

A PAID SUPPLEMENT

# SCENES FROM BEHIND THE SCENES

Philadelphia Day of Remembrance • February 23, 2013

By GRANT UJIFUSA

I am very happy to be with you today in Philadelphia, a city that I think was the epicenter of Japanese American redress. Why? Because Grayce Uyehara once lived here and Grayce Uyehara was the heart and soul of redress.

As we know, the success of Japanese American redress is a tribute to the thousands, maybe tens of thousands, of people who worked on the effort. But today I want to talk about just eight of them, beginning with Grayce. And then I want to talk about Mike Masaoka, Spark Matsunaga, Dan Inouye, Bob Matsui, Cherry Kinoshita, Denny Yasuhara, and Tom Kometani.

For them, redress was *isshou kenmei* – Japanese for all in, full throttle and non-stop

To appeal to both liberals and conservatives of the 1980s, we made the case for redress on the plain words of the First, Fourth, and Fifth Amendments to the Constitution. For many conservatives, the language of the Amendments was to be understood literally, against which the camps looked bad. Many liberals took a more expansive view of what the Amendments meant, including a solicitude toward racial minorities. But for nearly all Americans, the three Amendments were (and are) the bedrock “thou shalt not’s” of our political and civic life. That’s what was violated. So we had a way to frame the justification for redress to look like the River Jordan: deep and wide

But for many Japanese Americans and for me, the Anglo-American language of the Bill of Rights felt (and still feels) a little abstract.

For us, I think something else was also at work in redress. And that was *oyakoko*, a fundamental tenet of Japanese life -- the gratitude we feel toward our forebears, especially toward our Issei, for all they did to make our lives what they are today.

And so, out of gratitude, we were intent on redressing the pain and hurt visited on those to whom we owed everything. In short, I feel that redress was driven by a direct appeal to our Constitution and by *oyakoko*, by what the Japanese feel family means.

Still today at the center of most families is a mother. And the mother of Japanese American redress, the person who made sure everybody did what they were supposed to when they were supposed to do it was Grayce Uyehara. She was the person who made all the trains run on time in Washington and inside all the JACL chapters all over the country. And Grayce did it for four years, non-stop and full throttle.

There would have been absolutely no redress without her. She had earned deep trust among thousands of JACL members after years of work in the vineyards -- unlike me who was parachuted in from the outside.

In 1986, at the JACL National Convention in Chicago, I was 42 years old, and felt I had no more to learn about how to live life. I was wrong.

After the fierce mud-wrestling at the Convention, all of the so-called Redress faction candidates were elected over all of the so-called Japan Trade faction candidates, except one.

The Sansei man who lost was utterly humiliated. He, Grayce, and I were standing by a hotel elevator after the votes were counted. The Sansei said he was not going to the Sayonara closing event, but was going to his room and staying there.

Grayce said: “Yes, go up to your room. Then shower, shave, and put on a suit and tie, and come back down here. You’re going to the dinner. I will sit with you. And then you will stay for the dance.”

The Sansei came back down,

and we went to the dinner. Two hours later, he was dancing and laughing like everybody else in the ballroom.

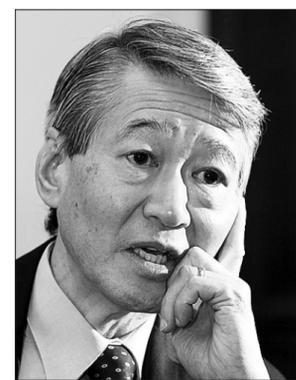
Grayce taught both of us Sansei males how live when you are defeated. I learned from her in Chicago, but I have not yet lived up to the standards she set down and lived by.

Now what about the much-maligned Mike Masaoka? What did he do?

For one thing, it was his idea to install Grayce as the Executive Director of the Legislative Education Committee or LEC, JACL’s redress lobbying arm, after staffer John Tateishi’s National Committee for Redress was shut down by the National Board in March of 1985. Earlier, Mike had also put me in as LEC’s Strategy Chair.

