

Michelle Sweetser:

Well, good afternoon, I think we'll go ahead and get started. We may have a few people struggling in. But I'm Michelle Sweetser, I'm the head of the Center for Archival Collections here in the University Libraries, and I'm really pleased to welcome you all to the library for this afternoon's event. Today's event would not be possible without collaborative partnership of many.

Michelle Sweetser:

First and foremost, I want to thank the University Libraries and the Asian Studies Program for their support of this event. And most importantly, we should acknowledge the Department of History obviously, and particularly Dr. Grundin, who I see is here now, who made arrangements for our speakers to come today. And finally, I know that Miho Ohsawa and Akiko Jones who are in the room helped facilitate Dr. Grundin contact with the speakers today. So we want to say thank you, because we know that each day we lose more and more of the people who lived through this experience of the war and the prison camps that our government established. And we're privileged to have not just one but two individuals today with firsthand accounts.

Michelle Sweetser:

So just quick introduction to our speakers, May Watanabe, and Alice Sano are our primary sources today. They're both American citizens born in this country and Japanese American elders living in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Both were young women at the time at World War Two and both were imprisoned in different American prison camps in 1942. Assisting them today is May's daughter, Lori Watanabe Saginaw also from Ann Arbor, Michigan. And accompanying them is May's second daughter Wendy Watanabe from Seattle, Washington. So please join me in welcoming May, Alice and Lori as they share their knowledge and experience with us.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

So, I was born in 1951, which makes me 68 years old. And that was six years after the end of World War Two. I did not directly experience World War Two. My parents did, my grandparents did. My uncle and aunt did. They didn't talk about it for a very, very long time. When they spoke about camp as a little girl, I thought they were talking about summer camp. That was the only camp I could relate to. So this telling of this story is not easy. Because there are parts of it that are very painful. And there are other parts of it that are interesting. And it all depends on what age you were at when you went through this experience. And what I shared with some of you before we started, is that May was 19 years old in 1941 and Alice was 12 years old. And if any of you know a 12 year old and know a 19 year old, you know that that's a big difference, those seven years are critical seven years.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

So keep that in mind. It's really essential to have the different perspectives and the different stories of these two amazing primary sources. I'm going to provide the narrative and I'm going to invite them to jump in at key points and elaborate with their experience. How many of you have never really heard that much about the Japanese incarceration during World War Two? Great. When I took American History 50 years ago, there was absolutely no notation of it in my textbook. And when I asked my teacher about it, he had never heard of it. So this was in an average American High School outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. And because some of you raised your hands, we all have to acknowledge that it's not completely known to everyone still. Is there anyone in this room who has never heard of 9/11?

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Naturally, we all heard of 9/11. And this is just as important. So, where do we begin? This title slide is the Japanese word "densho." And it means to pass on to the next generation or to leave a legacy. And in a nutshell, that's what we're going to talk about today. The next slide is very important for the framework of today. I grew up once I learned that camps didn't mean summer camp, with the idea that what had happened to my parents and grandparents was that they were put in internment camps, and that they were internees. And what has happened over the last 20 years or so, no, probably more like 40 years now, because it started at the early 80s. There has been an effort to eliminate the euphemistic terminology about this experience, this part of history. And so instead saying that 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry were relocated, we now say that they were forcibly removed.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And if you think about the sound of that, there is a different meaning to the words, the new words. Instead of saying that they were detained. We say they were held prisoner. Instead of saying that they were interned, we say that they were imprisoned, or they were incarcerated. Because they had no choice. They were breaking the law to leave. There were armed guards, there was barbed wire. There were people who were shot from being too close to the fence. And we don't call them internment camps. We call them prison camps, or concentration camps. So that's the framework. And I will tell you that when I learned this, and I had to make myself consciously change the words I chose to use, it was hard. And I was a little hesitant at first, because the new words are stronger and they are also more accurate and more truthful. Well, these two people up here, May, can you give us an idea of how your parents came to the US and settled where they did and what life was like?

May Watanabe:

My parents, both of them were born in Hawaii, but were educated in Japan. Then they came back to Hawaii and then the mainland. My mother was pregnant when they moved from Seattle, Washington to Chico, California. We recently heard about Chico it was near a paradise where the big fire was. We often went on evenings for rides up there. So my father always wanted to have his own business and his friends that he knew in Chico, the reason for their coming there, did not particularly encourage him to be a farmer and he didn't want to be. And mother fixed up this little store and called it the homegrown vegetable market. And he was intent on selling produce that is good quality and so was looking forward to having his life as an old owner of a business. The first day my mother said they had 50 cents in the cash register. Now this is a community of about 9000 at the time, and very few non-white people there. There were a few Japanese families and some single people who worked on farms and railroad and a few Chinese.

