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ARTHUR KIKUCHI

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LEAVING TULE LAKE AND LIFE AFTER TULE LAKE

Arthur Kikuchi was 15 years old at the time of the evacuation. He accompanied his parents and seven siblings to Tule Lake. At Tule Lake he worked as an x-ray technician in the project hospital. Early in 1946, his parents and siblings repatriated to Japan, but because of the influence of a missionary teacher, he refused to accompany them.

When I remarked: "Looking back on your experiences in Tule Lake, some of them must have been rather painful," he responded:

Yes. I think that possibly the most painful were the events...

One was after my family repatriated and I was put on a deportation list. That was something unthinkable, because my close friend who is a physician today had already gone to Minnesota, and I expected to be released any day. Instead I was put on a deportation list. And it surprised me because my father never involved himself in any of the rallies and war cries. He was a very quiet, reflective man who was apolitical. My physician's friend, his father was very outspoken politically, and to see him being released and me staying and going to deportation was extremely stressful.

RW: What happened?

AK: What happened was I joined the Tule Lake Defense Committee and Wayne Collins came to our rescue. And there is an Irish terrier if you ever saw one. He could not stand to see the government pushing us around this way. And he got hopping mad and he really devoted the balance of his life to our cause. This man is a righteous man and he was ^{not} intimidated by the government. His intervention ... prevented additional deportation.

Two stressful things happened; in part of the deportation there was a hearing prior to that. And I was asked why I didn't go with my family. And I said that it would be a foreign country and it would mean for me to start all over again. And I could just not see that.

And then I was asked whether I would bear arms for the United States. And I explained very carefully that I'm in a medical field and already an x-ray technician and that I could not bear arms. If you were to categorize me, I would be a pacifist. I would be willing to go and serve in the armed forces, but in a non-combat capacity. And then the men questioned my loyalty to the Emperor and at that point I said: "What ancestry are you?" to the interpreter. He said, "I'm part Irish and part German." So I said, "Are you loyal to the Kaiser?"

He said "Don't be ridiculous". I said, "You said it."

Another stressful thing was, following that, prior to being sent to Crystal City,¹ Texas ... We were stripped naked and searched for hidden weapons, and that was the first humiliation on top of humiliation I went through.

RW: What happened to you after you were sent to Crystal City.

AW: I was drafted... I had to serve my country now or spend time in a real clinker ... It was not much of a choice ... I served in the Army.

RW: For how many years?

1. An Internment Camp under the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice.

AK: I served for 15 months ... From Tule Lake I went to Crystal City, and then I was out for about a ... I just had a brief time to catch up with whatever I'm supposed to catch up with -- civilian shock -- you know. And then into the Army. So I was supposed to report to my home, and I had no home and no relatives .. It just didn't look good on paper to say, "Where's my last residence?" and I say, "Crystal City, Texas." So I borrowed an address from Acampo. There was a family acquaintance and I used their address.

RW: And this happened in 1946?

AK: Yes, that's correct, 1946.

AK: My buddies were the say way. My buddies from Tule Lake ended up in the same way and they actually spent time in San Francisco prison, and Wayne Collins got them out. He got them out from there and right into the Army.

My older brother, who was 3 years older than I was, while at Tule Lake refused to serve in the armed forces. He said as long as my parents are held, and they have no resettlement status, he said, "I cannot serve." And so, they took him and 15 or 17 other people and took them and put them into jail in San Francisco, let's see was it early 1945? I don't know if your records show such incidents. They appeared before Judge Goodman and he threw out the case. So he came back to camp.

RW: And after you got out of the Army, what did you do then?

AK: Well, after I got out of camp I couldn't get a job. Unfortunately, I ended up in San Francisco from Acampo. I came to San Francisco little realizing that that city was possibly the steepest in prejudice. I didn't know that. And so, although I was a qualified x-ray technician and jobs were available in my category, they would not give me a job.

And so I washed dishes and cleaned windows and I put myself as a house boy and started off to college. And that's how I started.

RW: And so you went through college as a houseboy?

AK: Yes, I went through as a houseboy and after the lifting of prejudice, finally in the late '40's, I was able to get a job as an x-ray technician. but it took a sympathetic Jewish doctor to get me in I applied at the Stanford Medical School....

AK: I went through Stanford Medical School first as a Darkroom Technician; and then I was an x-ray technician there; and then the director of the department offered me a job in his office and at that point I knew that I didn't want to continue being in a field in which I couldn't be independent, because I knew it would be tough getting a job. I had to find a way of getting independent and so I enrolled in the professional school and got into Podiatry College.

RW: Fine. And so you became a pediatrician?

AK: A podiatrist.

RW: Oh, pardon me, a podiatrist. Yes. I got it mixed up.

AK: We are constantly being mixed up with pediatricians are called podiatrists, but you usually hear them as pediatricians.

