

Nidoto Nai Yoni – Pritchard Park Dedication Ceremony  
March 30, 2004  
Speech by Dr. Frank Kitamoto

Introduction by Ralph Munro

RM: There are leaders in every community and there's no question about the leadership of Doctor Frank Kitamoto. I was standing in the principal's office at Bainbridge High School the day the word came back that Frank had been admitted to dental school. And I always remember that occasion because everybody was rejoicing at this wonderful accomplishment. He not only went on to be a fabulous medical practitioner for all of us but also an example for our entire community. So lets give a warm welcome for Doctor Frank Kitamoto.

[Applause]

FK: Thanks Ralph. My mother and father certainly were rejoicing a lot. Ralph's a tough act to follow... feedback here.

It was exactly sixty-two years ago at this time when military trucks, soldiers with rifles and fixed bayonets, brought us to this site. There were 227 of the 276 of us here, ranging in age from 9 months to 72 years old. Six men had already been inducted into the U.S. Army. Thirteen men had been previously sent to concentration camps in Missoula, Montana; Santa Fe, New Mexico. A few were in college east of the Cascades. Some were trapped in Japan during the war. Three families, the Shibayamas, the Haruis, and the Sekos, had, quote, "voluntarily," quote, moved to Moses Lake in a two day window between March 24<sup>th</sup> and March 30<sup>th</sup> before the army abruptly closed the window, ordering that all Islanders of Japanese descent were confined to Bainbridge Island, and no person of Japanese descent off the island could come here.

Two-thirds of us were American citizens by birth. The other third were not allowed to become naturalized citizens by law, but were Bainbridge Islanders and "Americans" by choice, having lived on the island for twenty-two to fifty-two years.

Some say we were removed for our own protection. If this was true, the sobering thought is then the rifles and bayonets were to be used against our friends and neighbors, and classmates who had come to say goodbye.

Some of us felt humiliated, herded like cattle down this long road and dock to the waiting ferry, the Kelohken. Others were in shock not able to recollect the details of the day. Children thought it was adventure. Parents were trying as best they can to protect their children. Mothers whose husbands had been taken away in early February by the FBI were occupied with their children and how they were to

survive. Soldiers were carrying children, carrying suitcases for mothers. Many soldiers had tears in their eyes.

I don't remember the day. I was just 2 years, 9 months. A fourth grader once asked me, "Why did you have to go to concentration camp?" I told her I think it was because our government thought we were dangerous and could be spies. She gave me a quizzical look and said, "How could you be a spy at two and a half?"

For who and what is the Bainbridge Island World War Two Nikkei Exclusion Memorial, Contemplative Garden, and Interpretive Center? It's for our first generation, Issei pioneers who first came to the island in 1883. They cleared most of the land on the island to grow strawberries. After over thirty years of toiling to build a future for their children they lost it all. Our last Issei, Mrs. Takemoto, passed away last year; It's for our second generation, the Nisei, in their twenties, who had to assume leadership and decision making when the Issei were taken away. The Nisei, the sixty men and two women out of the 276 of us, who served with the U.S. armed forces during the Second World War and then returned to help their parents start over. Tyke Nishimori died last year. Over a third of our Nisei have passed away; The Sansei, our third generation, who continue the recovery and see the need to promote healing of wounds from the past and champion the future. My sister Jane passed away two years ago. Don Nakata passed away. Our Sansei are beginning to die. These are the influences from our past. Even after three and a half years of exile they've instilled in us the fact that we are Americans, and that the United States of America is great, and how fortunate we are to be Americans.

This memorial is also for Walt and Milly Woodward, for Ken Meyers, for Genevive Williams, for the Tarabochias, the Jacobis, the Cumles, the Johnsons, and the Champanesses, the Nartes, the Madayags, the Rabers, our classmates, and the many others who supported us.

It's for those who fear that anything about our forced removal and imprisonment is criticism of our government and is unpatriotic. It is for those who can't see the yin and yang – the dangers of protectionism from fear such as the Patriot Act. Laws to help us feel safe may take away rights and freedom. Walt Woodward said, "If we can suspend the Bill of Rights for Japanese Americans it can be suspended for the fat Americans or blue-eyed Americans." Can we see that what happens to one of us can set a precedence for what can happen to any of us?

There was never an instance when a person of Japanese ancestry from America was convicted of being a spy for Japan. But the point is even if there was one or a hundred, that is not justification for imprisoning 120,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry. If this was so, mass arrests and imprisonment of Caucasian men should have occurred after Oklahoma City. This memorial is then for all Japanese Americans, all Japanese Canadians, all Japanese South Americans,

all Middle Eastern Americans – all Americans regardless of color, race, or ethnicity.

Most of all, this memorial is for our children. In 2050 people of color will outnumber our current majority population in the United States. Does the majority now try to hold onto power through manipulation and coercion or learn to lead by reaching outward, listening, caring and being responsible to all – seeing differences as a plus: powerful and desirable?

Can we break the cycle of fear, protecting ourselves by creating more fear in others, who in turn strike back at us, creating more fear, and on and on. Will we learn to be less self centered: to choose to act in love instead of fear, to take that risk, to make a difference. No one likes to be bullied or told what's best for them. You know what little does do to big wheels, especially if they're standing in the street. As the saying goes, "Those who think they know it all upset those of us who really do."

Can we get beyond General Dewitt's statement that "A Jap is a Jap?" Can we get beyond "an American needs to act and look like an American?" Can we go to William Tesconi who said, "The American Nationality is still forming and is not yet in its final form." If there ever is to be a final form, *can* we see America as beautiful, colorful, a "salad bowl" instead of a "melting pot?"

The money for the land for the memorial has been obtained and we are well on our way to raise the eight million needed to purchase Pritchard Park in its entirety. But, the three and a half million to build the memorial still needs to be raised to make it a reality for not only America, but for all people of the world. Can we get beyond, "Can we get along?"

December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, Pearl Harbor

Attacked!  
Horrified!  
We feel terrorized  
Friends and family died  
Frightened  
Nerves heightened  
We mourn  
The flag's torn  
Tears for our loss  
Wait! ... lets show them who's boss  
They must be idiotic  
We must be patriotic  
Strike back  
Even the score  
Hurt them even more

Fix blame  
Inflame  
Evil must be discarded  
It must be bombarded  
Cut to size  
Dehumanize  
They look the same  
No name  
Give them a number  
Numb  
Number  
Son?  
Daughter?  
Sister, brother?  
Father, mother?  
No!  
Just another son of a -----

Only call it "911, 2001"  
The Twin Towers, New York

If our children only learn in times of fear that "Might is Right, " in the future, what will be left?

Thank you.