May Watanabe:

So, when they went and saw this new store opened by an unfamiliar face, they tended to pass by. But in time they became acquainted and really became trusting of this owner who was honest and really providing a very good product. And so that customers would even just call and say, "Tom, have this for me ready," And then they would pick it up. This community was really quite open eventually when they got acquainted with my parents and my father was invited to join the Rotary Club. He played tennis with the lawyers and doctors and insurance people. And my mother was invited by the Presbyterian Church Tuesday evening club to join although she was a Buddhist. She was open to being with other people and being friendly, and my brother became a Boy Scout, an Eagle Scout, and I had dancing lessons and piano lessons, and I think we were just a typical American family.

May Watanabe:

And we had parties that I was invited to. And my mother would have the whole class there. Of course, I went to a school that was connected with a college and when I graduated from the eighth grade, I think there were 12 people or 13. But we all knew each other and we went into each other's homes. So I'm saying that this was not a typical kind of community, that Japanese and Japanese Americans lived in.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Do you want to talk a little about your brother and being part of two cultures.

May Watanabe:

My brother was three years younger than I and he was quite an adventurous fellow. And he would catch salmon that was coming up stream [inaudible 00:12:27] and come home with a salmon that was half his size and he would be cooking something. My mother and I would come home and smell this... What smells like fried chicken turned out to be frog legs. And so once again, it shows that he was a very kind of typical American kid.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Okay, Alice. Who is this gentleman handsome as he is in a uniform?

Alice Sano:

My story is quite different. My father.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Talk into the mic.

Alice Sano:

My father, is it on?

May Watanabe:

You don't have to look [inaudible 00:13:19].

Alice Sano:

Well I have to know what I'm talking about.

May Watanabe:

[inaudible 00:13:24].

Alice Sano:

My father was one of, I think eight children but he was not the oldest. That means he was not required to stay at home and take care of the family. So, being an independent soul, he always wanted to come to America. Is this on?

Speaker 6:

Yeah.

Alice Sano:

And my aunt told me once when I was in Japan, he would shake her hand and say, "How do you do?" just to say he was American. And so he did come to America. And I don't know exactly what age but it was an age when he had to get a job. And I know that he worked in a lumber company in Arizona, for one, and it still bears the name, Williams... It's in Williams, and it still bears the name Saginaw Lumber Company. It's still on the side of the building because all the lumber companies in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota were chopped down So they had no business up here. That's one job he had. And he came alone from Osaka, Japan.

Alice Sano:

And in 1918, he joined the US Army. And he told us that they said, "You can hear Sano but you can't see him." Because he was pretty short, little over five feet tall. That was World War One, but he was forever grateful for that enlistment. He got his citizenship, American citizenship on his retirement or the end of World War One. And he cherished that until the day he died. And he kept telling us about his citizenship, and therefore our citizenship. Oh, that's my family when we were little kids.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Tell us about your mom and how she came.

Alice Sano:

Well, the time came for him to get her wife. And that's exactly what it was. "Get a wife." He said, "Okay, but I want a Christian woman and I want one who won't be shy in the US." So he went to Osaka, they had found my mother there. She was a graduate of a [inaudible 00:16:59] school. A girl school, and she was not shy. So they came to America and established their home. And that's the three of us. I'm the only girl. There's a younger brother and an older brother. And-

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And tell us where you lived.

Alice Sano:

We lived in Los Angeles first for until I was seven years old. Then my father got a call to Chula Vista, California, which is seven miles from the Mexican border. He was called to be the manager of Celery Growers Association. And he was that until the beginning of the war, and we had a good time in Chula Vista. He was well respected and... Well, for instance, they had one festival, where you have to grow whiskers and then they measured what your whiskers to determine how much money you owed the city. So, I don't know. He grew these whiskers and paid the money. But anyway, it was a fun time in Chula Vista, a very small town where everybody was respected. And there were lemon trees all over, because most of it was lemon trees

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And your next door neighbor.

Alice Sano:

Oh, yeah, well, there was a neighbor across the street. The time came for us to, for him to buy a house for us to live in. We were living in a rental. She and her husband told us that they didn't want us to live

across the street from them. But we moved in anyway. And the fact is, it wasn't true. There was another realtor in the town who didn't want us to buy that house because he didn't get the money for it. So anyway, we moved in and she told us that they didn't really mind us moving in. And after that, she brought us a whole can of soup. I mean, a big can of soup that she made all about every month. Just because she wanted to give it to us.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

You had another neighbor.

Alice Sano:

Yeah. Our first neighbor, where we lived was next door to a piano teacher and we heard a piano practicing every morning at six o'clock in the morning. And we later learned that her daughter was a child prodigy who had a grand piano in her bedroom with a little cot to sleep in. And she practiced every morning and I later took lessons from Mrs. Steinbach and continued with her all the time I was there and continued with piano all my life to this day, and also Barbara, her daughter played the cello. So of course, I played the cello. And they were looking for a cellist in junior high. We called it junior high in those days. And just was given a book on how to learn it. Well, I studied the book and played everything wrong until I went to college. Nobody told me it was wrong. And then I had to correct everything. So my life was all filled with piano and cello to this day.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Great. So we're now in 1940, and Alice is in Junior High playing cello and May is graduating from Chico High School and May's been encouraged to go to college in the Bay Area to a prestigious women's school called Mills College. So she goes off, Oakland is about 150 miles away from Chico and she is looking forward to lots of adventure and excitement in her life. Alice is looking forward to lots of adventure and excitement and cello in her life. And then December the seventh happens and everything changes for both of them. So May would you give us a sense of what you remember about that day and afterward.