RW: (laughs) Well, I just have a few more questions. Looking back today, what part of your experience, and God knows it was a terrific experience, what part of the experience is still the hardest to bear?

AK: I think the incarceration without a hearing; I still wake up at unpredictable times and I'm still in camp, and I wake up in a pool of sweat. And I'm still in camp, and I'm still writing letters to the Justice Department, and getting no replies and that has been the toughest

RW: Was this a trauma that happened when you wanted to leave Tule Lake?

AK: No, still today ...To this day I'm still in camp. So that's a nightmare, a recurring nightmare and that's a stressful situation. I think if we were paying for a crime, you'd say to yourself, 'Well, I deserve to be put there, but if it isn't, then the anguish, the mental anguish

AK: I appeared at the National Hearing, the one that was held in Los Angeles. And interestingly enough, from this valley, only three of them (Japanese Americans) went forward to testify; the others are still afraid to testify. The reason being that they feel that anything that they say might be counter-productive in that they may be put on the undesirable list of the FBI.

RW: People are still afraid?

AK: Still afraid. Because they still do not trust the fact that the United States citizenship confers no immunity and no legal justice. This is the fear that is put into them. And so to this day, you will find, very few people reluctant to even grant an interview. And I am able to grant it because I've been through the worst and the worst still to come is that they could still deport me if they so wish. Well, I have had a creative life, and so it doesn't make any difference now. So that's the way I look at it. And I think if we are afraid of ourselves, or our shadow, I think that's not healthy. So I encourage the Nisei people to speak up, but they are not the speaking kind.

RW: That's why people will sometimes talk to me. But I still know they're holding back.

AK: Yeah. When my brief interview appeared in the paper, just one paragraph. There was a lady who wrote an angry letter to the editor stating that we should have been deported; that there should be no tax payers' money being

spent on hearings of enemies. So that is still here. My biggest concern for appearing was to try to create a clean sheet as it were, that we were not responsible for the Imperial Army's act, nor were we responsible for Pearl Harbor and subsequent acts. The pages of history still bear the erroneous information that we were put into camp for alleged sabotage, alleged activities, it's still there!

And the proof of this is that I have a podiatric assistant trainee who came from Massachusetts. After two months of employment in our office she said to me one day, "How is it that you weren't deported?"

Emily, I said, what brings that up?"

She said, "We just had a history class a few years back and we reviewed the events, and it said you people were like the Fifth Columnists and you were the element that created tremendous amount of threat to the national defense. And she said she was sorely disappointed that the United States would allow people like us to remain after this type of acts of treason. And I said "Emily," I said, "Do I look like a spy?" We dismissed it on that light note, but I realized it, you know.

RW: Did that happen just recently?

AK: That was 1975 or 1976.

RW: To this dayand I didn't mention that I wasn't able to get a house for a long time because of the restricted covenant in our area. I was not able to get a house.

RW: Well, on a happier note, I'd like to ask: looking back is there anything in this experience, that you did or other people did that makes you feel really good today when you think about it?

AK: I think in my case, there are too many erroneous things. You see, my family was split permanently. So at the age of 18 or so, you know, to

to be permanently split from the family, ^Aand I feel it for my younger brothers, who had gone over there [to Japan] and just leave their country; they could not adjust over there, be happy there or even in the future. So at the age of 14, 15, and 16, they were all on their own over there. And I think if the family were here, I would say it could end on a very happy note. We could say that in spite of that, we were together. But that was not so.

We are really willing to forget it really, put it behind. But we can't - for the sake of our children and our children's children. To say that hey, you're an American citizen now, but you have a really, real bad apple in your group, a bunch of traitors no less. We just didn't think that generations of people should have to bear that kind of stigmata. And we're doing everything we can at this point in time to set the record straight. Whether we will succeed or not, we don't know.

RW: If you think of any one else who would like to talk to me, you could just drop your brother a line or you could write to me at Washington University. Is this likely?

AW: I don't know who would feel as free as I do. There are too many who have gone through, you know, being a Nisei and what I had to go through ... The humiliation while being in the Army, you know for example. I was in Japan serving in the armed forces [U.S.A.] and a lady came up to me and she was the wife of the radiologist -- She comes up to me, and without any provocation, ... I was filing, I remember, and she said, 'You get out of that uniform, you dirty Jap, you're a disgrace to the uniform.' And I looked up and here she is, dead serious, you know. And I said, where did she come from, you know. She turned out to be a Californian. Her husband, who was raised in the Midwest, apologized profusely and tried to stop her, but he couldn't in spite of his best efforts. But that's sort of thing we do

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run into. And so, I think the thing that we're able to put up with that is the fact that I became a Christian in 1950, and was able to understand how the Lord bore all of our scars for us. And so, it's bearable. I think everyone carries certain crosses, and this is ours.