What Mike was, was both IQ smart and street smart -- a big-time problem-solver, as sharp as any *hakujin* lobbyist in Washing-

ton, and after 40 years in the trade, connected all over town. He was a small player, though for a long time the only one we had, in the kind of world portrayed in the movie *Lincoln*.



Rep. Robert Matsui

ton, and after 40 years in the trade, connected all over town. He was a small player, though for a long time the only one we had, in the kind of world portrayed in the movie *Lincoln*.

A conversation I would have more than once with Mike after dinner around 9 in the evening: “Mike, the wheels are coming off this thing, both in Washington and inside JACL. You can’t believe what Mr. X did today. What are we going to do?”

Mike would say, “Give me the night to think about it.”

“But, Mike, you don’t understand. The wheels are coming off this thing.”

“Give Me The Night To Think About It.”

An example of a problem Mike solved.

In January of 1987, Barney Frank told me in his office that he was going to push our bill in a big way. This after years of being bottled up by subcommittee chairmen before him. But Barney wanted Republican cover on his subcommittee, which meant that he was not going to send HR 442 to the full Judiciary Committee unless Pat Swindall, the ranking Republican on the subcommittee, would agree to support the bill.

I said, “Barney, this guy is a born-again Christian from Georgia. A really tough get.”

“I need to have him,” Barney said, “and you have to get him.”

I called Mike and asked him what to do. He said, “I need the night to think about it.” In the morning, he told me to call Dave Brodie, the chief congressional lobbyist of the Anti-Defamation League, and ask to meet with him. Mike said that Brodie had taken many Southern born-again members of Congress to Israel on “fact-finding trips.” Mike knew that this was one way the pro-Israel people allied themselves with born-again. Both had a big stake in Israel being taken care of.

I saw Dave in his office at ADL. On his desk, he had a small award maybe 20 years old from the JACL. Dave said he’d set up a meeting with Swindall.

Dave and I met with Swindall, even though I knew Dave had already talked to him. Swindall



Cherry Kinoshita

January of 1987 he was going move the bill, I went to see Dan Inouye in his hideaway office in the Capitol. Really excited, I told the Senator what Barney told me.

For a moment, Dan didn’t respond. He then asked quietly, “How many co-sponsors does Sparky have?” I said, “Twenty-five or twenty-six.” Dan said, “Thirty-three or thirty-four, max, don’t you think, Grant?” I said, “I don’t think so. I hope not.”

Two days later, Mike, Grayce, and I went in to see Spark. He was a little guy. If he sat in a chair, the soles of his shoes were maybe a half an inch off the floor. I told him that Dan said that Sparky would max out at 33 or 34 co-sponsors.

Spark said, “Oh no, I’m not.” Whereupon Spark went to work and put together a bi-partisan coalition of 72 co-sponsors for S. 1053.

The reason the bill passed overwhelmingly was that nearly all of Sparky’s Senate colleagues just loved him. And if Sparky really wanted something, his colleagues were going to make it happen for him. In fact, I think historians will say that in the Senate, it was just that simple.

Shortly before his death, here’s what Dan said about Sparky:

“The man who should take nearly all of the credit for the passage of the redress bill is Sen. Sparky Matsunaga. He is the one who sponsored the bill and organized the vote on that in the Senate. If Sen. Matsunaga’s efforts were to be weighted at 10, mine would be one.”

This means that a Japanese American, Sparky Matsunaga, and not former *hakujin* Boy Scout, Alan Simpson, was responsible for Senate passage. Simpson, in fact, voted to strip all of the money out of our bill. But no matter. On a beautiful spring day in 1988 the redress bill sailed through the United States Senate. This we owe to Sparky.

