

Lesson 6: The Return Home: The Decade That Followed

I was only in the second grade and upon coming back (from the internment camps) was in culture shock. I didn't remember the trolley buses, streets and stop lights, it was strange. My first memories are walking down to Paul Chihara's store, it was all boarded up. We walked all over (unaccompanied), even though we were in second grade. [The International District] was a playground for me at the time.

--Mitch Matsudaira

[About his father] After he came back from camp, there was no jobs and I don't know exactly what he did. Some of the things he did were: he was a night clerk at a hotel, he cleaned fur, worked in the Seattle Fish Company, and he worked at the Burnett Jewelry store on 4th and Pike cleaning jewelry. After high school, he quit and I took over that job because I knew how to do it.

--Mitch Matsudaira

Coming from an environment like camp for three or three and a half years and dumping into a city like Seattle was strange. It was a new experience....Everyone was pretty poor at this time. Kids who grew up back then were all kind of tight. Great friendships were formed.

--Mitch Matsudaira

In terms of the International District, it was never the same. After World War II, Nihonmachi never did come back. It used to be Main Street, and used to run from 5th Avenue all the way up, and along Jackson. I don't know what would have happened, it's hard to tell. Maybe it would be like San Francisco Chinatown which is old but is still intact.

--Mitch Matsudaira

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[Japanese] couldn't get into certain districts...I didn't care, but some people wanted to live out [of the International District] and they couldn't buy homes in certain areas. Of course at first when the Japanese came back, I understand it was pretty rough on them. They were told to go back...and don't come for jobs.

--Iku Matsumoto

Had 34 acres on Bainbridge Island and when we came back after the war, the taxes had risen so much because Bainbridge had developed that we couldn't afford it when we came back to Seattle...we were so poor, just to start up the ice creamery I had to borrow money, so we finally had to sell that property...waterfront...we had all that beach!

--Shigeko Uno

[About coming back to Seattle] Well, in the first place, Japantown was no longer there...I suppose we really lived in the slums but didn't know any better. We were poor but we didn't know anything like that...we were all in the same boat. And even the Japanese people (Issei) who came back and started their businesses...their children didn't want to continue so there's the end of it.

--Shigeko Uno

[About her father] After he came back from camp he died of a heart attack. Eight days after he came back.

--Masako Murakami