

## GATHERING TESTIMONY

The hearings were held in downtown Los Angeles. We provided rides to the hearings and we even managed to get them to hold one of the hearings at Little Tokyo in the evening. One of the ladies that testified at the Little Tokyo Towers was a person that had called me at my office at Cal State Long Beach. When I answered the phone, there was a long silence and she hesitantly asked if I was the person volunteering to work with people that were thinking of testifying. I usually couldn't afford to spend too much time with each caller but I could tell, however, that I needed to spend time with her otherwise she would not feel encouraged enough to step forward. Her brother was the young man that was shot and killed during the Manzanar riot of 1942.



**Noontime rally held outside the Commission Hearings**

In December of that year, believing that the Manzanar authorities were planning to railroad an innocent man for allegedly beating an "informer," a large group descended upon the police building to protest. The authorities panicked and tear gas was fired at the crowd.

The official report said that in the ensuing melee, shots were fired at the advancing rioters. Those who were in the crowd tell a different story. When tear gas was thrown, the crowd began to disperse at which time shots were fired at them. Mrs. Okamoto, the caller's younger brother was a fatality among those who were hit by bullets. It was said that a camp doctor was pressured to sign a statement indicating that the cause of death were gunshot wounds to the front of the victims, but, he refused.



**Outside State Building**

We talked for almost an hour. At the end of our conversation, quiet but one laden with emotion, she agreed to testify. She wanted the world to know that her teenage brother, James, was shot in the back as he fled. For years, the family had kept his tee shirt with the bullet hole in the back as evidence of this fact.

Jim H. Matsuoka, 2004

## The Hearings

The hearings proved to be an outpouring of emotions that had been pent up for so many years. It also featured to those opposed to redress like Senator S.I. Hayakawa and Lillian Baker of Gardena, who wound up being ejected after she tried to rip the testimony out of the hands of a spokesperson for the 442nd. Hayakawa, on the other hand, made news by deriding the Nisei, saying that the camps were beneficial in that it forced them out of their ethnic ghetto and out into to a wider world.

My testimony at the hearings was to be quite simple and direct. I wanted to point out that my father's life savings of some twenty years were gone. I still had the bank deposit books from the Sumitomo Bank. The U.S. Government had seized all of Sumitomo's deposits as enemy alien assets and then simply wiped them off the books. A letter from the Department of Justice said that we had in fact "abandoned" the claim



because too many years had passed.

Emotions boil over as redress opponent, Lillian Baker Swatches testimony away from Jim Kawaminami (spokesman for the 442 veterans)

I was more concerned about the testimony to be given by the person seated next to me. Larry Boss was a graduate student at Cal State Long Beach and had made a detailed study of the economic losses sustained by the Japanese community living in and around Long Beach. We needed this short of data because we were constantly being asked how we came up with the figure of \$25,000 for reparations. Both Lloyd Inui of Long Beach's Asian American Studies Program, his mentor of sorts, and I had to do a lot to get Larry to agree to testify. I even had to make a special trip to his home in Long Beach to make sure that he would submit his paperwork in on time. I felt Larry's testimony would be a crucial one. Here we had a case study of a local community that would document the enormous financial losses suffered by the Japanese Americans.

You could imagine our shock when Judge Marutani, who was presiding over the hearings, indicated that the testimonies will be halted due to the lateness of the hour, and that we should simply turn in our written statements. Shouts of protests immediately came from the audience. The four of us sitting at the testifier's table sat in stunned silence. All three of the persons sitting to the right of me began to hand over their statements to the clerk. The protest continued to cascade down from the audience and I could clearly hear Lillian Nakano, who was sitting in the front row in back of me yelling, "Jim, do something!" My first thought was - why me? I had that sinking feeling of someone that's picked to be "it." For a brief moment, I thought about asking everyone to stand up and walk out! Lillian was continuing to egg me on, all of this on an evening in which I was hoping that my testimony would go quickly so that I could head for dinner.

Well, it was all over the Metro section of the L.A. Times the next day. I had slammed my fist in anger on the table. I told Judge Marutani that I had waited too many years to speak about what had happened to us and no one was going to stop me. The audience of course erupted as I began a tirade against our incarceration and it's destruction of our rights as Americans. I likened the promises of America with the broken Christmas toy I was given at Manzanar, both of which deserved to be relegated to a trashcan! I also railed against the like of people like Senator Hayakawa, whom I said destroyed forever the notion that "wisdom and old age go hand in hand." I concluded that were I to receive redress, I would be glad to buy him a one way bus ticket back to Canada. In the turmoil that followed my outburst as I was leaving, a reporter asked me if I had planned all of this. No, I said. The only real plan I had that evening was to just go to dinner.

Jim H. Matsuoka (February, 2004)