



EPISODE 2 2004-INTERNMENT ARTWORK, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA.

Tukufu Zuberi: Our next story could shed light on one of the worst invasions of civil liberties in American history. It's 1941. Pearl Harbor has just been attacked. On the U.S. mainland, anti-Japanese sentiment is running high. In a climate of growing fear and uncertainty, the War Relocation Authority rounds up all Japanese Americans on the west coast and interns them for the duration of the war. Whole families are sent to isolated camps across the west, kept under guard in cramped conditions. To this day, many Japanese Americans are reluctant to talk about it, leaving a dark passage in America's past clouded in mystery. Sixty years later, in a San Francisco archive, a student thinks he's found a set of paintings that, if authentic, will provide a first-hand account of this terrible time. Kenji Liu was working in the archives of the National Japanese American Historical Society, when he stumbled across an unlabeled box.

Kenji Liu: Then I looked inside and there were these little paintings. There were ten of them. On the front it said G-e-o Tamura, looked like a signature. And the paintings were of what seems like a camp.

Tukufu: When Kenji turned the paintings over, he found something surprising. They were painted on what looked like fragments of a WWII internment notice.

Kenji: I said, wow, what a treasure we've discovered here!

Tukufu: This sounds like a fascinating case. I'm Tukufu Zuberi, and I've come to San Francisco to investigate.

Tukufu: These are the paintings.

Kenji: Mhm.

Tukufu: Wow... and they're actually quite beautiful... but quite imposing as well.

Kenji: Yeah, and here's what's on the other side. ...Could be evacuation notice.

Tukufu: So what questions do you have?

K: My main question is, what is the story behind these pictures? Who is G-e-o Tamura? You know, was he imprisoned in this camp? Why did he paint these pictures? It's an important piece I would like to know about.

Tukufu: Is there any other information you can give me to work with?

Kenji: No, everything is right here.

Tukufu: You're not giving me much, but I'm going to do my best and get back to you real soon. As a sociologist, I'm especially interested in the history of race relations, and prejudice against Japanese-Americans is nothing new. Beginning in the late 1800's Japanese immigrants set up successful farms and businesses on the west coast. The white community felt threatened. People of Japanese descent were declared ineligible for citizenship, and forbidden from owning land. The attack on Pearl Harbor gave officials an excuse to act on fear and prejudice in the name of national security, and the internment process began. But how do these small paintings and their creator fit into that story? Who is "G-e-o" or "George" Tamura? And where is this camp? The first thing I want to do is find out about the evacuation notice on the back of the paintings. One piece of the poster says it was issued by the Presidio in San Francisco. Today it's a national park. But during the Second World War this was the U.S. Western Command Headquarters. I'm meeting Presidio Historian Randy Delehanty who I know has some rare original copies of Japanese internment notices.

Randy Delehanty: They're very important documents in American and in Japanese-American history.

Tukufu: What would have been the purpose of these notices and where would they have been posted?

Randy: These were public notices. They were put in public places, generally in the Japanese-American neighborhoods in the western states. And they instructed the people who lived in those areas where they would assemble, and

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then from these assembly points they were taken to the internment camps. To over 120,000 people living in California, Oregon, Washington, and southern Arizona, this notice meant loss of homes, jobs, and property.

Tukufu: Wow. "The size and number of packages is limited to that which can be carried by the individual or family group... No personal items and no household goods will be shipped to the assembly center." I mean, this is really extreme.

Randy: They ignored the status of the people and paid attention only to their race.

Tukufu: I have these post-card sized paintings... You'll see they have watercolors on one side, on the other side is some typing. What do you think?

Randy: It looks like an internment notice that has been recycled.

Tukufu: Are there any clues in this notice that might suggest where the camp is?

Randy: Not from what I can tell on these cards. We don't seem to have the part that says where this notice was issued. For example, here you see Pasadena. We have the headline; we have the bottom of the notice. We don't have the central part that would have said where this particular notice was posted.

Tukufu: Okay...That's a setback. But could there be clues in the paintings themselves?

To try to find the camp, I've come to the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. The library keeps over 7000 photographs of the internment camps taken by the War Relocation Authority in the 1940's.

Tukufu: Thank you very much.

Librarian (Susan): You're welcome.

Tukufu: These photographs portray the daily life of the internees as happy and content. The reality was very different. Each camp housed up to 20,000 men, women, and children in barracks of wood and tar paper. Under harsh conditions, people were forced to carry on their daily lives. I'm comparing the landscapes in these photographs with the background in our paintings. Hopefully, I can find a match. No match there. Let's see, what do we have here... We have Heart Mountain... and no match there. Okay, and here I have one from Topaz. We have this ridge formation, but no, not our mountains. Okay, we got a lot of pictures of the landscape here. Wait a minute. Look at this mountain. It looks like the one in our paintings. Our camp seems to be Tule Lake in Northern California. To be sure, I'm taking the paintings to the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles-- to anthropologist Dr. Akemi Kikumura who's an expert on the internment camps. Almost immediately, she spots the distinctive features confirming our camp is Tule Lake.

Akemi Kikumura: Tule Lake is maximum security. The guard tower...

Tukufu: Right... The barbed wire...

Akemi: Barbed wire... you could not get out. They had tanks, they had guards, a whole battalion, guns, curfew... I think it was the most difficult place to be, of all the ten camps.

Tukufu: According to Akemi, Tule Lake began as a regular internment camp full of Japanese-American families. But in 1943 it became a "segregation center" reserved for troublemakers and dissidents.

Tukufu: If George Tamura was interned at Tule Lake, what does that tell us about him?

