

Biography of Sam Mihara



Sam Mihara is a second generation Japanese American and was born and raised in San Francisco, California, in the early 1930's. When World War II broke out, the United States government forced Sam, at age 9 years, and his family to move to a remote prison camp in northern Wyoming, where they stayed for three years. The Heart Mountain camp was one of 10 in the U.S. that together housed a total of 120,000 West Coast residents of Japanese ancestry, most of them U.S.-born American citizens. Sam and his family lived in one 20-foot-square room in a barrack for the war's duration.

After the war ended, the family returned home to San Francisco. Sam attended Lick Wilmerding High School, UC Berkeley and UCLA, where he obtained degrees in engineering. He became a rocket scientist and executive with The Boeing Company. Following retirement from Boeing, Sam created his own high-tech consulting firm and enjoys meeting many clients around the world.

Seventy years have passed since the incarceration and Sam is one of the few survivors of the Japanese-American imprisonment who is willing to speak about his experiences. Most recently, he is documenting his memories of that time and speaking about what occurred in the past. Sam has talked to many schools, colleges, attorney groups and other interested organizations. In his presentation, Sam discusses the details of how he and his family were forced out of their home by soldiers, moved to the guarded camp where they lived and suffered throughout the war, and finally released to return home after the war ended. He also describes the redress movement that resulted in a formal apology from the government. And he concludes with the lessons learned that apply to everyone, not just Japanese Americans.

Sam researched many government and private photo collections for his presentation, including several that have been impounded from public viewing. Many memorable images are works of professionals like Dorothea Lange and were obtained by permission from UC Bancroft Library. By combining these professional images with his own photo collection, Sam has created an informative and entertaining program that describes the conditions he, his family and his close friends experienced. The program has been seen and rated very highly by all of his audiences including UC Berkeley, USC, National Council of History Educators and the U.S. Department of Justice.

Sam is a member of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation and its Advisory Council. He is a member of the Japanese American National Museum and the Japanese American Citizens League.

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