



Cincinnati Chapter

THE EASTWARD MOVE

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In the fall of 1913, my parents left America and returned to their home in Hiroshima-ken, Japan, with their four children. The oldest was 8 years old and the youngest was 2. Since my mother had a weak heart, father felt that physically mother would be better off with grandfather helping out; and economically it would be more feasible to rear the children in Japan.

So, about three months later, my father left his family with grandfather to go back to America with intentions of returning within a few years. Since my grandfather was a widower who had lost his wife many years ago, he was happy to have his grandchildren and daughter-in-law stay with him.

In June of the following year, I was born. Three months later, my mother passed away with an apparent heart attack. Suddenly, my grandfather "inherited" a family of five children all by himself with the youngest being three months old. Today I can understand the predicament he was in and certainly sympathize with the situation he was facing.

Fortunately, at this time, Mr. and Mrs. Kawanaka, who was grandfather's niece, volunteered to take care of me. Having returned from Hawaii recently, Mrs. Kawanaka knew how to feed a baby with

formula milk. In those days, it seems there was hardly anyone in the village who knew how to prepare the formula milk. Grandfather was quite relieved and grateful for Mrs. Kawanaka's offer, and he accepted it with sincere appreciation.

I was reared with tender, loving care in the Kawanaka family as an only son for 8 1/2 years. They had two daughters who were 15 and 18 years my senior so they helped take care of me. I shall never forget the happy and carefree life I had with them. I have many fond memories of that period.

Since my grandfather had passed away about two years earlier, my father, who had never returned during those years and had remarried in the meantime, called all of his children to America.

Although the Kawanaka family was unhappy and reluctant to see me go, I made up my mind to go to America and promised them I would return a wealthy man one day. Such was the promise made by a naive 8 1/2 year old boy who thought everyone became rich in America.

In the Spring of 1923, my two brothers, one sister and I came to America to join our father, stepmother, and a half-sister. Being brought up in Japan as an only son, I was quite "spoiled" so it was a difficult adjustment to be thrown together in a family with four other children. Not having lived with the rest of the original family in Japan, I felt the lack of closeness with my brothers and sisters. The next several months were difficult because the sudden change was a little too much for such a young boy to handle.

There were many times when I longed for the Kawanaka family, but I struggled to settle down. To make the best of the situation, I felt I had to put the relationship with my "new" family in proper perspective; also, it would be a matter of time in accomplishing the adjustment.

It was about this time when I was preparing to enroll in school that I learned of being adopted by the Kawanaka family in Japan with the consent of my father.

In order to acquire an education in preparation for better things to come, I, at age nine, enrolled in the first grade with virtually no knowledge of the English language. The elementary school I enrolled in was quite unique because there was a substantial number of immigrant children and children of immigrants. It was located in the older section of Portland, Oregon, where commercial buildings almost surround the school. Due to the decrease in residential homes, the enrollment of Caucasian children had decreased considerably.

With the high percentage of Japanese and Chinese children, the school had a faculty who used methods to cope with the problem of educating immigrant children who had no knowledge of the English language. My brothers and sister were assigned to a room called "Ungraded Class" where the students' ages ranged from 12 to 17. They were only lacking in the English language. Each student progressed on his individual efforts so he could complete the required 8-year education in far less time. Since I was underage for the "Ungraded Class" I was assigned to a normal first grade class. We had about 12 children of Japanese and Chinese

descent who could speak or understand very little English.

On the first day when the teacher saw the list of children's names on the enrollment sheet, especially those with Japanese and Chinese names, she became thoroughly confused as to their pronunciation. To remedy this situation, she decided to give American names to every Japanese and Chinese student.

On the second day, she started to read American names from a list. We were to pick out the names that appealed to us. Starting from "A", she read the list. I waited until the middle and liked the name "James." From that day on, my name became "James" although I picked it without knowing any significance attached to the name.

I was in the first grade for several months before I was placed in the second grade. The second grade teacher was also a stickler about phonics. We were drilled daily by using flash cards and books. We were constantly corrected on our pronunciation and enunciation. Thus began the Americanization process of a nine-year old immigrant boy who later completed his 12-year education in 10 years and made the honor roll during his four years of high school.

Upon graduation from high school in 1933, I was able to find a job as a grocery clerk and delivery boy with a salary of \$40 per month including room and board. I worked 10 to 12-hour days, seven days a week in one and six days a week the next. I was determined to work for two years and save enough money to see the Kawanaka family again. It was a frugal life for me during those two years, but some unknown force sustained my

determination, even so far as to forego the idea of a college education.

