

I REMEMBER LIFE IN SEABROOK

In August, 1945, I remember coming to Seabrook on a hot, dusty train from Poston, Arizona (our internment camp). The shades were pulled down and we peeked out because my grandmother told us there were Indians watching us, on that day memory and imagination were mixed, and I could swear there were Indians with lances sitting on their horses peering at us on our click-clacking train. I do remember my father and I leaving the train in Chicago to have a real breakfast of bacon, eggs, toast and coffee (my father's favorite). We savored every bit and nearly missed our train and had to make a run for it.

Our arrival in Seabrook was not a day to celebrate. We arrived to find we were to live in gray shacks. We were given two rooms, 25 ft x 25 ft for 11 people - the same living quarters we had in camp. To add to our discomfort, we had to stuff hay into canvas sacks to use as our mattress. I don't know when we got real mattresses but at some point we did.

While living in Hoover Village, we had to walk to the communal shower and latrine. I remember having no privacy. We were unable to cook in the shacks, so we ate in the company cafeteria about a quarter mile away. My grandmother was unable to climb stairs, so each time we went to eat Ronnie Yonemoto, Sha Sha (a deaf mute) and Wataru Okamoto would rush down the stairs and carry my grandmother into the cafeteria. Kiku, my 5-year-old sister, had a terrible time at first. She told my grandmother she couldn't eat because of the "dirty" people in the cafeteria. My grandmother questioned Kiku and finally came to the conclusion Kiku was referring to the Blacks. She had never seen Blacks prior to our arrival in Seabrook and thought they didn't bathe.

Fortunately we were in the shacks a short time, then moved to 813 East Parsonage Road (the apartments). We lived next to the Sawamura (812), Kuramoto (814), and the Motoikes (817). Later Aki and Lena Kato moved into 814 when the Kuramoto family moved to California. The Katos and my mother and father had nightly Mahjong games, sometimes playing 10-12 hours straight. The games lasted long hours, especially in the winter when work was slack in the Seabrook plant, in addition, Mama, Papa, Lena, Aki, Mrs. Kato and Mr. Nakata played Hana-fuda, a Japanese card game. A good time was had by all.

At 813 Parsonage Road ten of us were squeezed into 3 small bedrooms, a living room, kitchen and bathroom. We had 2 double bunks in one room, 1 double bunk and a single bed in another, my father and mother in the 3rd room and I slept in the living room. I marvel at how we got to school on time everyday. Of course, we were the last ones on the bus each day. I became a tradition. In all this, my sister Kiku did not miss a day of school from kindergarten through high school. We all started work at 13 and 14 years old. During the summers, I worked in the fields picking beans and cutting spinach until I was 16. Then I worked in the Seabrook plant and was promoted into the quality control group at 17 and then a timekeeper. At first I was so tired my grandmother massaged my arms so I could move them the next day.

I started college with the intent to be a pharmacist but was more than glad after 2 years to quit so my brother Katchan could go to college. I needed a job to help with his tuition so I went to work as a dental assistant for Dr. Harry Barber (who was married to Mr. Seabrook's daughter). It was disaster. I had an aversion to blood so I threw up on arrival to work and threw up before I left work. Then Nochi Yumikura told me about a job opening at the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company. I applied and was hired. However, I nearly did not get the job because I was the first non-white hired into the business office and upper management felt the public would object. Mr. Tewksbury (local manager) told the company either they hire me or he will quit and would not do so quietly. I was hired. Then another obstacle-a letter arrived from Seabrook Farms advising me our family will be evicted if I took a job outside the company. Again Mr. Tewksbury came to my aid and because Jack Seabrook was on the Board of Directors for New Jersey Bell, I was not affected and was "allowed" to stay with the telephone company. Work generally was no problem, pay and promotions were accelerated as far as I was concerned. I was fortunate to be the first Japanese hired, the first Japanese promoted and the first female to be promoted in a man's job. I realize the reason I was promoted into a man's job was to fulfill AAP/EEOC requirements. (I was a minority and female.) Unfortunately, while working at Bell, I felt job-related prejudice for the first time in my career. During confrontations between management and union I found signs "They got us at Pearl Harbor they'll get us again". It was a particular volatile period between the company and the union. During one confrontation I was talking to the union delegate on the telephone and heard a union member

yelling "F----- the Jap bitch". I immediately met with the delegate to inform the union, "If any employee used the "F" word again I will fire him. I am an American of Japanese ancestry, a Japanese not a Jap. Call me a Jap and I will fire him. Whether I am a bitch is his opinion and if he was man enough he will say it to my face at which time I will fire him."

That was the end to any visible signs of prejudice while I was working. I retired in 1985 after 34 years with N. J. Bell. As a whole my family has been fortunate. We were poor but never knew it! We even had four in college at one time. My brother Katsushige earned a Ph.D. in psychology, Masaru A.B.S. in mechanical engineering, Mitsuo was a systems analyst, Ikuyo is a housewife, Sadayo is a cashier at the local grocery store, Kikuye a retired physical education teacher plus a retired U.S. Air employee and Hideko has a Masters as a language-speech specialist. Not bad for a father who was a military school graduate, a professional racer for the Nash Company, a lettuce shipper and finally a self-taught body and fender man and upholsterer and a mother who ran a restaurant/bar and ice cream store and retired from Seabrook Farms as a packer.

The best part is through all our life experiences we (sisters and brothers) grew up as best friends. We lost 2 brothers and our father but are fortunate enough to have our mother (92 years old) still with us.

By Fusaye Kazaoka
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