Akemi: It could mean that he and his family wanted to be expatriated or repatriated to Japan. It could mean that he answered the loyalty questionnaire not to the satisfaction of the government, therefore he was classified as disloyal.

Tukufu: So, either the government thought George was anti-American or his family was taken to the camp before the

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dissidents arrived in 1943. But I'm curious, was a lot of art like this done at the camp?

Akemi: Not only in Tule Lake, but in all ten concentration camps. It was a way to kind of escape the confinement.

Tukufu: Now what do you think would be my chances of finding George Tamura?

Akemi: Hmm... You may have difficulty, because he may be in Japan. You're going to have a hard time.-

Tukufu: In order to track George Tamura down, the first thing I need to do is to confirm that he was at Tule Lake. Here in the museum I have access to the War Relocation Authority records for Tule Lake.

Tukufu: Okay, here are the T's. All right, here we go! "Tamura"! Oh, there are a lot of Tamura's! So I'm looking for George Tamura. George, George, George... There's a Japanese name followed by a more Anglicized name. So here we have Atsushi and then George Tamura. Yashiro George... In '44 he would have been 20 years old. Hiromi George... and he's in '41... oh, this guy would have been three years old. So we know we can already count him out. So I have four names, and each of the names has an individual identity number. And so now I'm going to go and look at each individual file and see what I can find out. Right, George Tamura... "Fruit farmer, Shipping and Receiving Clerk... Chauffeur, bus driver, taxi, truck, tractor..." Nothing really here to indicate that this is our guy. Before I give up, I do one more search, this time checking the museum's entire database for anything on our four Tamura's.

Tukufu: All right, here's a guy... George Tamura... Japanese American... And he's written an autobiography called "Reflections". I want to check this guy's book out. "Reflections"... George T. Tamura... Okay, listen to this passage: "A girl named Kiku became terminally ill, and her cousin approached George Tamura and asked if he would make a drawing of her last presence here on Earth. "My talent as an artist was known..." He's an artist! This must be our guy! George Tamura writes that his family was sent to Tule Lake in 1942 – a year before it became a segregation camp.

Tukufu: Listen to what he writes about his first impressions upon arriving at Tule Lake: "The alien walls of wood and tar paper would then cover the emotions, sorrows and happiness of the people who lived in them; would conceal the feelings hidden deep inside all of us..." Very emotional, very beautifully, but very sad at the same time. So, if George Tamura was 15 in 1942, this would make him 79 today. I wonder if he's still alive... if he's still in the United States... I wonder if I can find him. His memoir says he came from Sacramento, so I'm searching the internet directories on the west coast. Okay! I have nine George Tamura's. Let me get busy and call them!

Tukufu: (on phone) "...Tukufu Zuberi, and I'm looking for George Tamura... who was at Tule Lake in California back in... my name is Tukufu Zuberi... sorry... for George Tamura?..."

Tukufu: "My name is Tukufu Zuberi, and I'm looking for George Tamura who was at Tule Lake in California back in the 1940's... Really! Oh! ...Sequim, Washington. I'm heading to Washington State where I hope to find some of answers to Kenji's questions.

Tukufu (at door): Mr. Tamura?...

George Tamura: Oh!

Tukufu: Tukufu Zuberi. How are you?

George: Please, come in.

Tukufu: Thank you very much. George, I have some images, some paintings, that I'd like you to take a look at... (George gets emotional) You ever see these before?

George Tamura: Yes... they sure bring back memories. I can't believe this!

Tukufu: What's the story behind these cards?



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George: I was about fifteen years old when we were interned at the Tule Lake relocation camp.

Tukufu: Why did you paint them on the back of an evacuation notice?

George: It was hard to get anything in the camp there, even pieces of paper. I had to put down an image of what life was like there. My personal feeling, I don't know why I didn't put the people in there. It was probably because I felt that there was simply no place for people to be living there at that time.

(Tukufu calls Kenji) Kenji: Hello?

Tukufu: Kenji!

Kenji: Hey what's up?

Tukufu: [laughs] I'd like to make arrangements for you to come out here to Washington State. I couldn't wait to tell Kenji everything I found out about his paintings.

Tukufu: ... and I have one more surprise for you.

Kenji: Yeah, I'd like to know why I'm all the way out here...

Tukufu: All the way out here in Washington!

Tukufu: Mr. George Tamura, I'd like to introduce Kenji Liu.

Kenji: Wow!

Kenji and I soon discovered that the small paintings were not the only images Mr. Tamura painted of Tule Lake.

Tukufu: Wow! Now these are beautiful! A little more detail. And you've saved these for 60 years?!

George: Yeah.

Tukufu: Wow... fantastic!

Kenji: Mr. Tamura, ...and when you see these paintings now, what do you think of?

George Tamura: I could never forget the number they gave us when they interned us in the camp... 27449... I try to forget it, but it simply won't go away!

Kenji: Do you think that there is anything that younger generations can learn from your experiences?

George: I think through all the mistakes we make in our relationship with everybody else in this country, we should learn from that. Because I could never expect any other people in this country to go through an experience like this.

Tukufu: In August 1945, the war was over. Six months later - Tule Lake - the last Japanese internment camp - was shut down. George Tamura returned to civilian life. It wasn't until 1990 that George Tamura finally received compensation for internment and a letter of apology from the U.S. Government... signed by George Bush Sr. George Tamura used the money to self-publish his autobiography, in the hope that his experience would be a lesson for future generations.

Kenji: Thank you so much. It's been an honor.

[George smiles and nods]

ENDS

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