you know. So when December 7 happened, we had in Canada, we had what they called the JCCA, which is the Japanese Canadian Citizens League. So my

father took my sister and I and we went to this meeting. And we were at this hall, which is another [inaudible] in the next town. And so we were there, sitting there at this meeting, and all of a sudden somebody comes running in and says, "They bombed Pearl Harbor! They bombed Pearl Harbor!" So they came into the meeting and said, "We got to disperse, it doesn't look good for us to be assembled here."

My sister, who is five years older than me, she got a ride home. Well here I am, 16 years old, I'm sitting on the sidewalk there, you know? And my father was going to come pick us up at 4 o'clock. He didn't know. I'm sitting there on the sidewalk, so this guy comes up and says, "You'd better go home." And I said, "Well, home is miles away." He was a bookkeeper for that co-op, so he said, "Wait until I finish up the thing and then I'll take you home." So that's when about a half hour or so, he came out and he drove me to our house. I went running into the house and telling my father, "Oh, they bombed Pearl Harbor!" He said, "Oh, I knew they were going to go to war." You know, because he saw that before. That's how he knew that that was going to be what was going to happen. So he wasn't surprised at all.

Right after December, they confiscated all the fishing boats from all our fishing [inaudible]. They took all our cameras, guns, radio, everything, and confiscated all that. And so my father was beginning to think... Then he heard that United States were talking about evacuation and incarcerating people. So he went around telling everybody, "You better not spend all your money." So somebody turned him in and he got thrown into the RCMP compound. So at that time, I guess my father was doing a lot of yelling there and so forth, so I don't know how long it was. They came and said, "Come and get your father, he's too noisy." So my mother said, "Somebody better go over and get him." They left it up to me to go and get him at the compound.

When I went to pick him up, to get him, he said, "We're going to go to Hastings Park<sup>1</sup>, which is just like Tanforan<sup>2</sup>. Same thing as Tanforan." All of our people from Vancouver Island and our relatives were there. So my father said, "We're going to go there on the way home." So he and I went to Hastings Park, which is not the park, it's the horse shed. That's where they were all at. So we went there and went to visit our relatives. And the memory that I have, that will be stuck in my mind forever was that these custodians were sweeping all this dust and stuff in the shed. And here were all these babies and little kids running around. This little Japanese lady who only spoke Japanese said to me, "I wish they wouldn't do that because they're raising the dust and we'd rather do our own housekeeping." I grabbed the broom, and I said, "The request is that they don't want you to do this. They have their own way." And so what the Japanese ladies do, is they get newspaper and they put it in a bucket

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<sup>1</sup> Hastings Park was a Japanese-Canadian Assembly Center in Vancouver, BC

<sup>2</sup> Tanforan Assembly Center, south of San Francisco, CA.

with water. They tear it up and they throw it all on the ground. And when they sweep, all the dust goes onto this paper. I had even forgotten about that, but that was what they, you know... So from that time on, I understand that the ladies, the mothers, they did their own housekeeping for what they want. But that was my own experience going to this horse shed, you know? They were all in these horse stalls.

All the people from Vancouver Island were brought in first. See, it's an island off of the coast. And so the young fellow that took me home that day, his father and mother were principals of the Japanese school on the island. So they were the first ones. All the minister, even the Christian minister, Japanese minister, people that had anything to do with the [inaudible], which is the embassy, anybody that had a hotel in Vancouver or Vancouver Island, all these people were brought in. And that's where they were brought, to the assembly. Most of them were not farmers. They were loggers, they were, you know... the men were immediately taken to road camps.

All the young eligible men, or they were what we called 'Issei,' first-born in Japan, but they were here as immigrants. They were taken. Some were what they called illegal, like we have here. They jumped ship and stuff like that. Some of those people were legals. And so they took all those people. So all the young men, first-generation people, were taken to road camps.

And all our people, the wives, they couldn't speak English either. These people that went to Japan and brought their wives and stuff, they were left helpless in our village. So we as young people used to go over to their house and buy their groceries, help them out with the babies and stuff like that, because we were of age to be able to help. We did no farm work.

