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Memories of Heart Mountain, an American Concentration Camp By Sam Mihara, a former prisoner

During World War II, the United States government forced Sam Mihara and his entire family to move from their home in San Francisco to a prison camp for people of Japanese ancestry. They were transported under guard to the Heart Mountain camp located in desolate northern Wyoming where they were imprisoned for three years. In his presentation *Memories of Heart Mountain*, Sam talks about what it felt like to be forcibly removed from his home and what he, his family and friends experienced at the camp. Sam, who was just a child during the imprisonment, provides a moving, first-hand account of the day-to-day experiences of Japanese Americans who lived through this great civil rights injustice. Approximately 120,000 West Coast residents were imprisoned in 10 camps.

The presentation includes vivid photographs, many of them taken by the noted photographer Dorothea Lange. Sam also includes several photographs from his own collection. Many of the photographs, which illustrate the move and life in the camp, are shown here for the first time. Through diligent research, Sam located a major repository of original photos from that time period--photos that had been impounded for 70 years. He also found recently declassified U.S. government reports about the imprisonment. Sam rounds out the personal experiences of him and his family and friends with this broader information.



Beginning with a description of his neighborhood in San Francisco prior to the war, Sam sets the stage for the dark journey that is to come. He talks about what people in the U.S. thought of Japanese living in this country. He talks about his friends and neighbors. Sam discusses the culture of being raised by Japanese parents while being educated in American schools. He transitions from that discussion of quiet, neighborhood life to photos of military guards forcing entire families out of their homes and being transported via bus and rail to temporary camps at horse racing tracks, before being moved to Heart Mountain and other camps.



Several of his relatives and friends were sent to the Santa Fe Camp and Lordsburg Camp in New Mexico. Sam describes the criteria used by the government to determine who goes to which camp. He also points to the differences between different types of camps.

The presentation goes on to identify the officials responsible for the mass removal of 120,000 people and discusses their reasons. Sam describes the legal resistance made by a few people on their removal from

their homes and the outcomes for those who resisted.

At Heart Mountain camp, the barren land between Cody and Powell became a barbed-wire-enclosed city of 11,000 first-, second- and third- generation people of Japanese ancestry. One-half of them were U.S. citizens by birth. Sam discusses the reaction of local residents upon hearing of these camps being created in their neighborhood.

Upon arrival at the camp, Sam and his family were placed in one small barrack's room with no furniture except military cots. They would live in this room for over three years. Sam describes the camp's layout and design, the barracks and the facilities used for daily living, including where the prisoners ate, what they were served to eat, and where the food came from. He describes through photos, the eating facilities, bathrooms, work places, schools, teachers, and various activities the residents undertook to pass the time.

Toward the end of the war, some families left camp permanently for employment in the eastern U.S. Following the end of the war, most families returned home to the west coast where there was more hostility toward returning residents.

Sam and his family returned home to San Francisco, and the camp property including the barracks was turned over to the successful Homesteader Program .

Sam discusses the legal actions taken to remedy the government's errors of judgment in the forced incarceration, including the release of all prisoners, the redress movement, and its results. And Sam includes the story of how President Reagan and the administration admitted to the mistakes made by the government and apologized.

After a 60-year absence from Wyoming, Sam recently attended the grand opening of a new museum at the Heart Mountain camp site. He poignantly discusses his return to the camp after so many years and the reaction of the new generation of people in Wyoming to the camp and its history.

Sam addresses the question – can it happen again? He concludes with important lessons learned and discusses how these lessons apply to today's civil rights problems.