May Watanabe:

It was Sunday and I went to chapel on the campus. A Campus is surrounded with a fence and the chapel is inside of it. Can you hear me?

Speaker 5:

No.

May Watanabe:

No, you can't hear me? So, I came back to the dormitory and the radio is glaring with the news of Pearl Harbor. [inaudible 00:23:26].

Speaker 5:

[inaudible 00:23:29].

May Watanabe:

Usually I'm talking so loudly. Can you hear me now?

Speaker 5:

Yes.

May Watanabe:

Anybody can't hear me. I guess [inaudible 00:23:39]. So, I was stunned as everybody else. But I think I was a little numb, I was told to go up to my room. Why? Why should I go to my room? I never quite understood that whether it was because the head resident thought that I could be protected from whatever might be said. But in truth I continued to go to school there and I don't think I had... I don't remember feeling any particular animosity. The chaplain who was also my advisor was incense with this enact that I could not go out of the room after 7:00 o'clock, I mean, crossing out of the building, and the library was just, probably not as far as the door to this room. And yet after 7:00 o'clock I was not to be outside. So this kind of thing seemed quite ridiculous. And then eventually there was an enact that came out, do we have that picture?

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Not yet. You want to talk about your exams and going back to Chico?

May Watanabe:

Well, the enact came out that people were being evacuated from certain parts of the coastline. And eventually it would come inward and include where I lived in Chico, but I was in the area that's a little bit closer, and that part probably would be evacuated sooner. And that would mean that I would have to go to a place separate from my family. And so this didn't make sense to me. I was going to leave School and go back home. And my college was nice enough to let me take my final exams in my high school by the [deany 00:26:12]. And so all my credits, which is really was an unusual gift that I received from Mills. Of course, I never received a degree because I could not continue.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Okay, so Alice, can you share some memories of December the seventh?

Alice Sano:

Well, my father, having been a soldier and very proud of that, and having gotten his citizenship as a result was all America. And he was all Japan too, but as soon as he heard the news about the attack on Pearl Harbor. He said, "Well, I cannot support Japan if they're going to do this." And so he couldn't help it if he had to be for one or the other, it would be for the United States. Because he was a citizen of it, and we were also citizens of it, except for my mother, and when the order came out that of our eventual evacuation, but it also stated that non citizens could not go beyond, I don't know what it was exactly two or three miles from their home. It meant that we could not visit our friends in San Diego. I mean, all of us could except my mother, and we wouldn't go without our mother. So we didn't see our friends for about four months till we moved, and that was the main way it affected us.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Thank you. I think that both Alice and May have shared the details of what it felt like to suddenly have identity and status completely transformed and to be restricted in movement, to be restricted in opportunity, access, and then ultimately to be imprisoned. This is a photograph by one of the prominent photographers that I've used in the slideshow. Her name is Dorothea Lange, and she was hired by the

government to document the years during the war. And 90% of what she shot has never been published. So, that gives you an idea of how the government felt about the images that she captured. But they are all part of the National Archives. And there are two books up here. One is called Un-American, and the other one is called Impounded. And they hold a lot of her images.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And this one is of kindergartners in the San Francisco Public School, after Pearl Harbor, saying the Pledge of Allegiance in the morning like they've always done in this school. And it just struck me that these are children who are about to begin their education to learn about the Constitution of the country, to which they have citizenship, and what their rights are as citizenship. And this is on the cusp of something that disregards citizenship all together. We all know that there was Anti-Japanese sentiment. We all know what the reactions were after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. But when you see these words that were actually published in newspapers, these are the words of a journalist, syndicated journalist. It's like a punch in the gut. And these are the words of general DeWitt, who had the authority to carry out all of the actions that the military would take during the forced removal of 120,000 people.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

So, this is not Alice's home, it's not May's home, but it's another Dorothea Lange photograph of a woman who I think to me typifies where many Japanese families had come after two generations of living in the United States. It's a very comfortable living room. It's nicely appointed, she's well dressed. And there is a Japanese doll. Can you see the doll on the table? So the significance of that doll, to me is that suddenly, all things Japanese became a liability to Japanese families, that anything that looked too nationalistic towards Japan, no matter how benign could be used as evidence of sabotage, or espionage, or disloyalty, and these things you'll learn from May later on, would either be hidden or destroyed or just removed.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