In the fall of 1935, I made my trip to Japan. It was a joyous occasion for me because the Kawanaka family was happy to see me again after twelve years. Tears of joy flowed quite freely during our reunion. Shortly after my arrival, Mr. Kawanaka took me personally to a neighbor and proudly presented me by saying I had returned. I did not quite understand the reason behind this action but later learned this neighbor had persuaded the Kawanakas to adopt a son for their daughter shortly after I had left for America. He said once anyone goes to America, he very seldom returns. Mr. Kawanaka told the neighbor that he had a son in me and he had the utmost faith that I would return some day. This was the moment for Mr. Kawanaka because he was able to prove his steadfast conviction. This incident alone made my trip worthwhile. Moreover, making such a wonderful family so happy was most satisfying to me.

As I prepared to come back to America in January of 1936, my departure this time was quite hard because of the realization that this may be the last time I would see them alive. Mr. Kawanaka passed away three years later, and Mrs. Kawanaka in 1945. To this day, I hold them as precious foster parents.

The Americanization process progressed quite steadily as the years rolled by and by the end of high school, I was well on my way to becoming a typical American youth. My thinking process had changed from Japanese to American. English replaced my Japanese language, and American customs became part of my daily life. During the transition, the study

of American history greatly impressed me along with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Although I knew I could never become an American citizen due to my ancestry, Americanism was becoming imbedded in my mind. My only regret at this time, in hindsight, is that I failed to maintain and expand on my Japanese language.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1941, it came to me as a shock, and I became one of 112,000 victims who were embroiled in the turmoil to follow. Because I was legally an enemy alien, I had a premonition that some form of reprisal would be taken by the American government toward people of Japanese ancestry. And I also felt that such action as evacuation would be inevitable for me. However, it came to me as a great surprise when American citizens of Japanese ancestry were included in the mass evacuation without due process of law. Such an arbitrary action by the American government based on ancestry only was a sad disappointment to me because I felt it was contrary to American justice and violation of the Constitution.

It is unnecessary for me to enumerate the trials and tribulations I went through during evacuation and confinement in the concentration camp. There have been many articles and books written on the hardships encountered by many people and my experience was no exception. Suffice it to say that being confined in a camp surrounded with barbed wire fences and machine gun towers caused me to become uneasy and I began to feel I was losing my sense of reality.

It was about this time that the government came out with questionnaires on loyalty to the country

directed to the very people they had imprisoned without trial. It stirred the emotions of all the internees and turmoil erupted in many camps. Irrespective of the mistreatment we received, the overwhelming majority of the internees, including myself, chose to remain loyal to this country when answering the questionnaires. And surprisingly, about 6,000 volunteers came out of these camps to form the 442nd Regimental Combat Team to fight in the European theater and the military intelligence team in the Pacific theater.

Life in camp was miserable and I decided to relocate. To do this, still being an enemy alien, I had to get clearance from the FBI and the Army and Naval Intelligence as to my character. The approval came several weeks later, so I put in my application for relocation to the Chicago, Cleveland and Cincinnati hostels operated by the Society of Friends (Quakers). I made up my mind to relocate to the city that accepted my application first, and it turned out to be Cincinnati.

I relocated to Cincinnati in July, 1943, without any prior knowledge of the city and not knowing any person in the area. I became an "immigrant" for the second time but under far different circumstances. I recall one incident in particular. On a street car, a man struck up a conversation with me. He asked me how long I had been living in Cincinnati. I replied, "About two weeks." With an amazed look on his face, he commented how well I had learned to speak English in such a short time. The hostel was managed by a Quaker couple with Dr. and Mrs. Takao helping them. It was quite crowded but there was no problem. We were all "immigrants", in a sense,

with one common goal: to return to the mainstream of American life. With such a goal, we all became friends and enjoyed fellowship with one another, although we came from different walks of life and different western states.

Since I came to Cincinnati without any job offer, I proceeded to look for a job through the War Relocation Authority (WRA) office. They had a listing of available jobs for persons of Japanese ancestry. I could not find a job that suited me for which I was qualified, as many of the better jobs required American citizenship that I lacked. Knowing my stay at the hostel was limited, I thought that I should expedite my job hunting by looking elsewhere. I began to seek job opportunities through three daily papers and started answering advertisements directly on my own. After one week, I found a job at the Mariemont Inn as food and beverage steward that paid \$30.00 per week plus meals.