My father, the minute we found out that we were going to be evacuated, he didn't care if the weeds went 10 feet tall. My father was known for having the cleanest and a weedless garden, the 10 acres of any farmer in the area. But my father said, "No, we are going to help all of our Japanese neighbors." We would go and stay overnight with some of the ladies that were pregnant. My mother and father thought, "Never mind about our... we are going to be evacuated, it doesn't matter." That's how we spent. And to me, at 16 years old, I didn't have to work. It was a pleasure. I would get on my bicycle and run all over the place to all the neighbors and see if they wanted anything or needed anything. But that's how we existed until we were evacuated.

And so, money that they had saved... So my father said, "Don't spend your money because you're going to lose it." You know, and so somebody turned him in. So my father kept saying, "If you sign over here that we're not going to be evacuated, I'll go back and tell them to build and to do all that." And they said, "Well we can't do that." So then, you know, my

father all yelling and screaming and saying, "That's all I want you to do, is sign over here saying that we will not be evacuated." Well, no. They knew we were going to be evacuated so my father, you know...

We in our village, most of our people, all the RCMP had their headquarters at our Japanese school. We had a Japanese school in our village and my father helped to build that, too. So we had these two Japanese schools. RCMP came and asked all of us older ones to come in and type and take data from all these families. So all the families in our neighborhood came, especially the men in the house, or they couldn't speak English. We were interpreters. So we did all the paperwork. All six of us, well my sister was already married, so five of us went down and did all of the paperwork on all their land and so forth, and all the paperwork on, you know, to record their belongings and stuff like that.

It's amazing, we didn't learn about a lot of things. We learned a lot about our neighbors or some people. This one lady, she comes and she says, "I'm not going with this man." Her husband. She's living with someone else, and she is not going to go with that man. She says, "I'll kill myself if I have to go." We told the RCMP the situation. They were compassionate enough to let her go with this man that she had been living with. And it was really amazing because we drew up separate papers, and he would be going to certain place and she would go into the same place. And we were surprised. I was telling my mother, she always said, "You Niseis (which is the second generation), have no respect and have no this and that." And I come home and I'd tell her, "What happened to Mrs. Yamasaki?" And she said, "Oh yeah, she's living with that man." And I'd go, "Oh? Is that alright?" And so my mother goes, "[inaudible]." But yeah. Through this paperwork that we did, that lady, she was forever grateful to my brother for working out the situation for her. She said her kids wouldn't do anything. They'd say, "No, you've got to go with dad." My brother said this is a situation. It was really amazing that we got her settled. That was a rare case.

### **Travel to the Road Camps:**

A lot of these people, husbands of these young Japanese wives, were sent up to road camps and we didn't even know where they were and they didn't know. But my mother heard about the road camp, that they were in road camps. So when we got ready to go, we were going on the train and we knew we were going on the train, we would be going through these road camps.

My mother killed about a hundred chickens and she roasted all these chicken. She made these bags of cookies and Japanese senpai[?] and all this stuff, all ready. When we boarded the train, we had like hundreds of these roasted chicken and all this stuff, and we got on the

train. It turned out to be because we helped the RCMP with a lot of the paperwork. Not only that, they had no place to go to eat. You know, we were way out in the country. They said to my brother, "Is there any place that we could go to eat our lunch?" My brother said, "My mother roasts these chickens like you won't believe." We could only sell chicken 25 cents on the whole. My mother cooked 25 chickens, and all the RCMP and the staff and everybody would come to our house and my mother would have baked potatoes and roast chicken and vegetables. Oh, and they paid my mother for that, you know, they paid my mother for that. But she cooked all their lunches at our house. When we got ready to go, they gave us the Pullman, the train. Our family were on the Pullman train and we loaded all this stuff. Everybody was only allowed to carry 175 pounds or what. They just looked the other way and we just took all this stuff and so when we got on the train and we started to go.