These are the notices that May was talking about. The one on your right, is the executive order that Roosevelt signed, executive order 9066. And it authorized that all people of Japanese ancestry, regardless of citizenship would be removed from the military zone. The military zone was considered all of the Pacific coast. So Washington, Oregon, NC and California. And then the notice that's on the post on the left, that's on top, it says, "Notice." That is one of many exclusion orders that General Dewitt would issue in a very systematic way. And the exclusion orders were designed to target those areas that they felt were the highest security risk. So they were the areas that were closest to the water. And Bainbridge Island above Seattle was the first of the areas to be evacuated. Alice lived near San Diego. Chula Vista is near San Diego. San Diego was a big military base. So, that was another area that was evacuated early on.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

May's family, as you remember, was in Chico, further inland. So her evacuation was not in the initial pipeline until mid 1942. But there was no internet. This is how people learned what was happening and these posters were everywhere. Nobody could walk a block without seeing them in every business, in every window on every pole. Immediately people started to sell their belongings. So this is a slide that says, "Evacuation sale." This is a Japanese farmer trying to sell his tractor to some white neighbors. And this is a classic attempt by an American born Japanese man owning this shop. He had this sign made the day after Pearl Harbor, so that he could try to establish his loyalty to the United States with his

customers, and so that they would continue to support his business. And it was futile. And he had just gotten married. He and his wife were imprisoned in a camp called Gila River, and he never returned to this shop.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

This is another typical attitude. That was fostered by the media, by popular opinion, by the military. And it's not to say that the anti-Asian attitudes were new in this moment. They have been building since the mid 1800s. And many people now look back on this as an economically motivated land grab. But it's clear that there was a hysteria about it. This is hard to look at, but it's the kind of propaganda that was everywhere. And this family, has many characteristics in this photo that I think typify the evacuation. They are dressed as if they were going to church in their best clothes. They're each wearing a tag. And that tag has a number on it that identifies the children as well as the adults. They're no longer known by their name. They are a number. And if you notice, this little girl is holding a wrapped sandwich. That white thing in her hand is a sandwich that was made by a church group who had come to the train station where all of these families had told to be at a certain time with everything that they were going to take on the train with them, numbered and ready to go.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

This is particularly poignant to me, this older man who is 70 who owned a laundry, he sold that laundry. He's dressed in his best clothing, he's tagged and he is carrying, if you can see at the bottom, wrapped books with a string around them, which is a very, very Japanese way of carrying objects to wrap a string around them so that that string becomes the handle. And why would he be carrying these books? He's only able to take to this unknown destination, what he can carry. And he's taking his books. This couple are inside of a truck and their dog is clearly trying to follow them. But there were no pets allowed. And this man is being carried kind of fireman style by others. He's a paraplegic gentleman, he's been helped onto the train.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

So these are all people of Japanese ancestry who are considered to be a threat to national security, and they are being evacuated. And this photo to me typifies the imbalance of power. So the guards with rifles and unarmed civilians all lined up at the train stations, not knowing where they're going. Okay, so no, Alice, this is Santa Anita assembly center, formerly Santa Anita race track. And this is where your family was taken. Can you tell us about that?

Alice Sano:

Well, Santa Anita, was a glorious place minus the barracks of course. We were in Santa Anita because we were amongst the first to be evacuated. And so we were the first to be put in the stables. So our family was put in a stable, as were many others, and it was cleaned up as well as it could be. But you couldn't completely disguise that. And one day I woke up in the hospital. Santa Anita made a hospital of the ticket offices there because they were fine and nice buildings and they made that into a hospital with the beds. I guess they were supplied by the army. And one day I woke up in the hospital and everybody... I was in bed, I guess, asleep or unconscious. But I woke up and there were all these faces looking down in the bed. And I didn't know what was going on but they said, and they were all relieved to see me open my eyes.

Alice Sano:



So, I'm not sure what happened. Nobody told me but I think I had pneumonia or something like that. Anyway, I was unconscious and woke up and they were all very happy. So I got a look at the hospital. They had hospital beds, they had nurses, of course the people in the hospital were the inmates, the Japanese. They were the young doctors and young nurses and doing their thing, taking care of the sick. And then when I got well, we were sent to a barrack and not to the stables. And that's where we were to the rest of it.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And can you remind us of what your family carried to Santa Anita?

Alice Sano:

Oh, well, we went on a train from San Diego. And we had all our luggage, and I carried my cello in a soft case, they didn't have hard cases in those days. I carried my cello and my brothers had to carry my luggage. And I thought that was fair.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And Alice, what about meal time?

Alice Sano:

Oh, meal time. That was interesting, because we were the first there. And the cooks were Japanese. I mean, the inmates. Our rice was terribly mushy and we complained about that. "This is not the way to cook." But that because the cooks were all Japanese inmates didn't know how to cook hundreds of pounds of rice at once. So they did the best they could and it got better and better and then producing that was good.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Few lines.

Alice Sano:

Oh yeah.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Tell us about that.

Alice Sano:

We had to line up for a meal. There was only one mess hall open at that time, the red mess, or maybe it was a blue mess. It was a blue mess. And we lived up for our meals, had our meals, came out and we lined up for the next meal because it took so long to get to the mess hall. And when we finished lunch, we lined up for dinner. That's how we got our meals. But we got our meals.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And you got your rice?

