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Testimony  
Before the Committee on Resources  
Subcommittee on National Parks  
United States House of Representatives

Hearing on H.R. 5817  
The Bainbridge Island Japanese American Monument Act of 2006  
September 28, 2006

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Chairman Pombo, members of the House Resources Committee. Thank you for the opportunity and honor to speak in support of H.R. 5817, the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Monument Act of 2006.

My name is Fumiko Hayashida. I am 95 years old and the oldest living survivor of the first group of Japanese Americans taken to internment camps in World War II.

Before I begin, I wish to thank Congressman Jay Inslee for his original bill that created the National Parks Service study for the Bainbridge Island Japanese American memorial, and again I thank him and Congressman Mike Simpson for co-sponsoring H.R. 5817.

This is only my second visit to Washington DC. The first and last time was in 1993, when I was invited to attend the unveiling of a historic photograph of me and my daughter Natalie at Smithsonian Museum's exhibit "A More Perfect Union" that chronicled the World War II internment of Japanese Americans.

My American story is not unlike the story of millions of other Americans. In the 1890's, my parents Tomokichi and Tomoye Nishinaka came from Japan to America. They first set foot on American soil in California, and soon after they settled on Bainbridge Island in the heart of Puget Sound in Washington state. They shared the dream of everyone who comes to America: the hope of a new life full of opportunities and possibilities.

I was born on January 21, 1911, the middle child of six children. Our family grew strawberries, and like most farming families, the money from our annual harvest was our only income for the entire year. It was hard and risky work.

I was 28 years old when I married Suburo Hayashida in 1938. Like my parents, we started growing our own strawberries and began to create our own family. My first son Neal was born in 1940, my daughter Natalie was born in 1941, and later that year I became pregnant with my third child Leonard. Our future looked bright and my parents' dream of new opportunities and possibilities was beginning to come true.

My whole world changed on December 7, 1941.

Like all Americans, I was shocked when I heard the news that Japan had attacked the United States of America at Pearl Harbor. I remember that day very well. It was a quiet Sunday morning. Our family was gathered at home reading the Sunday paper, when my brother-in-law ran into our house and said, “Did you hear, the war has started. Japan has attacked America.”

My first reaction was of disbelief and anger. I wondered to myself: What is wrong with Japan? I was so mad at Japan. I thought that Japan must know that they can't win a war against America. I did not know much about Japan, but I knew that we were a much stronger country

My disgust soon changed to fear, for I realized that I now had the face of the enemy. I was very scared of what people might want to do to us. Rumors began to fly. Will we be arrested? Will angry people come and vandalize our homes, ruin our farms, or do us bodily harm?

My fears started to come true. The government started coming to our homes, looking through our possessions, confiscating some items and asking lots of questions. Because some families wanted to show to the government people that they were patriotic Americans, they sadly destroyed many cherished and valuable family heirlooms and possessions – some passed down from several generations – that looked too “Japanese.”

Some of the elder men and leaders of our community, including two of my brothers-in-law, were taken away. There were never any charges, trial or legal process of any kind, they were just taken away. Since they were our first generation, they were not citizens and for that reason my husband and I always believed that we and our children would always be safe. After all, we were all born here. We are citizens of the United States of America.

I was wrong. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which set in motion the plans to remove all persons of Japanese ancestry from the west coast of the United States. It became official on March 23, 1942, when US Army soldiers came to Bainbridge Island and started nailing Civilian Exclusion Order No.1 posters on walls and poles throughout the island.

The government poster said we only had six days to get our lives and property taken care of before we too were to be taken away. It was a confusing and scary time. Our strawberry crop had to be tended to and our property looked after, so we gave power of attorney of our entire lives to our Filipino employees.

Nobody knew where we were going, how long we would be gone or if we could ever come back. While our destination and future was uncertain, I was certain that it would not be for long, because I believed America would defeat Japan in a matter of weeks, or a few months at most.

On the morning of March 30, 1942, the Army trucks rounded us up with soldiers armed with rifles and bayonets. We could only take what we could carry or wear, so we layered up our clothes and had to make hard choices on what items we could fit into a single suitcase. My daughter Natalie was only 13 months old, so I also had to carry her as well.