The second day in we were going up the Rocky Mountains, and here we see our people. My mother's throwing chicken out the window and all these little goodie bags. And one time we stopped between stops and here we saw our neighbors. And they just cried. They said, "How's my wife?" We had to leave them because we didn't know what was going to happen to them. But we were already now going. So we told them, "We did what we could. They're okay, they will be taken care of. But we had to leave before they did." They were so happy and they were so glad. And they said, "Oh, they got to eat roast chicken," and stuff like that. All going up the Rocky Mountains, even people wouldn't even know. We threw stuff out because my mother said, "They're in the road camps."

### **Train Ride to Manitoba:**

We were going to Manitoba and going to the immigration hall. Climbing up the Rocky Mountains, that was like two days. By the time we got out, it took us four days to get to Manitoba on the train. So we were climbing, and we went the northern route, so we went through Jasper. We had this young constable who was 19, one of the guards on my train. Front and back, each train had a constable on each end. The one constable I had was Clifford Dan and he was 19 years old. And so he befriended us. As we were going up he was saying, "I don't see any difference in you people."

On the second day he says, "In Jasper, at this train station they have the best apple pie. I'm going to take you off and we're going to have apple pie in this cafeteria in the Jasper station." I said, "Oh yes, that'll be nice." You know, what the heck's this 16-year-old with this handsome RCMP going to take you off the train. When they lowered the footstool to get off the train, I went to step off and the captain said, "Get her back on the train! Don't you know she's an enemy alien?" And Clifford Dan said, "I'm only going to get her an apple pie." He was so mad, he went in and he bought the apple pie. I'd never seen such a big apple pie

in my life but it was like this big. He comes back and he was so mad. He was angry about the whole situation that he couldn't take me off. Anyhow, the rest of the trip he kept saying, "Well I don't see anything different about you people, why are they taking you away?" He was grumbling and grumbling about that situation but we became fast friends. When we got to Manitoba, he went back and forth several times and brought other Japanese. Every time he'd look us up.

### **Winnipeg Assembly Center:**

We were still there. We were still there up until May at this assembly center because our farm wasn't ready. And our house wasn't ready, so we were one of the last ones out of the assembly center. We used to have to cook, or we used to have to, you know... It was just chaos. They had beds, just you know, 50 beds in a row and we all slept in these cots. Every day we got up, they fed us three meals a day, and then in fact we started organizing dances and stuff like that.

Nothing else to do. They would say, "You have to get a pass to go outside to go to the movies or anything like that." [inaudible] because we could get the passes easy. So my sister Jessi and I, we would go down to the RCMP and say, "We want a pass to go to the movie." And they'd say, "Okay, well who's going?" We'd get passes for the boys that want to take us to the movie. Yeah, and so it was great, great fun. We got fed three meals a day and so forth, so the hardship didn't come in until after we got to the farm. That's where all the immigrants I guess were housed before. It was like a three-story. Men were up on the third floor, we were on the second floor. And oh, the bathing facilities were so terrible. About 150 people and they got eight toilets. So my mother, she found a bathhouse around about two blocks away from the immigration hall. And it was five cents or something, I don't know, it couldn't have been very expensive because we could afford it, but we would get a permit and we'd go. The RCMP said, "You guys are the cleanest family I ever seen in my life." My mother would take all of us. The girls and my younger brothers, we'd go to this bathhouse about two blocks away. Every day we went. I think it was a nickel or something. Lots of people got permission but they were scared to ask. Where would they go? I mean, why would they go outside, just for a walk or something? But with us we had a purpose, or the fellas wanted to go to the movies, or something like that. But we organized dances and stuff right inside the assembly center. I have three older brothers and my sister and I, so there are five of us. But everybody, they really, really were happy that we got there because we organized a lot of the things.