Alice Sano:

Yeah, got our rice.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

So I was doing a little research about the blue mess hall and I found out that it was built to serve 850 people meals, and it actually served 3000 meals a day. And then to give you a better sense of how difficult it was to navigate life for the nine months that Santa Anita was open, there were 150 showers total in the whole place for 18,000 people to share. And during those months, there were 37 deaths and 194 births. So life did have to go on. And it wasn't all easy. This is another Dorothea Lange photo of a man Mr. Kondo. He is living in a horse stall and he is waiting to know his future. He must have had a break from the line.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Okay, so this image I know it's hard with the lights to see it is actually showing you the 10 permanent camps that were all being hastily built by the US Army. And that's the reason that people living near San Diego and people living near Bainbridge Island had to go to the Fairground to Puyallup Fairground, and to the Santa Anita racetrack, because they had to be removed from those high security areas right away in the early spring. And these permanent camps were not yet ready to receive people.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

I'm going to point out to two camps were May and Alice ended up. This is Tule Lake, which is in Northern California just south of the Oregon border. And this is Jerome which is way the heck over Arkansas. So in the summer of '42 that is when you May and your family arrived at Tule Lake. Can you share what that experience was like in your memory?

May Watanabe:

First of all, when we prepared for going to [inaudible 00:46:49] before that there were investigations by FBI in most homes. And in my community my father was respected and very upstanding member of the community. But he had given \$5 to some temple or something for them to use. And this was held against him. And so they came to investigate our house. Now many homes were being examined. People threw away, burned anything that might be suspected of being suspicious material. Letters, precious letters, pictures, people might have had even Japanese swords or Buddhist altars. But we had very few things. But the FBI came and I remember that this men sat on my brother's Latin project he had made for school moments too, and smashed it [inaudible 00:48:24]. So I think he was a little embarrassed. But my father was taken to the police station and to the embarrassment of the police chief who was his friend that they released him.

May Watanabe:

And then there was the loading, packing, getting, getting rid of things that was done in any home of a Japanese family and my father's car was put in storage. My mother had to get rid of the furniture. And a woman came by and saw her precious plant that she had nurtured and said, "Why don't you give that. You have no use for it. This was the kind of attitude that people had, knowing that they had to get rid of your things. So we rode on a train, all the [inaudible 00:49:44] were down, and we didn't know where we were going or how long. We could only take what we could carry in our two hands and we arrived to Tule which is a dried up lake, which is now like a desert. And it was dusty, it was hot, and there were tumbleweeds.

May Watanabe:

And our new home was a 20 by 24 sized room in a barrack like an army barrack there were probably these 20 by 24 it didn't matter what size your family was. And it was barren. There was nothing in there except four army guards, a potbelly stove and thin walls without any insulation which was very hot in the summer and very cold in the winter. But eventually the... You have 10,000 people living, you've got to have schools, you have to have [inaudible 00:51:12], you have to have some kind of recreation. And it was a growing community. And people had jobs. The highest paying job was being a doctor, was \$19 a month. And my father decided he would just be a service to the community. A man who wanted to own his own business, decided he would shovel coal, which later the doctor said probably contributed to his high blood pressure and latter his heart condition. So he had an early death [inaudible 00:51:58].

May Watanabe:

I worked as a nurse's aid after working in office for a while. And I was so excited when I saw a baby delivered. And I thought, "Wow, that's what I want to be. A nurse." It was about the time when I needed to decide what I was going to be doing if I continued to go to school. So, the thing is, when in a place like that where there's not the organization or the kind of setup where families ate together, saw each other. My deepest regret is that I could not know my brother better because he went off with his friends. I didn't know that he was going to be a student that excelled. And it was only after I was out of camp years later that I found out that he was actually giving graduation speech which was a valedictorian. And this is a sample of how family life was affected. That he didn't have that closeness.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

So May, I'm sorry I got a little out of order with the slides. So I'm going to show what Tule Lake looked like from the air. It had a hundred miles of barbed wire fence surrounding it, I guess 37 guard towers, and it had 18,000 prisoners at its maximum. This is the coal shoveling that you mentioned. This is a makeshift school yard that was created. And this is the first high school inside of the prison camps and your brother is the person standing on the far right. So what I didn't explain were the fact that there was photographing and fingerprinting of every single person who was brought into the camps and Alice, can you tell about your being fingerprinted?

Alice Sano:

Well, I only remember it because it was all my birthday. My 13th birthday. My good luck birthday. And-

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

That's quite a memory.

