



Associated Press

Ken Nakamura of Watsonville poses with a promotional poster for "Return to the Valley." Like many Japanese-American citizens his age, Nakamura was evacuated to an internment camp during WW II.

Documenting a difficult past

Japanese American Community
Film covers Japanese-Americans' return from WWII internment

By DAVE BROOKS
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It would be hard to start your life over with only 25 bucks — especially when it feels like no one is on your side.

Some of Watsonville's most notable citizens had to rebuild their entire lives from scratch after World War II. The internment of Japanese-Americans from 1942 to 1945 heavily affected many immigrants of the Pajaro Valley who had to leave behind everything following President Franklin Roosevelt's executive order calling for the internment of Japanese citizens who lived along the California coastline.

The story of their return after three harsh years away from home was told Sunday during a special screening of "Return to the Valley," a new PBS documentary that explores the post-war experiences of Japanese families.

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Local resident Ken Nakamura, who was interned at Topaz, Utah, for three years, attended the event held at the Japanese American Citizens League. "Return to the Valley" producer Christina Lim, of the San Jose PBS affiliate KTEH, was on hand at the screening and said not much has been done about the return to home of the nearly 120,000 Japanese-Americans at the end of WWII.

"We looked at the material and we realized that very little has been done on the post-war period," said Lim. "OK, they all went to camp — what happened when the gates were thrown open and they were handed \$25 in cash and a train or bus ticket home? Now what?"

The documentary film uses archival and personal photographs, as well as video footage, to tell the story of Japanese-Americans who returned to the Santa Clara, Pajaro and Salinas valleys after the war ended.

Most of "Return to the Valley" relies on interview footage with former prisoners whose ongoing oral history of the experience keeps the memory of what happened alive. "They tell it in a way that cannot be captured in any other manner," said Lim.

Featured in the film is Watsonville resident Kay Izumizaki, who left internment at the age of 22.

"We stayed there until we were kicked out," said Izumizaki, "We had nowhere else to go." When she returned to Watsonville, Izumizaki stayed at the Buddhist Temple, which had been converted into a hostel. She often faced racism as she and her family attempted to readjust.

"The dean of girls at Watsonville High School asked me, 'Why did you come back?'" Izumizaki recalled.

Interestingly enough, Izumizaki remained patriotic to the United States — her husband was enlisted in the Army and was fighting overseas. Many Japanese-Americans had loved ones fighting for Uncle Sam in WWII. Instead of denouncing the U.S. for their treatment in the camps, many did their best to prove their loyalty and show the rest of the country that they posed no threat to U.S. security.

Mas Hashimoto, a Watsonville citizen who was interned in Arizona, said the experience should make Japanese-Americans become more diligent citizens.

"It's up to us to make sure this never happens to anyone again," said Hashimoto. "We have to be proactive."

Lim said that in all the interviews she conducted, each person expressed their concern over the recent detaining of Arab citizens following the 9/11 attacks.

The show will be broadcast on Tuesday at 8 p.m. on KTEH. Check your local cable listings for more information.