

Honorary Degree Ceremony
Robertson Auditorium
University of California, San Francisco
December 4, 2009

Remarks by
Patrick Hayashi
Former Associate President, University of California System

What a wonderful, beautiful day!

I have the honor of speaking to the UC community on behalf of the Japanese American community.

I also have the honor of speaking to the Nisei who are being honored today on behalf of their children and grandchildren.

###

Today, when UC honors these Nisei students, the Japanese American community would like to honor UC.

Today is a wonderful day, but it is not surprising. During our darkest days, UC stood by us. When others treated us harshly, you treated us with kindness. When others persecuted us, you protected us. When others scorned us, you embraced us as family.

Few people know about how UC leaders fought to protect the Constitutional rights, the personal welfare, and, most important, the human dignity of Japanese Americans.

After Pearl Harbor, racial hysteria swept the nation. President Robert Gordon Sproul, Vice President Monroe Deutsch and several other UC leaders helped establish the Committee on American Principles and Fair Play to defend the rights of Japanese Americans.

When it became clear that Japanese Americans on the west coast would soon be put into concentration camps, many UC faculty tried their hardest to place their students in colleges in the mid-west.

Then, when we were imprisoned in temporary assembly centers, like Tanforan, a race track in South San Francisco, UC faculty came to visit. They wrote letters, sent books, passed final exams through the fence. They brought art supplies so that we could start art

classes for the children.

At Berkeley, Harvey Itano earned the University Medal as the outstanding graduate of the Class of 1942. President Sproul could have easily given the medal to the next student in line. Instead, at the commencement ceremony, President Sproul said, "Harvey cannot be here today because his country has taken him elsewhere." And he arranged to have the medal presented to Harvey behind barbed wire.

Here at UCSF, Dean of Pharmacy Troy Daniels along with other faculty members displayed uncommon compassion, integrity and courage. Dean Daniels went to the Presidio to speak with the head of the western military command, General John DeWitt. He asked that his eight Nisei students be temporarily exempted from the order to evacuate and be allowed to complete their pharmacy degrees.

He also said that he and his wife would adopt Harry Iwamoto, his first graduate student, if that would allow Harry to stay. But, General DeWitt had publicly stated, "All Japanese, including those born in the United States, are members of an enemy race," He told Dean Daniels that all Nisei students would have to clear out of San Francisco.

But the students and faculty had other ideas.

The students stayed and they studied. The faculty helped them finish their coursework in record time. And then they helped them prepare for their state boards. When the students made their way home after curfew, they had to dodge the soldiers patrolling the city. Dean Daniels arranged for them to take their state boards early.

One of these students, Masao Yamamoto, told me that he was overcome with relief and gratitude when he learned that he had passed because he now had the foundation upon which he could build his life. After the Nisei students passed their exams, Dean Daniels helped them get safe passage out of San Francisco. He personally contacted law enforcement agencies and told them that UCSF students would be traveling to rejoin their families.

How UCSF helped these Nisei students finish their studies is a wonderful, important story.

But, UCSF gave something much more valuable to the Japanese American community. You protected us from the bitterness, rage and despair that could have easily poisoned our hearts. At the worst of times, Dean Daniels and the UCSF faculty allowed us to see the very best in humankind.

Today, UCSF completes the honorable work President Sproul, Dean Daniels and many, many others began 67 years ago.

What UC does for our community today is kind and generous, decent and just.

On behalf of the Japanese American community, from the bottom of our hearts, we thank you, we thank you very much.

Kokoro kara, arigaatoo, arigaato gozaimasu.

And now, I would like to speak to the Nisei - those who are here today, and those who are with us in spirit.

I speak on behalf of your children, grand children and great-grandchildren.

You never talked much about the camps because you wanted to protect us.

Immediately after Pearl Harbor, community leaders were picked up by the FBI. My mother's cousin was arrested because he taught kendo. A week later, the FBI told his wife where she could claim his body. No word was heard about many others who had been arrested -- sometimes for weeks, months and even years.

This was a terrifying time.

You were given just seven days to prepare to go into the camps. You sold your family's possessions for just pennies on the dollar. You desperately tried to find homes for your pets. Many of your parents were already quite old. My grandfather was 75 at the time. So much of the burden fell to you.

You were told that you could take only what you could carry.

In your hearts, you understood that all you could really carry were your aging parents and your little sisters and brothers.