Alice Sano:

It was easy to remember. But my dad opened his office for the finger painting. It was kind of a warehouse office. So he let them use it.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

So the most of the camps were done strictly the way the military would do them, May described how they were furnished, how they were built, how they were organized, there was no privacy at the latrines, in the showers. It was very, very immodest, and very culturally challenging for Japanese women in particular, to have to us latrines and showers designed for the army. These are inmates at Poston, one

of the camps in Arizona where they're having to actually stuff bags with straw to make their mattresses. The mess hall at Manzanar, you can see that it's a mom and her two kids but the dad isn't there. And this is a makeshift school at Manzanar before an actual school was set up. Tell us about Jerome, Alice. Jerome in Arkansas.

Alice Sano:

Well, Jerome we had our units as usual. They were made the same with just the tarpaper and the slats to remove the tarpaper on. But we did have huge wood stoves, which really heated our rooms. And the men had to go out every day into the woods to cut the wood for us which they did. And we just had to learn to burn of wood fires stove every single day in the winter.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And Jerome was typical of most of the camps because there was industry going on. At most of them, it generated revenue for the army. So there was a sawmill at Jerome and all of the camps had a significant amount of agriculture Tule Lake in particular had a huge number of acres of produce growing around it. And if you think about it, the prisoners there are Japanese farmers largely. So they had excellent agrarian skills that they brought with them Tule Lake was a desert when they arrived and it was very, very bountiful and prosperous for farming when they left. So, Alice's family is in Jerome Arkansas. May's family is at Tule Lake. It's 1942 and a lot of the abandoned farms and homes of Japanese people who are now in camps, were vandalized, possessions are stolen some possessions as you heard, were kept in churches given to friends to hold on to, but most things were lost. Most property was lost.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Bank assets were frozen. If mortgages couldn't be paid, if taxes couldn't be paid, then property was then forfeited. So there was a major economic penalty to those imprisoned. And I learned this doing the research for this presentation that the government actually encouraged refugees from the Dust Bowl to move on to Japanese farms, take them over and live on them. Now, this is a great story. Bob Fletcher, he was an agricultural inspector, he inspected the farms of three Japanese families. He knew them well. And when they had to leave, he left his job. He took over the farms he saw to the raising of the crops. He sold the crops, he used that money to pay their mortgages and their taxes. He maintained those farms. And he stayed on those farms until those three families returned.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

It's a wonderful story of Americans who did object to what was being done to Japanese families. So there were such citizens, many in church groups, and there is actually a book in my library, but I didn't bring it. That is a collection of all the weight Americans who made a significant effort to help the Japanese families who were incarcerated. This is also very common for non Japanese Asians during this time. It was extremely dangerous and problematic to be Japanese. So People who were Asian had to make sure that they distinguish themselves from being Japanese. They were Filipino. They were Chinese. They were Thai. They were Korean, anything but Japanese.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Okay. So this is a really interesting and important part of the internment of the incarceration experience. Whoops, that was a slip on my part, that many people do not really fully understand. So it's now the beginning of 1943. The United States has been at war for almost two years. They need more soldiers. The government decides to send recruit teams into all the camps. They want to enlist young Japanese

American men to fight in the war. How can they justify enlisting soldiers who they have formerly imprisoned, because of suspicion of being a threat to security, or of being disloyal? The tool that they used to show that the people that they selected to enlist were loyal, was a loyalty questionnaire. And there were two questions on that questionnaire that changed people's lives forever. Number 27 and number 28.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

So that's what's up on the screen. And the problem with these two questions is that the wording was very ambiguous. It was not clear what the consequences would be if a person answered yes or no. The answers that they expected to have were either yes or no, there were no qualifiers. And the first one is, are you willing to serve in the United States armed forces on combat duty wherever ordered? So they're asking this of people who are behind barbed wire under guards at the instruction of the US government. The second question is, will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Now May and her brother Paul, were both born in the United States. They really didn't grow up with allegiance to the Japanese Emperor. Their family was committed to being American and living in the United States. And you've heard Alice talk about her father's patriotism. So what kind of position does it put people in? To have to answer yes or no to these two questions. And when people answered yes, they were labeled as loyal. And when they answered no, and there are a million reasons that they would answer no, like, "A parent is too ill I can't leave." Or "I'm not allowed to have citizenship in the United States. So if I give up my allegiance to the Emperor of Japan, I have no citizenship at all."

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

There were all kinds of impossible scenarios that people were faced with. And the people who did answer no to both of these questions, had no idea how terrible their circumstances would become. Many of them were put in federal prison. Imagine being a Japanese American young man during World War Two, where the enemy is Japan and being in a federal prison. May will you talk about this loyalty questionnaire and the impact on your family?

May Watanabe:

My father, decided that at first, I think when your asked your loyalty he was not allowed to be a citizen although he was born in Hawaii, and I don't know what the reason is but I thought that he had written no first and then realizing that his children are citizens, his intent was to live in America. So of course, he would say, he would answer in a way that would keep him here. Now, we lived in a block 42 where many of the people there were personal friends. They were, background is Hiroshima which is the same as my parents roots. And when they realize that he was not voting the way they would they considered him an enemy. And so, one night as I came home on the ambulance from the hospital since it was late at night, they delivered me to "my home". And my father said, "Hurry come in." There were people yelling outside and soon it was throwing rocks and calling him dog. And it was very frightening.

