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Commentary

Sadness as Nobuo "Nankai" Nojiri Becomes a Buddha

by Alice Murata

Nojiri married Alice Tsuchida in 1942, a week before they entered camp. He said he had less than three hours to prepare. He was supposed to leave the following day for Fresno but a MP came and said Fresno was too full so they should leave that day. He registered for ten people, which meant ten of them would share a room. Encouraged to split the group into two groups of five, they could have two rooms. Nojiri found that when orders were changed one group would go to Fresno and the other to an unknown location. Nojiri requested they all be placed together. He was told to be at the train station at 4. The MP said he would take care of the house and everything. The Caucasian owner reclaimed his land saying that it was not paid in full. If Nojiri could pay in full, the owner said he would return the property. This "hakujin sold to quite a few Japanese and he took all their land back." His brother and brother-in-law also lost their properties.

What angered Nojiri was that the truck came for the family leaving them little time to prepare. He was at train station by the requested time and for four hours the

train did not move. He left all the farm equipment and everything. With additional time he could have better secured his property. At that time Nojiri did not know where they were going. They ended up at Manzanar.

After the war, Nojiri found out that when people were scheduled for Manzanar, the husband would disappear so they wouldn't have to go on that train. When the head of household couldn't be located the entire family was delayed. The father returned the following day and the family was able to go to Fresno. "I'm too honest" said Nojiri.

In Manzanar, Nojiri was a policeman and worked making camouflage nets. He complained daily until they finally permitted him to move to Jerome where his wife's family were interned. They traveled with soldiers and at Little Rock were confused as to whether to use Black or White facilities. He was not a stranger to segregation. In Florin, Japanese schools were segregated from American schools. When he arrived at Jerome, it was raining so he did not want to get off the train and thought Manzanar was better.

After ten months at Jerome, it was used to house German prisoners. They wanted the Japanese to move to another camp. Nojiri went to Rowher, Arkansas. One of his brothers went to Tule Lake and then to Japan.

Saying goodbye to many families as they left camp, Nojiri thought there would be nobody left to say goodbye to him. He was one of the last families to leave Rowher. First he went to Louisiana and decided, "No thank you. I'm not going there." He did like that they lacked running water. They had a big tank half full of sand that collected rain water which they used for drinking, taking showers, everything. Nojiri then considered moving to Florida but before they could go a hurricane destroyed the whole area.

The Nojiri family moved to work for a Quaker family in New Jersey. One sister got married in camp and moved to Chicago. Nojiri and his wife had two children in camp so the family consisted of his mother with eight children and the four of them. First they worked for a real nice Quaker family for three years but the pay was "not too good." Then, they moved to work on a chicken farm for three years. Meat was rationed, so people bought chicken. The family built a new house and put new television in for him. That was the first time Nojiri saw television. Pay was received weekly but there were ways there to make additional money.

Nojiri decided to move to Chicago because his mother and sisters had relocated here. After completing high school his siblings went to work in Chicago. One brother was working at a hothouse and they wanted a boiler man. Nojiri moved into a company house, worked at

the greenhouse until it was sold, and then purchased his current home in Melrose Park in 1951. After several short term positions, Nojiri worked for 19 years at company until he retired. He was the only Japanese person among the 180 employed there.

On the job, Puerto Ricans always said "Jap, Jap" often. I said, "I'm Jap, it's okay. But you better watch out. He's showing he was dumb. He said, 'What do you mean?' Well, Japanese is the right way and Jap shows you don't have education. So you better be careful." My oldest daughter was starting kindergarten and one girl says "You're a Jap," so she says, "No, I'm not a Jap. I'm Chinese." She didn't want to be called "Jap."

After graduating from the University of Chicago, the eldest daughter, JoAnn, volunteered for the Peace Corps. Her mother didn't want her to go but said go ahead thinking her fragile daughter would never be able to pass the physical. She did and worked in Uruguay for three or four years. JoAnn didn't return on the day she was supposed to because she decided to walk to San Diego with four or five other Peace Corp members. They wanted to see Columbia and Peru. After working for a while JoAnn decided to attend the University of Illinois to study social services and met her future husband, who had a doctorate and was doing research there.

"One day my daughter came home and said I got a good boyfriend, so is it alright to marry. 'Who is it?' He's a boy from Japan. So I say, you better watch out. She says what do you mean? 'He likes me. He wants to marry me.' But you better find out what the father is thinking in Japan. They say okay, everything's

okay. Otherwise, going to be big trouble. Bring the boy here. So they came here. I talked to him. You better go Japan, get okay from father, mother. I'm okay but I worry about your side. He said, 'Wakaremashita, wakaremashita.' He went home to Hokkaido. He talked, drank all night. He couldn't say he wanted to marry JoAnn. So he came back to Tokyo and asked a really close friend, 'Will you please ask my parents?' The friend agreed on the condition that he not ever separate or divorce. His father agreed with one condition, that the two come to Japan and marry the Japanese way. He wanted to see JoAnn. So, they had wedding here and another wedding in Japan, Japanese style. They really liked her."

The father was aware that it was time for his son to wed. On his return, his father had several photos of girls and asked him to choose. My son-in-law returned to Japan because he wanted to marry JoAnn and didn't choose or tell father about her.

My son-in-law works at Princeton in New Jersey as a physics professor. They have two sons. The older son graduated from Princeton University with a degree in physics but went into business. He was working for Goldman Sachs at the time of the interview because they wanted to open a branch in Japan. Now he works for JP Morgan in Tokyo and brought his daughter, Maya, for the first time to the United States so family members could see her. This grandson took Japanese language at Princeton. He said, "My mom goes to Japanese school but I think I know more than her." The younger son was in college at Carnegie Mellon.

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