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## TAKING ORAL HISTORIES

### Shiro and Mei Nakano

#### Japanese American Internment Camp Survivors



**Mei:** My father thought the kids born here should follow the American way of life. And even then he felt they would run up against prejudice. He used to say “Don’t forget you are Japanese,” meaning you must not bring shame to the whole race. It meant you were somebody. It sustained us through a lot of humiliation we underwent.

**Shiro:** I was working in a market for a man who had even sponsored a Japanese American scout troop. We felt comfortable. On December 7th, the liquor manager came running up to me and said, “You and I are enemies.” I hadn’t even heard of Pearl Harbor. On Monday, (the owner) was there with a termination check saying “I have to let you go, because we’re not on the same side anymore.” He did not stop to think that I was an American citizen, born and raised in Los Angeles.

**Mei:** The direction of our whole lives is toward civil rights. We vote that way and we talk that way. And we’re really very sad when people who have undergone the same kinds of experiences that we have can turn around and forget what it cost us!

**Shiro:** Education is the only answer. It’s the only way we are going to create a sense of security. Prejudice is so insidious. Without education we just fall right back into the same old trap . . . children are very aware of outward things. But you shouldn’t be afraid of things you haven’t come up against before. If you try not to make fun of a person who looks a little strange or different, pretty soon you don’t have to try. It becomes habit.

-- Excerpt from Nakano Oral History, Sonoma County Survivor Project, 1992.