May Watanabe:

And somehow I found a whistle and I just thought, "I'm going to blow this whistle." And that seem to be loud enough and scary enough that the police came and the people dispersed. But we were moved from

that block to another block for our own safety. But this happened to others also. And from then on it was a growing, terrible thing that happened with this division among the people. People who couldn't have citizenships were automatically going to answer in a way that would send them back to Japan.

May Watanabe:

There were people who were sent to Japan thinking that they would be with people of their family and found that they were not really welcome. They found people were starving in Japan that hardly feed themselves. And so that they were really not welcome to come. But this was the situation that was created. And there were families that were divided because the parents felt they had to take their little children. They couldn't leave them even though they were citizens. So there are very many horrible stories as a result of this questionnaire.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Alice, would you share about the loyalty questionnaire?

Alice Sano:

Me?

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Yeah, you.

Alice Sano:

Well, in a way we weren't affected by the question because there was nobody in our family that would be affected. My brothers are too young. My father was too old maybe, I don't know. But we heard of families. In fact, one family, good friends of ours whose son answered the question the wrong way and the whole family was sent back to Japan. Just because he did. Well, it would be just he but the family decided to go with him of course. And that's the only encounter I had with this questionnaire business.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

On the resource sheet, I've noted for you an amazing fiction book called No-No Boy that was written in 1957. And it is the most compelling account of the complexity of this whole mired tension about loyalty and disloyalty. And what is even more difficult to comprehend is the other layer, which is those young men who chose to fight who chose to enlist. This is a photograph that the government is taking of people who are in the prison camps in order to send those portraits to the enlisted family member who is now overseas. So, these are soldiers who have enlisted to fight in World War Two in defending the United States who still have family members who are in the prison camps. And these are the photos that the government took to send to those enlisted soldiers.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

This is a complicated photo. These are young men who are part of an infamous regiment, the 442nd. It was segregated, as were most units of non-white members in the military at that time. And these young men are on leave in Italy. They are at the grave site of one of their comrades. And they're wanting to take a photo of the grave site to send to his mother who is living in Hawaii. This is a horrible picture of the Tule Lake segregation center because the camp where May's family was, ended up becoming a holding center for all the disloyals from all the camps. And they were treated very badly. And it's a dark

part of history that we don't hear much about. These are photos that were taken of May's parents and her brother on the far left when they were being transferred as loyals from Tule Lake to another camp. And they were sent to Granada.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Okay, so what we now have, and we're nearing the end, is that May and Alice both had special circumstances that enabled them to leave camp before other people did. And in May's case, it was to continue her education. So This is a photo of May being sent off to take a train all the way from California to New York, where she was going to become a nursing student at Syracuse University. Do you want to talk a little bit about who enabled this to happen?

May Watanabe:

When I was talking about my time in Chico, I did mention that there was a Sunday school teacher, Mrs. Oliver, who was kind to all the Japanese and Chinese people, and she continued to be in touch, and she managed to have the Presbyterian Church offer me a scholarship to go to Wooster college, which you probably know is not far from here and because it's Presbyterian. But I learned that it does not have a good nursing program I would have to commute to Cleveland. So I asked if they could give the scholarship to my brother. And I would find another way to continue my education. And I did, so there was a organization. I can't remember the national... I'm terrible with initials.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

It was the Japanese American Student Resettlement Council.

May Watanabe:

I thought it was... Well, anyhow. So with them and the Quakers who were working very hard to help students continue their education. And so I found out that there was a cadet nursing program that was offered to young women who would dedicate two years of their lives after they graduated and they would have free education if they would continue to be in the nursing field. So I thought, "This is perfect. I won't have to pay for rest of my education." But there were only certain schools that would accept you. And Syracuse University was one of those. Chancellor Tolly took a chance against the protest of some people to allow some Japanese American women to come there, most of them were from California [inaudible 01:16:43] and some other students to continue education. So that's why I was able to finish my degree there.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And can you tell us what it felt like to leave camp and arrive at Syracuse?

May Watanabe:

You know what I thought? "Oh, I'm going to be [inaudible 01:17:04] and we will walk on a sidewalk and have an ice cream cone." I mean, that's the lighter side. But it was another train ride.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And Alice, your family and your dad about leaving Jerome.

Alice Sano:

Oh, my dad had received his job and left for it in January and that is the Japanese language school at the University of Michigan. There was an army language program, but it was called MI program the military intelligence students. They were really top notch students. Really good students who caught on to everything. In fact my dad really enjoyed his work here at the University of Michigan, because he... And he loved to teach. And he taught his students. I mean, they were so enthusiastic. They finished the course in half of the year. It was a year's course. But they finished in half the year, so I never got to meet them. Not that I would have anyway but-

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

But your family, your mom and your brothers and you joined him in Ann Arbor.

Alice Sano:

Yeah, we joined-

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And you live there to this day?

May Watanabe:

And you live there to this day?