When we arrived at the Eagledale Ferry Dock at the end of Taylor Road, a Seattle newspaper took a picture of me holding my purse, my little Natalie and her stuffed toy animal. I am humbled that this photograph has been used in numerous historical exhibits, including the Smithsonian Museum's "A More Perfect Union" and as the image for the Bainbridge Island "Nidoto Nai Yoni – Let it not happen again" memorial.

It was a very sad day. When all 227 Bainbridge Island Japanese Americans – more than two-thirds of us American citizens – walked down the Eagledale Ferry Dock and onto the old ferry, we became the first of some 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent to be forcibly removed and exiled from western Washington, western Oregon, all of California and part of Arizona. We arrived in Seattle, boarded an old train and rode two days with the blinds shut to the hot California desert. It was a horrible trip. I had two young children and in 1942 there was no such thing as disposable diapers.

On April 1, 1942, we finally arrived at Manzanar in Owens Valley, California. Most of the barracks were still being constructed. I was shocked at our living conditions. It went against our cultural traditions of modesty and privacy. Our entire family was crammed into one small space, with thin walls that didn't reach the ceiling. You could hear every word, family discussion and quarrel. We ate in large mess halls which broke our tradition of private family meals. We all shared one common building with latrines and showers that had no dividing walls. It was so humiliating that some people would wait until late at night to use the latrines and surround themselves with cardboard boxes. The walls were just covered by tar paper, and dust came up everywhere through the cracks between the boards.

Even under these conditions, I gave birth to the first Bainbridge Island baby born in Manzanar, my son Leonard. As an adult, he served in the US Army in Vietnam and was wounded by friendly fire. He came back a changed man and never fully recovered from his war experience. He died this past February.

About a year later, along with most of the Bainbridge Islanders at Manzanar, we voluntarily transferred to the Minidoka internment camp in southern Idaho to be closer to friends and family from the Seattle area. My sister was there and she was raising her five children by herself. Her husband was rounded up by the government shortly after Pearl Harbor and taken to a special detention camp in Texas, because he was the editor of the North American Post Japanese language newspaper in Seattle. Our family spent the rest of the war in Minidoka. The camp conditions were the same as in Manzanar, but it was much colder in Idaho than California.

When the war finally ended and we were freed from Minidoka, no one wanted to talk about our painful years in internment camps. We buried our pain, suffering and shame, choosing to try to forget the past, persevere and for the sake of the children move forward with our lives.

We returned to Bainbridge Island to find that we lost everything. Our farm and strawberries were not well maintained and we had to start from scratch. We tried to make a go of it, but having three young and growing children, we had to find a more stable income. After a year my husband got a job at Boeing in Seattle, but the long ferry and bus commute from Bainbridge Island became taxing. We decided to leave Bainbridge Island and buy a home in Seattle, where I have lived to this very day.

The years we experienced in Minidoka and Manzanar changed not only our lives, but the years of internment during World War II changed the lives of all 120,000 Japanese Americans who were forcibly exiled by the United States government.

I am grateful that Presidents Ronald Reagan, Gerald Ford, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton have apologized for this shameful period in American history, and that the US Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 and the modest reparations that followed. These are powerful statements from our nation of healing and honor.

As the very first place where the World War II internment story literally began, the passage of H.R. 5817, the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Monument Act of 2006 would be another powerful statement by the United States of America that we must learn and never forget the lessons from this unfortunate chapter in American history.

Only a small fraction of the Japanese Americans who experienced the internment are still alive. My husband died in 1983. We never celebrated our golden anniversary. Only my youngest sister and two of my children are alive today from my immediate family.

I am an old woman in the 95<sup>th</sup> year of my life. I hope to live long enough to see the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Memorial earn the honor and recognition from our federal government and become a unit of the National Parks Service. I urge you to please urgently pass this measure so that all Americans can learn from and take to heart the spirit of the memorial's name: "Nidoto Nai Yoni – Let it not happen again."