Senator Matsunaga was a good and great man. So was Senator Inouye. But the redress bill made Dan Inouye uncomfortable for reasons that merit our profound respect. He felt that if you put a money figure of any amount on the Japanese American experience, it would cheapen the sacrifice of his dead 442 buddies.

The austere and always dig-

nified Senator once asked me, “Grant, the guys pushing up daisies in Italy and France, how much are they getting out of this?”

In the end, Dan decided to get behind the bill in a big way after hearing from his E Company buddies in Seattle. From his very, very powerful position on the Senate Appropriations Committee, the Senator in 1990 made redress payments an entitlement – mandatory expenditures on par with Social Security. Otherwise, we would still be going back every year for dribs and drabs – \$5 million this year, \$10 million last year – small amounts appropriated out of much more than a billion owed us. And maybe nothing this year and next, thanks to the big deficits piled up after Bush II was elected.

Congressman Bob Matsui also solved a big money problem for us.



Sen. Spark Matsunaga

In the spring of 1989, we learned that what HR 442 had authorized -- \$1.2 billion for 60,000 internees or \$20,000 per victim -- was not the way the bill should have been written. Applications at the Justice Department for individual payments showed that there were almost 80,000 living Japanese Americans eligible.

The actuaries had been wrong. The bill should have called for \$1.6 billion.

We were looking at a \$400 million shortfall – a huge hole – and faced the prospect of having to go through the whole authorization rigamarole again for more money. And we probably couldn’t get it. Congress was tired of our issue, and could only talk about deficit reduction and the big Japanese economic threat.

So what happened? Bob went to see Dick Darman, Bush I’s Director of Management and Budget. They came up with an accounting maneuver that you wouldn’t want to use every day.

Here’s the way it worked. On Monday, say, all the money withheld for Social Security came into the Treasury Department, where it would sit for maybe an hour before being sent over to Health and Human Services to be kept before it was sent out to those getting payments.

But instead of sitting in the Treasury Department for an hour, Darman kept the money there for around 36 hours, during which time a huge amount of interest was thrown off -- \$400 million worth. This was put in a cookie jar and sent to the Justice Department, which in due course paid it out to Japanese American victims of Executive Order 9066 -- an administrative action, let me say here, issued by FDR on February 19, 1942, a day that shall live in infamy.

Few knew what Bob did, and Bob never tried to take any credit, even years after the fact, for the huge contribution he made to the well being of our community. Without him, younger Nikkei might not have gotten redress payments. Matsui was as brilliant as Masaoka and, one has to say, considerably more modest.

Another really capable Japanese American was Cherry Kinoshita of Seattle. She actually read the Senate bill after it came out of Chairman John Glenn’s

Government Operations Committee. I was too lazy to read it, and not many ploughed through the mind-numbing language except Glenn himself and Spark.

What Cherry discovered was a provision that said if an eligible Japanese American died before his payment turn came up, the bill would give his estate nothing. In other words, the legislation was written so that some Nikkei would find themselves in an arm-wrestling contest with Death itself and some of them would lose.

When Cherry called me about the problem, she was crying and said, “Grant, this is worse than nothing. You have to call Spark.”

I did the next day. Spark said, “This was the best I could get.” I said, “Spark, you can’t bring that bill back to the community.”

Spark went back to Glenn to get the provision changed. Glenn,



Grayce Uyehara

a deficit hawk, relented grudgingly. He also had many conservative constituents living along the Ohio River across from West Virginia, who if anything were more than happy to save some money mostly on the backs of the Japanese American old.

What Cherry brought to redress was raw IQ and total *gaman*. Cherry was, in my judgment, the single most intellectually gifted Japanese American who worked on redress.

One of Cherry’s colleagues on the Legislative Education Committee -- or the LEC, JACL’s non-tax-deductible lobbying arm -- was Denny Yasuhara, who did absolutely crucial work in JACL’s dirty laundry room. Denny was barely 5’4”, very smart, and absolutely fearless.