People didn't realize that there are families that come like our family. There were eight of us: my mother, and then five of us older ones, and then I had three younger brothers and



sisters. So the farmers wanted us because we were a working crew in itself. But a lot of these families had a father and a mother and two kids or something like that. So they would bunch them up so that they had two Japanese families or these farmers would have to house these people. And some of the people didn't like each other. Like you know how anything else, they don't want to go with so-and-so. So they had a commission and we even worked on the commission too in the office there to try to sort these people out that weren't antagonistic against each other. But some of the farmers were very unhappy with the situation because there's only like one working and a mother who can't do a heck of a lot. It was kind of a testy thing.

### **Farm in Manitoba:**

We were very, very fortunate as a family. But when we got to the farm, they bought a brand new house. A chip lack house; it's about the size of these two rooms here. We had to do the inside ourselves practically. It would come with two bedrooms, and two bedrooms, and just the hallway. In between was the kitchen area. But we had to make our own tables and the legs and all. We didn't have no furniture, no nothing. With wood and lumber, we made... We didn't even have seats so we made those benchy-looking things that is just like a picnic table. Same thing, that's the way we did. We had one stove, one potbelly stove that my mother had to cook on for us. We had nothing else. We had electricity, but that was it. And they had storm windows. In the winter when it snowed - and Canada is a dry snow - all the snow comes on this side, you can't open the door from the inside. You've got to climb out the window here; my brother and them had to dig out the doorway. Next day, it's all over in the other side.

You couldn't go to the bathroom unless you had a rope to go to the outhouse. So my mother decided that she would get one of those toilets inside the house. You could get lost in the snowstorm. From our house to the outhouse we would have a rope. Don't let your hand go from the rope because you could get lost. That's how fierce some of the winters were.

It would snow from October and it would be under snow until April. Once the sugar beet is ready, if we did not top off all the sugar beets and get it off the ground by October 1, we didn't get paid until April because it goes according to the weight. The days in Canada, the days are longer. We'd be working like 11 o'clock at night. And we'd have this machete; us girls would have to pick up the beets that are like this, pick it up and top it and then throw it on the truck.

At night, we'd come and we couldn't even lift our hands out. Next morning we'd get up, same thing, start again. That's how we worked, but we had to work like that in order to get

all of it harvested. The machine would dig out the beets and then you'd go and shake off the dirt and cut the top.

When I came here and I heard about Cesar Chavez and our little hoes like this with a little short hoe, that's how we went and separated the beets. When I fought for that when I came here and I saw Cesar Chavez fighting for that, these little short hoes and everybody had to bend over like that; that's what they gave the farmers here. Everybody's going, "What do they want? They've got hoes." If you had to be on the bent over back all day, we would go down a hundred acres and get to the other end, and come back, it's noon time. Then we'd eat lunch and then we'd go all the way down. That's all we could do, is four rows a day. We would be with these little hoes that had these little heads like this, and a little short arm like that. You dare not stand up; you'd never get down again. I have a lot of empathy for the wetbacks that have been working in California. Unless you've lived it yourself, you don't realize it. People don't think. But that's how sugar beet was. Hard work and timing. Timing was everything. We didn't even think, you know. You didn't plan anything, you couldn't go anywhere anyhow; it took a day to get a permit to leave the farm.

The people didn't do anything. They were fed three times a day. A lot of people would work in the infirmary. The doctors would be doctors, family dentists would be dentists. No sense sending them to the farm. Like my father, he'd say to my mother, "You're stupid to take them all there. They have to work their butts off." At least my kid brothers and kid sisters, they got to go to school. But anybody that had to work couldn't go. We had to work the farm. In Canada, once you pass out of the eighth grade, it's not mandatory that you go to high school. That's it; you don't need extra education. We were three miles from the highway. Just to get our mail, we'd have to walk three miles to get our mail or get groceries, anything. We didn't have a car, they took everything else away from us; so we'd walk.

My mother heard all kinds of terrible stories about stuff going on in the camps. And she had two daughters and she chose to take us as a family unit. My father said, "Oh my goodness." He never realized how hard it was. My father wouldn't go with the dogs, see. He wouldn't go anywhere near those people.