You carried us with strength and grace and shielded us from pain.

You told us about the good parts of life in the camps -- the dances, the baseball games, the festivals, the weddings.

Sometimes, very rarely, you spoke about the hard parts -- about the

beatings by a few hateful guards, about the suicides, about the arguments over the demands of patriotism and the demands of democracy, bitter arguments that turned friend against friend, brother against brother.

You told us about old Mr. Wakasa who had adopted a stray dog. One day his dog got caught in the barbed wire. When he went to free him, the guard in the watchtower ordered him back away from the fence. But, Mr. Wakasa was deaf and he continued to help his little dog. So, the guard shot and killed him.

When you spoke of the harshness of the camps, you made sure we knew that there was always kindness.

My mom and dad told me that when I was born, the Quakers sent a bassinet.

Teachers from back home wrote letters and sent books.

At Gila River, 15-year-old Ruth Mix lied about her age, so she could help out in the camp hospital. There, she and other workers smuggled in medical supplies, sanitary napkins, clothing, shoes - anything to help.

You told us about their acts of kindness and courage. But you never talked about your own.

But, now your stories are being told.

One UC grad, Lillian Matsumoto, worked at an orphanage for Japanese American children. When the evacuation order was given, Lillian could have gone to the camp with her family. Instead, she, along with all the other orphanage workers, chose to stay with their orphans. Together, they all went to Manzanar and started the Children's Village, a place where these children who had nobody else could grow up protected and loved.

At Mazanar, California; Topaz, Utah; Heart Mountain, Wyoming; Poston, Arizona; Jerome, Arkansas -- at all the camps, you immediately volunteered to teach classes in makeshift schools.

You cared for the sick in hospitals. You buried the dead. You helped deliver the next generation of children.

You never talked about your courage.

In 1943, the government gave you a questionnaire and asked "Are you willing to go into combat and fight for America?"

Some, like my uncle and father, had the courage to say, "No. Hell no! We will not fight until our constitutional rights are restored!"

Many of you were sent to Tule Lake, an especially harsh, high security concentration camp.

Others had the courage to say, "Yes. Hell yes! Many, like Yori Wada, former chair of the UC Regents, joined the MIS and served as scouts, code-breakers and translators in the Pacific.

Many others joined the 100th/442nd, the Japanese American Regimental Combat Team, and fought in Europe and became the most decorated regimental combat team in history.

And today, we pay special tribute to those who never returned -- to those who fought and fell at Anzio, Salerno, Monte Cassino.

We remember the hundreds of men who were killed or wounded while saving the Texas Lost Battalion.

Today, we remember the Nisei broke through the Gothic Line. Two attempts to break through had already failed. The 100th/442nd decided to try. One night, for eight hours, they climbed up a 4,000-foot cliff face to get behind the Germans and break the Gothic Line. They climbed quietly. They could only hear each other breathing.

But every once in a while they felt a gust of wind. And they knew that one of their friends had lost his grip and was falling. The men who fell knew that if they cried out everyone would be slaughtered, so they fell to their deaths silently.

After the war, you came home to start your lives again.

America was characterized then, as now, by violence and prejudice, decency and generosity.

One of the Nisei we are honoring today, Grace Amemiya, pursued her nursing career and served in an Army hospital in Iowa caring for wounded GIs. The hospital director worried about her safety, because

former POWs would be returning from the Pacific campaign for treatment at the hospital. The director told Grace that she should never walk alone and that he would provide her with escorts.

But, the GIs she cared for, those who could walk, said, “No, we will escort Grace wherever she wishes to go.”

With incredible forbearance and fortitude you rebuilt our homes and our communities.

Throughout your lives, you guided yourselves by one simple precept, “Kodomo no tame ni.” “For the sake of the children.”

For our sake.

You taught us, by example, the importance of hard work, sacrifice and service. You helped us build our lives upon your lives.

Everything we have accomplished all the happiness we have felt was made possible by your sacrifices by your strength and resolve.

For all that you have given us, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts

Kokoro kara. Arigaato, Arigaato Gozaimasu.

**

And, most of all, on this wonderful day, we all congratulate you.

Let’s have a quick Japanese lesson.

In Japanese, congratulations is

“Omedeto Gozaimasu”

Now, everyone – on three

One - two - three.

OMEDETO GOZAIMASU!