

Charles Kikuchi
November 10, 1942

Bila -
Case History
Kikuchi

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Mr. Morita of Pasadena 60-I-B

Mr. Morita is one of the war veterans in this camp. This afternoon I went over and talked to him about an hour on various things.

He was born in Izu, Japan 50 years ago. It is located on a peninsula about an hours train ride from Tokyo. Mr. Morita comes from the Shizuoka Ken. A number of Japanese have come to the U. S. from this province. His father was a landowner in his native village. He said that his family line was rated fairly high in Japan because they were of the propertied class. "My ancestors for many centuries always acted as sort of town mayors." Both of his parents are still living. One brother, a graduate of Keiyo(?) University now owns light modernized apartment houses in Tokyo. Another brother, also a university graduate, is now dead.

Fifty years ago (1892) when there was a big importation of Japanese labor to Hawaii and California by the sugar interests, Mr. Morita's father came to the United States to work as a houseman in the Spreckles mansion in Sausalito, Calif., just across the bay from S. F. near the Golden Gate. His mother stayed behind in Japan and Mr. Morita was born that same year. His father made several trips back to Japan because he was paid a liberal salary. Mr. Morita stated that his father had received some university work in Japan and he had a knowledge of English. It was his intention to go to school in the United States, but he did not get very far because he was busy accumulating money.

In 1907 when Mr. Morita was 17, he also came to California. His father returned to Japan for the last time and he has not been back since. Mr. Morita took a job as a schoolboy in San Francisco and he attended the Pacific Heights Grammar school. He graduated in 1911 and for a short time he attended Lowell High School.

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About this time he heard that there were some friends from the same province living in Pasadena so he went down there and got a schoolboys job. He graduated from Pasadena High School in 1915. By this time he had decided that he wanted to be an engineer and remain in this country. He studied at L.A. Jr. College and at Cal. Tech. where he graduated.

He was still in college when the World War broke out. He joined the Student Army and continued with his training for engineering. He was taken into the regular army very shortly after that. In 1918 he was on the point of being sent overseas as an engineer because he had a speaking and writing knowledge of English, Japanese, and German. However, the Armistice was declared and he did not have to go to Siberia. He was given an honorable discharge shortly afterward.

Mr. Morita could not find an engineers' job after he entered civilian life so he worked in a Japanese grocery store in Los Angeles as a manager. The next year(1920) he started his own store in Pasadena and he continued this successfully until the outbreak of the present war.

At the time he opened his own store he decided that he wanted to get married. Negotiations were started with his family and a go-between arranged his marriage to a first cousin(not a blood relation because of some step-mother relationship). A big ceremony was held for the wedding in his home in Japan and Mr. Morita was represented at the wedding ceremony by a friend. Mrs. Morita entered this country as a picture bride shortly afterwards. The boat landed her in Seattle where Mr. Morita met her and another marriage ceremony was performed. The next year Bill was born. Dick 20, Elsie 17, and Helen 14 are the

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other children. Bill roomed with me at U. C. last term. He is now attending the U. of Nebraska studying to be an engineer. Dick is also there and he wants to be a dentist. Elsie and Helen are attending school in this center.

Mr. Morita is an average size Japanese, about 5'6". Signs of middle age are noticeable. He is getting bald and his hair is all thinned out. He is in an excellent physical condition in spite of his age. He has an extrovert personality and he speaks English well. Mrs. Morita is more self effacing and she speaks little English. She appears to be much more conservative than her husband. Bill took after his father, while Elsie and Dick are more inclined towards the mother's characteristics. Elsie is one of Bette's best friends here.

The home life of Mr. Morita's family was fairly Americanized while they were in Pasadena. He stated that they ate Japanese food part of the time and American food part of the time. They used the chopsticks quite frequently. Mr. Morita is a Protestant. He said that his family followed few Japanese customs. He is quite proud of his American citizenship which he received for his war service. He said: "I am an American and no different from any caucasian American." He had lots of caucasian friends in Pasadena, many of whom patronized his store. Mr. Morita has never returned to Japan. He expressed the desire to see his mother once more. "I'm used to this kind of life, and after the war I plan to make one last visit to Japan to see my mother and then I will come back to America forever. I can come back here because I have my citizenship."

Mr. Morita does not know for sure if dispersion would hasten the assimilation process of the Japanese in this country because of the unsettled conditions. He feels that the Japanese may just as well

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scatter all around now. "If California welcomes us back, we will go back." Mr. Morita intends to go back to Pasadena because he has his home there. "It is the only town in which I care to live." Before evacuation, Mr. Morita had never left Calif. since coming from Japan, except for the one trip to Seattle in 1920 and now Arizona.

In his social and business life, Mr. Morita was quite active. He was highly respected in the Japanese community and among his caucasian friends. He belonged to the Japanese Association in Pasadena and for three years he served as the Treasurer "in order to put it back on its feet financially."