### **Death of her younger brother:**

Well, turned out to be the third year we were there, my brother, my kid brother was... we didn't have any water, so we would have to go to the pump to get the water. I went to Arizona one time and they're telling us that these Indians had to walk three miles to get water. Reminds me of my brother, he had a little red wagon and he put water buckets in there and he'd go to the place and get the water. While he was coming home from getting

this water along with another little boy, a drunken lady, she ran into them and killed them. Didn't die immediately, but he was thrown 50 feet into the gulley. By the time we took him to the hospital, we knew he didn't have a chance. His head was cracked from here to here; you could see the skull. My mother, being a strong-blooded that she was, she knew that he was going to die. But the ambulance that picked him was the ambulance that broke down every five minutes. We said, "We're going to sue the ambulance!" And my mother said, "No, he was meant to die." You know, that's her way of thinking. We were so upset. And on top of that my mother had to get out of the ambulance and they had all the tools underneath the seat. No, he died that very night. And the lady was an RCMP wife, and she was drunker than a skunk.

**Interviewer:** Was she persecuted?

**Molly:** No. It was only a Jap that died, you know? That's the way it was. We learned humility. Just like survival, I guess you'd say, "Survival of the fittest". We just kind of said, "Oh well." My mother, she'd say, "Well no, it's written that he was to die and get going."

Well, of course. Your head was cracked open all the way. He's not going to really live even if he lived. So he died. And my father, who was at the road camp, we wired him to tell him. And my father came. And that's when he came for the first time and saw how we were living. And he said, "It's too bad. You should have been at the ghost town." But then that's too late. We didn't condemn my mother, because there's some other good things about her.

He was not schooled, but he was very, very savvy in agriculture. The Canadian government came and asked him to go to eastern Canada, you know, Toronto and Quebec, and teach about growing vegetables and stuff. So my father got a job right away. Even though we were in Manitoba, my father had leave to go to Ontario and so forth. He was doing lots of research and stuff like that. We didn't get to see dad very much either. But it was his war effort. He had kind of like a freelance type of thing, you know, so we were surprised because right away they came to ask him.

### **After the War:**

As soon as they had lifted the restrictions, we all moved to town, you know, most of the town of Winnipeg. Everybody went out to get a job. I didn't have any education, but I knew how to sew, so I went to a sewing factory and started to work. My sister did too, everybody went. I worked night time; I'd clean offices. In the daytime I'd work eight hours. We did everything to work towards the family. My brothers, you know, my father believed that the boys should have the education so we all worked and put it into the family pot and sent two

of my brothers to medical school. So everybody worked to help. This was the way; not all of us could progress, but at least some of us could get the education, and that was my mother's theory.

We figured, you know, that's our lot. In fact, I was reading an article in one of our Manitoba magazines and they said, "I went to work at this place, and the first time I went, my name was Enta." Well that does not sound Japanese, you know? So when I went into employment to displace, then they saw me, the job was filled, you see. And it happened to me a couple of times.

So one time I said to the lady, "You're going to be sorry." I was so angry. "You're going to be sorry one day that you didn't give me that job." She acted like, "Who cares?" That type of thing. Well, I was reading an article in one of the things that they had, that they said, "I went to work at a place that made hats." And everybody made 20 hats. I made 50 hats in one day. They said, "Oh my goodness, thanks." I don't remember it, but somebody had written an article about that and how I had out did everybody, every Caucasian, you know what I'm saying? My father used to say, "Well, you have to be better than everybody else. Why would they hire a Japanese?" That was his motto. I used to say, "Everybody hates me!" He would say, "So what, you got a job."

I don't remember outdoing everybody that much, but I was reading this article and I was thinking to myself, "Really? Did I do that?" It was something. But I told that lady, I said, "You're going to be sorry." Well, I boycotted that company for as long as I lived in Manitoba. Every friend that said to me, "This United Church company?" I said, "No, don't go to work for them. If you want a job I'll send you to any place else."

