

"You People Bombed Pearl Harbor"

Aki Kurose

ME: Let's move ahead, to the time of Pearl Harbor. Where were you, what were you doing?

AK: 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. And then the whole time we were now getting the orders, and getting prepared to go to camp and whatever.

ME: You mentioned your teacher said, "Your people bombed Pearl Harbor." Was there any other signs, any other discrimination?

AK: Yeah, and some of the students would just be very unfriendly. Because it was a very emotional time and some of their families, members probably went to war or were involved. And so it became a very emotional time, and my Japaneseness became very, very prominent to me. It was that I became very much aware of my Japaneseness. Not in a real positive way, but kind of a scary way, or, and almost like... "Why?"

ME: What did you think was going to happen to your parents?

AK: I had no idea. I just felt like, "Why are they saying this, and where are they gonna go?" I really had no idea what a camp would be like. And I really didn't know what to expect.

ME: What, what did they think was going to happen to them? Did they have any idea?

AK: They just said, "Uh-oh." And they didn't really clarify, or possibly they didn't know, probably they didn't know exactly what was going to happen. The FBI was, came to the apartment, and they were watching the man across the street, Mr. Kimura, because he worked for the Japanese Consulate or whatever. And so, all this became a very, kind of a fearful kind of thing for us. You know, saying, "Wow, this could actually happen."