He stated that the purpose of the Japanese Association there was to help out the people in that community. "There was nothing political to it. We had no consulate office there. Our purpose was to do more of social work. The whole community donated funds for this purpose."

He gave an example where his association was able to help out. A drunkard father died leaving his three sons orphans. He had been allowed to have a large credit at various Japanese stores because the owners were sorry for the children. There were no funds for the funeral so that the Association sponsored the funeral. Mr. Morita and the other stores cancelled all of the bills of the father so that the boys would not feel obligated to repay. A collection of \$300 was also taken up in the community and given to the 17 year old boy and his two younger brothers.

Morita explained that the Association also did most of the alien registration and he showed me a letter from the Postmaster praising the group for its fine cooperation.

Send off parties were also given for Nisei draftees and caucasians

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American Legion Posts were invited to these affairs. "The people in Pasadena felt that the Japanese there were not bad eggs." This was verified by letters which he showed me from various public officials in that city. "Only 6 out of 1,000 Japanese were picked up by the FBI after war broke out. That is the least of any Japanese community. That's the best record." The people of Pasadena were not glad to see the Japanese go from there and the Fair Play Committee is going to send gifts to all former Pasadena families at Christmas time. Nobu is working on that list yet.

Mr. Morita was also active in the Japanese Union Church, and he also served as a scoutmaster for boys troop 41 in 1937.

His home and store constituted the only Japanese residence in the whole block. At the outbreak of the war, the Caucasian people in his block made him the air-raid warden, "to show that they trusted me." He also served as a block representative to the Civilian Defense Committee.

Mr. Morita was not active in the American Legion in Pasadena, although he indicated that he knew the members well. He did not join the Legion because he did not want the Japanese in the community to feel that he was putting on airs.

Evacuation changed his life and he lost his security. He left all of his business and his home in Pasadena. Pianos, davenport, and a lot of furniture was stored in this house. He figured on getting a good rent (75.00) a month for his 2 story home and store, but he now finds it difficult to rent out. "It is hard because we do not have any defense industry in Pasadena, and it is a ghost town now." His lack of income is one of the sources of his greatest worries. He has not been able to send as much as he wants to for Bill. Bill is

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now working in some campus fraternity as a dishwasher. He wants Elsie to go out to school next year, but he is not quite certain that he will be able to finance her.

Mr. Morita has made a fairly good adjustment to the Center life. At Tulare he was a calisthenics director and was on the payroll. Fryer has given the former service men here a break in jobs so that Mr. Morita is doing the same thing here. He does not have a large class now because it is still dark in the early mornings.

But Mr. Morita's life is not an idle one. He has many interests which keeps him busy 7 days a week. During all the years of work, he never had much of a chance for recreation to the extent which he has here. One of his hobbies is fishing. Mr. Morita goes out to the canal once or twice a week. With several of his friends he explores around for the best spots, going as far as ten miles from the center. No equipment was brought here with him so that he has made several excellent poles from the white pine wood. This particular wood is very flexible and suited for his purposes. Guides have been made from odd pieces of wire found around the center. At first he used to give the fishes away to his friends for their ponds. Now he fries and eats them. He claims that the fish taste similar to bass. He takes particular pride in the fact that the biggest fish he has caught was 19" long. Mr. Morita is quite proud of his fishing abilities. "The fish give me quite a fight."

During the first month, Mr. Morita and his sons were busy building the furniture and gathering lumber. His daughters also helped in getting the lumber. The apartment has been fixed up in excellent taste. It is his theory that everything should be built on a small scale in order to make the room larger. Beds have been made with

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designs on the ends. Boards are placed under the mattresses and he uses no springs. Bill built a redwood hopechest and other items such as tables, chairs, dressers, closets, cigarette stands, study desks and pantry. Several of those stands with cloth spread across them serve to divide the room from the rest of the apartment. His house is equipped with an air cooler and the family is comfortably settled.

Now that his home has been all fixed up, Mr. Morita has had more time to indulge in other hobbies besides fishing. One of the favorite aspects of his recreation are the long hikes out into the desert to search for ironwood. This is the dead roots of a tree and the Iseei have carved many art objects out of them. The wood is very hard but it has soft spots. This is patiently scooped out with a screwdriver. The object do not represent anything in particular, although they are chiefly being used for flower stands. After the object has been smoothed off, it is highly polished with shoepolish or stained black until it looks like an antique piece. Great patience is required in this work as the going is very slow. Mr. Morita says that the people in Japan do a considerable amount of this sort of work. He has received no formal training in it, but he has a particularly good sense of figures and proportions. A piece of this root in the rough state is taken out and studied until a general pattern is fixed in the mind. Sometimes other wood carvers are consulted and they discuss the procedure which should be used. When this is settled, he sets to work. It takes anywhere from three days to a week to finish the article. It is his plan to make a matching set of various objects.