### **Meeting GI's from Hawaii:**

What happened in Manitoba was that lots of these people were stationed at Camp Savage, which is the Japanese language school for the military, and my husband was there. As many, many people from Hawaii - lots of people from Hawaii - were stationed in Camp Savage. And they didn't know nobody, they didn't know nobody. The closest place they would go to is Minneapolis or Chicago or somewhere. And so they would have a three-day pass or something like that. So a lot of kids from Hawaii would, well we heard that there was some Japanese up in Manitoba. They'd get a three-day pass and come up to Manitoba, and Winnipeg. Well, they would come to Winnipeg and they'd come to the USO, but there are no Japanese girls that are allowed to go to the USO. So the USO would call the YWCA where we were known, you know, and they'd say, "Are there any Japanese girls that could

entertain these Japanese boys at the USO?" That's the only time we could go to the canteen, see, when they called us.

So we would go down there, and sure enough, these young GIs from Hawaii. So you're not allowed to go out with them. You're just there to be entertained and so forth, so we would be called for that. You'd dance with them, just socialize with them. A lot of the kids, once one kid went back and said, "Oh yeah, there's Japanese over there." A lot of the kids would come up. My husband came up. He was a guest of somebody. It was a dentist that lived in north Winnipeg. So he called up to Hawaii and said, "Hey, I got these Japanese soldiers." So then they called and they said that he'd like to have some young girls. In fact, in general they wanted a whole bunch of kids to come. He had a big rumpus room, you know.

So we all went down and we went there. I had just made a new sailor suit. So I wore that. I didn't even think nothing of it, I went down there. He was perturbed I came in a navy outfit; he was in the army. But that night after we had finished at the rumpus room, then everybody dispersed. I was going around with someone at the time too. Everybody left, and my brother was taken back to his hotel. Well, I got home and then my brother came home and my father said, "What hotel is he staying at?" My brother said, "We're staying at The Bell." And my father said, "Oh my goodness, that's a bed bug place."

So my father went down and took him out of the hotel and brought him to the house and said, "You'll stay overnight here." So that night he stayed. And he was supposed to leave the very next night. They all went to a movie and I went out with my boyfriend and so forth. When they came back, it was snowing because it was in January. They came back and he missed the train. So back he came to our house again, you know, to stay overnight. We only lived like three or four blocks from the train station, so my father said, "I guess it's up to you to take him to the train." So I was nominated to take him to the train at 9 o'clock or whenever it was. I was late for work but I took him down to the train station and saw him off.

Well, when he gets back, he got AWOL, and he got confined to camp. So here comes flowers and letters and all kinds of stuff, you know. So he was an awful lonely guy. They were going to get shipped out, and they were going to have a furlough. So he had a 10-day furlough. He asked us if he could come up and visit us for his furlough because he had no other place to go because he was from Hawaii. My mother said, "That's okay, he can come." So he came, and during that time we got to know each other. I took my vacation at that time, too, to entertain him. So we got to know each other. He kept asking me to marry him, to marry him, and finally I told him, "We don't know what's going to happen." When he went to Florida - they were transferred to Florida and while he was in Florida he said, "I can get an emergency and say I'm going to get married." Well, my father said, "No, you don't want to

do that." So he went overseas. Well, overseas was Hawaii where he was born. They were there for about six months and then he was sent to Guam. He was now attached to the navy.

One thing they did, and my husband was very upset, was that he was attached to the navy and their compound was outside of the guarded territory. So they have to leave and then go to where they were doing radio work and all that. But it was outside of the guarded compound. The guards would make sure that they got there and got back. If they were going to come back, they had to call the guard house and tell them that they're coming, because they didn't want to be mistaken as Japanese. The whole 16 boys were all Japanese. He always said, "Why the heck did they build that stupid thing outside of the compound?" But that's the way it was.