Alice Sano:

Oh, yeah, I'm still there.

May Watanabe:

[inaudible 01:18:52].

Alice Sano:

[inaudible 01:18:52]?

May Watanabe:

Did you say [inaudible 01:18:57].

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Okay, so now we come to the end of the war. May's in Syracuse, Alice is in Ann Arbor. I never actually knew how the camps got empty. But it turns out that people who were left in the camps got \$25 in cash and a ticket home. And the question about where home is, at this point is the really critical one. Certainly Alice's family had a new home, not in Chula Vista, but in Ann Arbor, and May's parents chose not to return to Chico and they settled in Cleveland. Fast forward, it's 1988 for about 10 years, the Japanese American Citizens League, other civil rights groups and senators and congressmen in the United States Congress have worked to create a Civil Liberties Act of 1988 that acknowledges the losses of Japanese people and Japanese citizens who were interned, incarcerated. Gosh, I must be tired.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:



And this is known as the redress bill. And it's relevant today because we're beginning to talk about reparations. So, the true understanding of redress from all angles is so, I think applicable to being able to look at reparations from all angles also. This is an Issei man. So in Japanese, an Issei is the first generation, a Nisei is the second generation and a Sansei is the third generation. And this Issei man is 105 years old and he is receiving his redress check. And May and Alice both received a check. And I'd like you each to talk about what that meant to you. So May.

May Watanabe:

My parents were gone and many others who were gone by the time this was offered. But what is 20,000 for the years, the pain, the fear, the struggle? This is what I'm seeing.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And Alice?

Alice Sano:

When I received my check, we were received, each of us received a check of, I think it was \$20,000. And that was a lot of money. So, even today, so I invested it, I couldn't, I didn't even think of spending it [inaudible 01:22:26]. So I invested it, and I'm still reaping from that investment. So it was a good deal for me.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

And along with it came an apology?

Alice Sano:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

So just to wrap things up, here we are 2017 and President Trump is signing his executive order that has come to be known as the Muslim ban and it's eerily reminiscent of executive order 9066. And this is a radio show in 2018 where the government is actually looking in Arkansas very close to where Jerome was at the possibility of detaining migrant children in one of the camps. This is a protest that took place this year, this summer at Fort Sill. Fort Sill is a place where Native Americans were held prisoner. It's also a place where Japanese Americans were held during World War Two. And it's being considered as a place to hold refugee children.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

So the people protesting are part of a nonprofit grassroots group called Tsuru For Solidarity. And Tsuru means crane in Japanese. It's a symbol of peace. And this is a group that is primarily founded by Japanese Americans. And they do not want history to repeat itself. So they are really focused on current acts of oppression and inhumane treatment of new groups knowing the history of what happened to their group. This is their information. It's also on the handout. So this is a picture from our family's photograph album of my mom returning to Tule Lake on a pilgrimage. There's a pilgrimage that takes place every other year to Tule Lake. Anyone can come to it. You all can come to it.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

It's always around the 4th of July, intentionally. And you can see what she was describing the bareness and the dustiness. There are three pilgrimages that she took there. The second one was with my cousin Tom, and my sister Wendy. And this was the most recent one, which was in 2018, with her two grandsons. So I'm going to ask the two of you to make your closing remarks. And May if you want to talk about the pilgrimages and what the preservation of Tule Lake means, please do that also.

May Watanabe:

Well, to have my whole family go to see this place, which is part of my history was very meaningful. And now they are struggling to try to make this a historical place as part of the National Park system. And we're having a hard time, even harder now with their cutting down the National Park funding. But I think that this is a very important reminder of what can happen to our citizenship, our constitutional rights and it would be very helpful to have this established. I don't know whether it'll happen in my lifetime but they are trying to raise money and to make this possible.

May Watanabe:

When I think about the things that happened and can happen, when there is a judgment made without thinking deeply on what the significance is. I think of 9/11. And at moment when it happened. I said, "Oh, my goodness, it's going to happen again." And to know the things that happened to people who people thought were Muslims who were not. There were thoughts of incarcerating them. And so we must look at our freedom as something that has to be really worked on and maintained with a conscious effort.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Thank you, Alice.

Alice Sano:

I'm really heartened to know that pilgrimages have been made where you were. And I know, there's a camp in Wyoming. No. I think is Wyoming. A friend of mine goes to or has gone to several times because that's where her relatives were.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Maybe Heart Mountain.

Alice Sano:

It wasn't the Heart Mountain that was.

May Watanabe:

[inaudible 01:28:56].

Alice Sano:

Yeah, well, I don't know exactly where it was but she's my friend who talks about going to this camp. And there's a town around it that keeps it alive or keeps it in good condition. And I'm sorry to see that last clip of another race, possibly being treated in the same way by this president and I hope it never happens. I hope the activists are active enough to prevent it from happening.

Lori Saginaw Watanabe:

Well, thank you both for sharing your memories. That makes history much more alive and understandable and closer to all of us. We appreciate you.