

Excerpt from Densho Interview with Akiko Kurose
July 17, 1997

Akiko Kurose: Well, I had just come home from church. And then we kept hearing, "Pearl Harbor was bombed, Pearl Harbor was bombed." I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was. My geography was not that sophisticated. I had no idea, and my father said, "Uh-oh, there is going to be trouble." And I said, "Well, how come?" He said, "Well, Japan just bombed Pearl Harbor." And he says, "We're at war with Japan." But, I thought, "Why should it bother me?" You know, "I'm an American." And then he said, "You know, we are aliens." My parents... "We don't have the citizenship, so they're gonna do something, we'll probably get taken away." But at that time, my parents had no feeling that we would be removed because -- so they were saying my brother would have to take on the responsibility to keep the family together, because they may be removed or put into camp or whatever. And, then when I went back to school that following morning, December 8th, one of the teachers said, "You people bombed Pearl Harbor." And I'm going, "My people?" All of a sudden my Japaneseness became very aware to me. And then that I was no longer, I no longer felt I'm an equal American, that I felt kind of threatened and nervous about it.

Excerpt from Densho Interview with Gordon Hirabayashi
May 25, 1999

Gordon Hirabayashi: And, and then one day, I'm dashing home. "Hey Gordon, it's five to eight." I grabbed my stuff and it takes about five minutes to get home so I was just dashing home, and it hit me. A question that I should've faced earlier, just hit me. How come I'm dashing home and all your time keepers are still there? I didn't -- I just needed the question to be raised. I knew I couldn't answer it. You know, without saying, "I can't do it." I turned around, and went back, to the library. "Hey, what's, what's the matter?" I said, "Well, you guys are here." "Well, we got work to do." I said, "Well, I got work to do too. I decided if you guys are here, I'm gonna, I'm gonna work with you. I'll go back when you guys are ready to go." Nobody turned me in. And I didn't take that until it hit me. And when it hit me I knew, gosh, I can't do it. That's two-faced.

But a question arose during the process and I, the, the question was this -- that's why I think it'll fit here, this part of it -- if I couldn't accept curfew, how could I accept this? Soon as that question hit me, I knew answer, the answer. I couldn't, I can't accept it. It's worse. This is worse.

Excerpt from Densho Interview with Kara Kondo
December 7, 2002

Kara Kondo: I can always picture the sun was setting and the crowd was gathering where the people -- some of your friends -- and there were hundreds of people there. Some were there to say goodbye, others came just for the curiosity. And it just had sort of a circus feeling about it. And people were looking for their friends to say goodbye to, and, but finally we got on the train. I remember pronouncing the last name and I got help going up the train. And I said, "Thank you for your help." He said, "Forget it. Thank you." And it was such an odd feeling, it just... as we pulled out I can remember my father holding onto the arm of the seat, hard seat. The blinds had been drawn, but you could, before they did that you could see the shadow of Mt. Adams and the sun behind it. And looking at his face I could just feel that he was saying goodbye to the place that he'd known so well. Pictures like that just really, when you think about it, were very sad. But it was... it was such a -- it's hard to explain the kind of feeling, the atmosphere of that time.

But... and we went, traveled through the night with the shades drawn and got to Portland livestock center, our evacuation center about, really about dawn. And I stayed until the last person got in the, into the compound and heard the gate clang behind me. And I think -- when people ask what my memory was about evacuation -- I think I'll always remember the sound of the gate clanging behind you and knowing that you were finally under, you had barbed wires around you, and you were really being interned.

Excerpt from Densho Interview with Masao Watanabe
June 19, 1998

Masao Watanabe: I had been to Puyallup a few times when it was the fairgrounds of Western Washington. Little did I know that I would replace the pigs and the cows and that type of stuff, you know, 'cause they, they restructured the fairgrounds and the parking lots into these temporary hovels. And they had a hell of a lot of nerve calling it "Camp Harmony." But, anyway, it was... boy, it was a real traumatic type of living, where you're in the former stalls where the pigs and the cows and everything else were. Temporary shacks, just the walls were so many feet off the ground, and families of six and seven were crowded into one little spot. I think intentionally, I forgot a lot of "Camp Harmony." I hate to use the word "harmony," but it was just not a very good experience.

How were you, what were you thinking? I mean, you were a high school graduate and so you had learned a lot in your civics courses and history courses about the United States Constitution and all those things. What was going through your mind as this was happening to you, a United States citizen?

Well, in retrospect I can say a lot about that, but I just... I just felt that all this liberty and crap was all crap. You know, it just, you read so much about democracy and all this and it was a real eye-opener to see what could happen to citizens and what does citizenship mean. 'Cause it just bothered the heck out of me to think that I tried to be a good citizen and, man, they are tossing me into joints like this. I didn't like it. I can't imagine anybody liking it or having positive images of being locked up.

Excerpt from Densho Interview with Tosh Yasutake
November 14, 2002

Interviewer: Well, eventually the government decided to form a segregated army unit, the 442. And they went to the camps and they asked for volunteers from the camps. What was your reaction when that happened?

Tosh Yasutake: Well, I thought, that's really great. But then at the time it happened I thought it was -- I was very happy to hear that.

Interviewer: Why were you happy to hear that?

Tosh Yasutake: Well, because we were given -- if you wanted to go in the army volunteer another -- before, we were not, even if you wanted to go we couldn't go. So now, at least we were given a chance to go into the army. But then later, the more I thought of it, the more uncertain I was because, because of the fact that actually they were asking volunteers for, to form a segregated Japanese American unit and the more I thought of it the more upset I got. And I thought that if they were going to volunteer or even be drafted in the army, they ought to just assimilate us among the hakujin troops and not have a segregated unit. And so many of the friends and working in the hospital had already volunteered, but I didn't until the very last day because of that. I was holding out, hoping that they'd say that they would assimilate us to, if we wanted to we could go to some other units. But they didn't say that. And finally in desperation, the last day I decided that maybe if I did volunteer that it might help my dad get released a little earlier. So I did volunteer.

Excerpt from Densho Interview with Frank Yamasaki
August 18, 1997

Frank Yamasaki: Again, now these were rumors that you must volunteer to prove that you're a good 100 percent American, that you're a loyal American.

Interviewer: Volunteer.

Frank Yamasaki: Volunteer to the U.S. Army. Well... no way, from my feeling. It was, it was just totally wrong. Let us, take us back to Seattle, get our parents and get our hotel back, get us back into what we were. We were American. How come Tony, they were Italian, how come they weren't evacuated? How come the German friends I had, they weren't evacuated? And they had far more active political organization in America than the Japanese had. The Japanese, I don't recall ever sounding, being subversive-minded. And I think, later on, it proved there was absolutely no subversive act.