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MARA KUMAGAI FINK: Since I was in grade school, I've known that my grandma Kay was forced to live in an internment camp during WW II. Her family was taken from their strawberry farm on Bainbridge Island, Washington, and lived in army barracks in the desert. But whenever I ask her about it, she tells me it wasn't that big of a deal.

MATSUE: Actually, camp life it's an experience, but I don't think it hurt. I think it hurt a lot of people. Most of all, it hurt financially. But being as young as I was in my early 20s, didn't bother me at all. It's something you endure. And it's fine.

MARA KUMAGAIHow could living in desert camps with barbed wire and guards with guns be fine? I wanted to see for myself. My

FINK: grandma's memory is not what it once was, and so I took her younger sister with me to the internment camp in California where her family was sent during the war.

So now we're at Manzanar. And you can hear the wind probably cutting across the desert. And there are the beautiful Sierra and Nevada Mountains in the background. But here it's really hot. It's the 102 degrees and sunny. So do you recognize it?

MATSUE: Are you kidding? No, because there's more sagebrush now.

MARA KUMAGAIAuntie Matsue is one of my grandma's younger sisters. She was 14 when her family left Bainbridge Island and

FINK: came here. My aunt's been back to Manzanar before. She described the barracks where she and her brother and sisters stayed with their mom.

MATSUE: They're just open rooms. And you just have one court after another. And so you have to have a little privacy. So that's why you took a bedspread and put it up at one end of the apartment so that you could change your clothes.

MARA KUMAGAIChanging clothes was only one of the challenges. Temperatures ranged from over 100 degrees in the summer to

FINK: below freezing in the winter. Frequent dust storms coated the insides of the barracks with a fine layer of grime. How could you not be mad? Like, if I had to live in this, in this temperature for the summer, and then be freezing cold in the winter, I would just be mad about having to live here regardless of whether I was stuck here or not.

MATSUE: We had no choice. So we had to just accept it. We had no choice. We couldn't go anyplace else. They didn't allow us to go anyplace else. So what could we do?

MARA KUMAGAIWell--

FINK:

MATSUE: We can't run out of here.

MARA KUMAGAIWell, I know. But did you ever feel mad?

FINK:

MATSUE: Oh, of course, of course. But it was just one of those times of life that we had to just accept it as it was.

MARA KUMAGAIMatsue's father, my great grandfather, was not in the camp with them. Just before the family was evacuated, the

FINK: FBI arrested my great grandfather, alleging he sent a small amount of money and comfort bags to the Japanese soldiers and possessed sticks of dynamite. The dynamite part was true. He needed it to clear stumps from the strawberry fields. The donations to Japanese soldiers was not. Matsue remembers going to visit her father at the immigration center in Seattle.

MATSUE: You see your dad behind bars, and that was just such a terrible feeling. And I just stood there, and I just cried. So I couldn't even talk to my dad. I was crying so hard. And then, of course, we didn't see our dad until a good year after that.

MARA KUMAGAI That was my grandma's family story. My grandpa's family was also in camp. 35 years after coming to America, **FINK:** they had saved enough money to buy a greenhouse in Seattle. When the government put them in camp, they lost everything. My grandpa died before I was born, but my uncle, Ross, my grandpa's youngest brother, is still alive. Ross was 9 when his family was moved into horse stables at the Pinedale Assembly Center in California and then transferred to two other camps in Northern California and Idaho.

ROSS: I remember when we went out to play football, we were playing by the fence, and the ball rolled to the fence toward the fence. And a guard up there in the tower says, stop or I'll shoot. I said, yes, sir. And then we ran. And to this day, I don't know if we ever retrieved that football or not.

MARA KUMAGAI While Ross was in the camps, my grandpa was in his 20s and serving in the Armed Forces. My grandpa's job was **FINK:** to recruit Japanese-Americans from inside the camps for the military intelligence service. While my grandpa was able to go in and out of the camps recruiting soldiers, his family remained locked up by the country he worked for. After the war was over, they returned to find that people had shattered the windows of their greenhouse. His family couldn't keep up with their mortgage while in camp, so they walked away and started over in Minnesota. Ross says he wasn't angry while he was a nine-year-old in camp.

ROSS: Not till I got much older did I feel anger. And it took a good part of my life. I think that they put me in there for four years. I missed a lot, particularly schooling. And I think I got out, and I was in the eighth grade. And I had to work twice as hard. And there was many, many evenings of crying and trying to catch up. And I think I'm still crying.

MARA KUMAGAI My grandma's family was much luckier. Neighbors had taken care of their land. But my grandma's youngest **FINK:** sister, Shima, found that picking up where she left off wasn't easy. She tried to rejoin the brownie troop she had been in before the war, but the leader claimed she'd fallen too far behind.

SHIMA: Well, then the next thing I want to do was join another group. Well, I found out I couldn't join because I was Japanese. And I went to bed that night in tears because I couldn't join anything.

MARA KUMAGAI That feeling of rejection was experienced many more times by Shima and her sisters. And they still tell me that **FINK:** they're not angry. But after talking with them, I realize now that they didn't hold on to their outrage because they couldn't. They had to move on with their lives. But when I read about an effort in Texas to revise textbooks to say that the internment wasn't racially motivated, I'm concerned. As a Japanese-American granddaughter, I want to make sure that what my family experienced as American citizens isn't forgotten. For MPR News Youth Radio Series, I'm Mara Kumagai Fink.