

## SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

[http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/298920\\_japanese09.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/298920_japanese09.html)

### Web site tracks life in WWII internment camps

#### Preserving stories for next generation

*Tuesday, January 9, 2007*

**By KERY MURAKAMI**

P-I REPORTER

The headlines seem so mundane, says Michelle Osborn.

"Claim Class Jewelry At Senior High School."

"Sunday Church Services."

There's a review of the movies "Lifeboat" and "Showboat," published Dec. 30, 1944, in the Rohwer Outpost.

For two months, Osborn, a fourth-generation Japanese American, has spent eight to 10 hours a week at her home computer in Renton, typing in headlines such as these. "Lifeboat," the review says, is playing in Hall 15; "Show Boat," in Hall 33.

These buildings were part of the Rohwer internment camp in Arkansas -- one of 10 relocation centers where about 120,000 Japanese Americans were locked up during World War II.

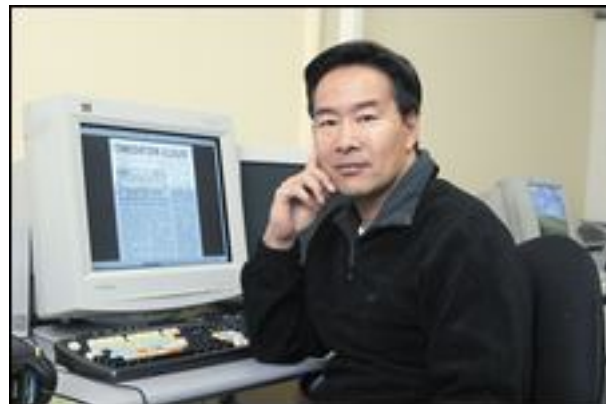
Another story in that day's Outpost: "Bronze Star Awarded S/SGT."

It's a little blurb about Staff Sgt. Frank J. Yumasaki, a Japanese American man formerly of Norwalk, Calif., who was awarded the Bronze Star by the Army.

"His mother resides in Block 14," the blurb notes.

The non-profit organization, Densho -- "to pass on to the next generation" in Japanese -- already includes videotaped interviews with Japanese Americans recalling their experiences, particularly during the war, on its Web site.

But with the help of a \$30,000 grant from the California State Library Civil Liberties Public Education Program, the Seattle-



based group began scanning internment-camp newspapers online over the summer. Osborn, 42, and 19 other volunteers started creating an archive for the articles two months ago.

Densho project Executive Director Tom Ikeda, who founded the group after retiring as a general manager for Microsoft Corp. in 1996 to increase awareness of Japanese American history, said availability of the papers now is limited. Ikeda, whose parents and grandparents were interned during the war, is hoping that making the papers more available will flesh out understanding of the internment.

"Vikings Trip Bears 35-33"

Sharon Nakamura, 50, types in her house on Beacon Hill. For two months, the third-generation Japanese American has been working on the Gila News-Courier, the newspaper published at the Gila internment camp in Arizona.

She's struck by the stories on the sports pages, such as one about a camp football league game.

"Maybe it's because I'm a parent now," says Nakamura, a graphic designer, who has a 13-year-old daughter, Mika Tanagi, with her husband, Page Tanagi, but she notices how the stories describe parents trying to create a sense of normalcy for their American-born children, wrested from high school football teams, friends and schools.

In barracks and behind fences, "they had dances and ice cream socials and movie nights. They were trying to have as normal an experience as they could," she said.

So far, the group has posted online all 583 editions published between 1942 and 1945 of the Manzanar Free Press, published at a camp in California, and the Minidoka Irrigator, from an Idaho camp. Ikeda is hoping to have all 4,000 issues of the 10 camp papers on the Densho Web site by summer. He and the volunteers said singling out people because of their ethnicity during a time of war is particularly poignant now.

Nakamura's father, who was interned at Minidoka as a child, volunteered at age 18 to work in the Idaho fields, "for pennies on the dollar," she said, to avoid being in a camp. Then he enlisted in the Army to get away from the fields.

Now, his daughter is angered by ads in the camp papers seeking people to work as field laborers.

"Basically, it was slave labor," she said. "The labor thing really irritated me. I thought, 'Look at this!'"

And there have been moments of revelation.



Tom Ikeda is the executive director of Densho, a non-profit group that hopes to increase understanding of the World War II internment of Japanese Americans by archiving the camp newspapers.

Osborn said the years of incarceration were not often brought up at the dinner table when she was growing up. But as she typed, she was amazed by the steadfast love of country infused in the articles. People facing suspicions of being traitors were simply hellbent to prove otherwise and had great patriotic sentiment.

"I never understood why," she said, adding that her family always flew a flag on the Fourth of July.

The articles do not tell the stories of what the families lost. Unsure if they'd ever be back home, many were forced to sell homes, farms and businesses for pennies on the dollar.

Certainly, there are moments of anger.

She notes a Gila News-Courier headline published Feb. 22, 1944 -- "Selective Service: Preliminary Examinations Start Today for 85 men" -- for an article on recruitment to the armed forces of men not considered trustworthy enough to live freely.

There aren't many people left to ask, Nakamura says. Her parents have died. And there are so many unanswered questions.

She'd always heard the Seattle Japanese Americans originally were sent to Manzanar in California, but didn't get along with the Californian internees. So they were sent to Minidoka. She didn't know if that was true.

"It would be great to come across little tidbits like that," she said.

---

*P-I reporter Kery Murakami can be reached at 206-448-8131 or [kerymurakami@seattlepi.com](mailto:kerymurakami@seattlepi.com).*

**© 1998-2007 Seattle Post-Intelligencer**