### **Redress and Reparations<sup>3</sup>:**

Our redress was \$22,000, but in American money it was \$17,000. But my husband got \$20,000 in American money. I fought for getting American redress. To me, it doesn't really matter. We need to fight for it. But like the doctors and the dentists and all of that, they were saying, "Don't rock the boat." And I'm saying, "What? Why? Nobody knows about us being incarcerated."

In fact, my little nephew was first grade of school. He was like six years old when he went to school. The teacher asked him, "Where were you born?" Asked all the kids. And he said Tanforan Racetrack. She wrote a letter to my sister-in-law who can't read or write English, and said, "Your son is belligerent. He said this and this and that." My sister-in-law said to me, "What is this?" I went storming in the school and told them, I said, "You mean you don't know that this child was incarcerated and born in Tanforan Racetrack? That's where he was born, right in the stall." And they didn't know it.

There wasn't even any literature on the incarceration or the evacuation. Now the kid is 60 years old. So I said, "What?!" She apologized all over the place, and I said, "You mean to tell me that you don't know about evacuation? We're the ones that suffered with this." So she was very apologetic. She thought he was being very smart. But of course, how would she know?

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<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internment\\_of\\_Japanese\\_Americans#Reparations\\_and\\_redress](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internment_of_Japanese_Americans#Reparations_and_redress)

## Trip to Cuba:

I'm trying to think of how many years ago - five or six years ago - I went to Cuba. And I went to interpret for the Cuban-Japanese. And they were incarcerated. All 348 men were incarcerated for four years, and of all places, they called it Presidio.<sup>4</sup>

The prison was called Presidio and I went there. Some of the Japanese men are my age. I think they said four or five of them committed suicide. But only the men were taken and imprisoned under Bautista. And they did what the Americans did and said, "I didn't know that, I was so happy to be asked to go, because I went to Cuba and learned."

But we had to go through Mexico City and then fly into Cuba and then come back out again through the same way. So when I came to San Francisco, they said to me, "Where have you been?" I said, "We went to Cuba." And they said, "The stamp is 19 days, there's a [inaudible] for 19 days because for the Mexico stamp there's a 19-day lapse. So they said to me, "What were you doing?" Well, they told us, "Don't lie. Tell them everything that you know and show the letter that you have from a previous program".

I was all ready and I came up to the window and the guy said to me, "What happened to the 19 days in between?" And I said that this is the way it was. I went to interpret for the Cuban men that were incarcerated during the war. And he said, "They were?" I said, "Yeah, and this is what happened, and so forth."

He said, "Cool." Wang, wang, wang, wang. [inaudible] They didn't even open my suitcase, didn't do nothing. Some of my group, they were messing around with paper and stuff like that, they got put into a room. But I just told them exactly. He said, "Cool."

When Cuban people, they are mostly from Okinawa which is the most southern island in Japan (it's much like Hawaii), when they went to Cuba, they thought they were back home. You should see the orchids and everything, they were just huge, beautiful, coming out of the trees. Bananas, papaya, mangoes, everything. They thought they came just like where they left. They were so happy [inaudible]. It was the most, worst soil there is, and they gave them that. Do you know what they did, the Japanese people? They worked and they stopped the salt from coming into the land, and it became one of the most productive cane fields.

The Japanese people in Cuba are so highly, highly praised for their effort. All the herbal, botanical, all those things are all done by the Japanese herbalists or Japanese horticulture

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<sup>4</sup> Presidio Modelo, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidio\\_Modelo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidio_Modelo)

people. All their land was confiscated, just like us. But when Castro came, they gave everybody that had land, they gave them six hectares. When I looked at their farm, it's much like the size of our farm. So I'm figuring it's like 10 acres or so. And all of these Japanese people, they farm. Anything left over, everybody's got a little stall they could sell, they could sell their produce. And they're happy. I kept saying, "Why would you stay in this godforsaken place?" They would say, "Where would we go?" So they're completely happy with where they are. Of course, they're all intermarried now. More Spanish, and they speak Spanish. A lot of people still kept their Japanese. Like a lot of older people, they speak in Japanese.

END OF INTERVIEW