Jobs were not that easy to be had because the war was still going on and the employers were still casting doubtful looks at people of Japanese ancestry. Mr. Raymond Booth, the Relocation Officer, was surprised to hear of my success and began to suggest my strategy as a pattern to other evacuees to seek employment on their own. Thanks to the great effort of Mrs. Booth, I was able to find a room with a family located in Oakley. This was the beginning of my 45-year stay in Cincinnati.

In the summer of 1952, through the untiring efforts of Mike Masaoka and the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), the Walter McCarran Immigration and Naturalization Act was passed over the veto of President Truman. This bill

provided naturalization privilege for the Issei (first generation) to obtain American citizenship which had been denied them by law up to that time. It was a Herculean task of overriding President Truman's veto because it required two-thirds majority of both the House and Senate. Through diligence and political maneuvering, Mike Masaoka overcame almost insurmountable odds and accomplished the passage of this bill. It was jubilant news for us who had waited so long for the opportunity to become American Citizens.

Dr. Heishi Takao was the president of the Cincinnati Chapter JACL at that time. He asked me if I would undertake to organize classes for Isseis so that they might prepare to take the naturalization examination. I accepted the task as a challenge and to share the dream of citizenship becoming a reality for other Isseis.

By researching the naturalization law, I discovered that the Isseis could take the examination in their native language because they had been residents of this country for more than twenty-five years. This meant that learning English was not necessary for citizenship.

My first priority in organizing the classes was acquiring instructors who were bilingual, experienced in teaching, and commanded the respect of the Isseis. There were two persons who came to my mind with perfect qualifications. I contacted Dr. Shiro Tashiro, a faculty member at the University of Cincinnati since 1919, and Dr. Joseph Tamura who had been on the faculty at the College of Medicine since 1931. I was overjoyed when both consented to undertake the program.

Upon contact with the Chief Examiner of Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in Cincinnati, I explained that the naturalization classes were to be conducted in Japanese and I would appreciate the examination be conducted in the same language. He stated that he had no objections but explained that INS did not have provision for translators. He further stated that it was up to us to provide them with individuals with recognized integrity. I submitted the names of Dr. Tashiro and Dr. Tamura and the Chief Examiner accepted them without hesitation for he knew their reputation.

With the groundwork fairly well established, I organized two classes with a total enrollment of approximately fifteen Isseis, ranging in age from mid-fifties to early sixties. Since Dr. Tashiro lived in Clifton and Dr. Tamura in Pleasant Ridge, the students were placed in a class according to the location of their residences. I contacted the Adult Education Division and received their cooperation by lending us the textbooks and pamphlets on naturalization. With great enthusiasm shown by both the "sensei" (teachers) and the "seito" (students), the classes began to function smoothly and seriously.

As I look back, I marvel at the devotion displayed by both Dr. Tashiro and Dr. Tamura toward this project. They had to read the textbook in English, translate it to Japanese, and prepare the lectures to be conveyed to the "seito", in addition to the full program they carried on their full-time job! Because the politics and system of government were different in Japan, sometimes it was difficult to translate American history and the Constitution to

Japanese and compare them in precise Japanese terminology. In spite of difficulties, the "sensei" did a fantastic job of educating the "seito."

In the early spring of 1953, the day of reckoning had come. It was a day of examination and two classes went before the INS examiners with Dr. Tashiro and Dr. Tamura as translators. Each student was quizzed individually by an examiner, and after four to five grueling hours, they all passed with "flying colors." It was a joyous occasion for everyone. It was the culmination of "sensei's" great efforts. We all owed a big debt of gratitude to Dr. Tashiro and Dr. Tamura for, without their diligence and perseverance this day would not have been so joyous. To complete the day, I took my examination in English and passed it to fulfill my dream.

In conclusion, I wish to state that "The Japanese American Creed" composed by Mike Masaoka best expresses my sentiment. It was first read before the United States Senate and printed in the Congressional Records, May 9, 1941. I was asked to read this "creed" at one of the Midwest District Council meetings and was so moved by the feeling it expressed that my voice quivered and almost faded toward the end, In addition, I am forever indebted to those men and women of Japanese ancestry who served in the United States Armed Forces during World War II in spite of all the adversities. For, without their gallant deeds, I may not have realized my prized possession - American Citizenship.

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