From 1984 to 1986, the JACL National Board was composed of two factions -- the Japan Trade faction and the Redress faction. The Japan Trade people had six, sometimes seven people of the 16 on the board. If they could get 8 and a tie, then the National President, a Japan Trader, would cast the deciding vote.

The Japan Traders felt that redress was a hopeless enterprise, what with the legislation forever bottled up Congress and a veto-wielding Ronald Reagan about to be re-elected in a landslide. They called for moving away from redress and toward lobbying for the interests of the Japanese government and corporations.

The idea of recruiting Nikkei was the brainchild of a Minister Without Portfolio in the Nakasone cabinet; getting individual people on board was the work of the Consul General in Los Angeles. The silly notion was that Japanese Americans could do for Japan what Jewish Americans do for Israel.

So a member of the National Board and a staffer were given gold-plated trips to Japan, where they were received as if they were major American dignitaries. That apparently was just for starters for them and others. Japan was then rolling in money and riding high -- something threatened by trade protectionist sentiment in the US.

In the late fall of 1986, the program was shut down by Nakasone himself.

In the meantime, however,

the Japan Traders could have destroyed redress with the appearance of a single news story: If these people are in bed with the Japanese today, what were they up to in 1942?

Denny kept the Japan Trader number on the National Board under 8, and in March 1985, the LEC was established and Grayce became its Executive Director.

The Japan Traders had no support among the rank and file. But they came back in the August 1986 JACL National Convention with a tall, physically striking female candidate for National President, while the male candidate of the Redress faction was a lot less compelling. In fact, sometimes when he opened his mouth and tried to speak, nothing would come out.

On the second day of the Convention, the female candidate was estimated to have a 10 to 15 vote lead among the 121 chapter delegates.

Denny went to work, cajoled, and relentlessly twisted arms behind the scenes, saying that the tongue-tied male candidate was the candidate who wanted to keep JACL committed to redress.

On the fifth day of the Convention, the Redress faction’s candidate won by three chapter votes. The LEC and Grayce were kept on the job, the National Committee for Redress was not brought back, and lobbying for the Japanese government and corporations was forbidden.

As I see it, if two chapter votes had gone the other way, redress would have been left to die. Denny saved it, and we should remember him. JACL, with its obvious shortcomings, was the only nationally established organization that Japanese Americans had. In 1984, it had nearly 25,000 members, many of them Nisei women not afraid to lobby big-time politicians face to face in places like Cleveland and Albuquerque.

Finally, I want to talk about Tom Kometani, a long-time resident of New Jersey. Tom did two things. He got 14 of the 16 members of his state’s congressional delegation to vote for redress. Only Cherry perhaps did better with 10 of 10 out of the Washington delegation. The numbers out of California were much less impressive, with Leon Panetta and Nancy Pelosi not voting and a Congressman from San Jose voting “present.” Odd, because Newt Gingrich and Dick Cheney both voted “yes.”

And then on national TV, Tom debated John McCloy, the so-called Chairman of the American Establishment who as an Assistant Secretary of War under Roosevelt helped to make the decision to jail Japanese Americans. Tom soundly defeated McCloy on the MacNeil-Lehrer Report before a huge audience. It was an astonishing performance for a Bell Labs scientist -- soft-spoken, but persistent in stating the facts of exclusion and the case for redressing the breakdown of our Constitution.

In our form of government, the politics of money, numbers, and clout often determine what happens in Washington. But not always.

In Congress, we had only the facts and the merits of our case. And we had Spark and Japanese family values. In the end, that was enough for Japanese Americans, once imprisoned in the land of the free, to propel them to triumph on August 10, 1988, a day that shall live always in the history of our Constitution.

*A graduate of Harvard, Grant Ujifusa is the founding editor of the Almanac of American Politics, known in Washington as the “bible” of American politics. For reversing Ronald Reagan’s opposition to HR 442, Grant received the Order of the Sun from the Government of Japan. See also: grantujifusa.org.*