During the "ironwood hunting" parties, the men have developed a practice of carrying canes with a fork on the ends. On the handle

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end, Mr. Morita has designed a snakes head. He says that they used these short sticks to catch rattlesnakes. The men seemed to have developed considerable skill in this as nobody has been bitten yet. The idea is to keep jabbing the stick at the snake so that it never has an opportunity to strike--"just like in boxing." The men get fairly close to the snake, as they move around. At the first opportunity, the snake is pinned down. A man is judged according to the skill in which he can accomplish this in the least time. At first, all of them were beginners so that they all tended to smash the snakes head in. Mr. Morita has become quite proficient in this art. He gives the snakes to friends who keep them in boxes for exhibition. During these forays, the party usually take a lunch. They start out early in the morning and are gone all day.

Another practice which these parties have developed is to return by the outskirts of the farms. Right now they bring cucumbers home in the knapsacks which they carry. These are also given to friends who pickle them with salt and vinegar into the Japanese dish known as "Otsekemono" (? Pardon my French!) The taking of these vegetables is not considered as stealing although the men like to make a great secret about where they obtained them. They do not want to encourage the young boys to do this "because they have the wrong attitude and they will take more than they need and waste it." Mr. Morita greatly enjoys this outdoor life, but he now finds that his other activities are beginning to take more of his time. Sometimes Mr. Morita also gives good haircuts with hand clippers to the boys he formerly knew in the scout troop in Pasadena. Mr. Morita says that he now reads very little although he does have a few books in his home.

Besides the exercises classes he gives in the mornings and evenings, he also attends Rec. meetings and consultations. One of his biggest activities has been in the organization of the War Veterans club in this camp. The administration has been favorably inclined towards them and an office and a secretary paid by the WRA has been assigned to them. All of them have been given "soft" jobs by the administration. He is quite proud of the fact that he designed and helped build the bench for this office.

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As to the function of the group he had this to say: "The Legion here is the only one that is able to fill the gap between the Issei and the Nisei. We will do the best we can to better this community. That is our aim. The Issei look to us for leadership because they believe that the Nisei are too young. We have avoided political ideas as much as possible, as we wish to help the Issei here and we don't want to run into conflicts. The Issei alone can not accomplish anything because they do not have the rights. They respect us more because we are more their age. The matter of age is very important to the Issei and they do not like the young people to be telling them what to do. They feel that the Nisei are too young yet."

Mr. Mitsumori, one of the Legion members, has been very active in the community life and he is also on the Board of Directors of the JACL.

Mr. Morita has not taken an active part in the political life of the center lately. He feels that there are too many Issei agitators who complain about little things. "I want to be constructive." He claimed that somebody who wanted to harm him sent a letter to the FBI saying that he was an agitator "because I happened to oppose their destructive ideas." He welcomes the FBI to come and investigate and they will find that he has a clean record. "We should work for the future instead of thinking all the time about the injustices of the past." He says that he talks a lot with the Issei and Nisei so that they will not get discouraged. "Those Issei educated in Japan think different than I do. They get their ideas from Japan and they don't change."

Mr. Morita is very much concerned over the education of his children and the other children in the center. He wondered whether the schools could get assistance from California. "The Nisei are citizens of California and the state should help out because Arizona is too poor. They have no textbooks here and the children don't get any homework. Children going to school without books is terrible. They should have homework." Mr. Morita says that he pays his taxes to California and that the Nisei children are entitled to help."

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He wants to send Elsie out to school next year and he is thinking of trying to get a job in the middle west so that he can make a home. He is very glad that Elsie is interested in school and that she wants to go on to college. Elsie used to read a lot and she has borrowed several of my books. She is a very attractive young girl. At present she has nothing specific picked out to go into. She just wants to be a coed. She is a little conservative in her ideas which may be due to her mothers influence. Mr. Morita thinks that Bette and Elsie click because they are more Americanized. Bette, however, feels that the girls in that group are not as Americanized as she would want them to be. She says that they are not willing to enter into discussions but always want to argue. She thinks that they trend to be a little Japanese. At school they are a little quiet. One of the English teachers is greatly disliked by Elsie and Bette because she tends to be so patronizing; "You Japanese are so self conscious." This burns Bette up no end and she does not like these insulting remarks.

Elsie is more favorable towards things Japanese. She thinks it would be a good idea to teach Japanese to the students here. She even enjoys the Issei talent shows. She has a boy friend going to the U. of Nebraska, which may be one of the reasons why she would like to go to college. She said that she liked the school here and did not mind being among the Japanese pupils. She claims that she likes it better than Pasadena, even though she does miss her caucasian friends. Bette, on the other hand, would much rather be attending Vallejo Hi.

Mr. Morita is in hopes that the whole problem of education will be settled by all of the evacuees being resettled in another year and a half. He corresponds with many of his caucasian friends. One of them is a U. S. Naval Officer who sent a letter to General De Witt just to find out where Morita was located. Another friend is a major in the air corps in Colorado who also writes to him. Other friends he knew during the 1st world war are now officers in the military services. Mr. Morita also has a number of caucasian friends in Pasadena, many of them in the American Legion Post there.

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