



Lesson Three

Lily Fujimoto Taka Oral History

Lily Taka – “Hey, are you Japs?”

Lily Fujimoto was pregnant with her first child when she was relocated with her family to Poston, Arizona. She left Poston and moved with her husband, brother and daughter to Des Moines, Iowa, before returning to Riverside in the 1980's.

Lily Taka (LT) is being interviewed by **Allison Campbell (AC)** of the [Riverside Metropolitan Museum](#)

AC: In the period between December 7th, 1941, and May 1942 when you were evacuated, you continued to live and work in Rosemead? What was the atmosphere like? How were the neighbors, and how was the community treating you?

LT: They were very friendly. They thought that we were not dangerous, so they treated us very well. But I did have some experiences, negative ones, after I left camp, after – well, this was 1942. No, '43, I guess, because I had a baby by then. Do you want me to tell you about that?

AC: Yes, please.

LT: Well, we were given an escort as far as the Arizona border, because we were going to go to Des Moines, Iowa. The reason we were going there was because my brother-in-law had gone ahead of us to a school, a school in theology in Des Moines. He got my husband a job as a watch repairman in a big jewelry store there, so we decided to go there. We left camp. The day that we left, the camp people, some of them, came to say goodbye to us, and the kitchen gave us a bottle of baby formula. It was cold. The bottle of milk was cold. So as we were going toward the border, we wanted to stop at a restaurant so that the milk could be warmed. This lady at the restaurant said, "Sure." She took the milk, put it in a pan of water, and was going to boil it. As we were waiting, she suddenly turned around and said, "Hey, are you Japs?" I said, "Well, we're Japanese American." "Well," she said, "you just take this and get out of here, and don't ever come back." She watched us as we were leaving with her hands on her hips. That was a bad experience.

Then on the way out there, we stopped at a store, Newberry's, and wanted to buy something, I don't know what. But, anyway, as I was walking down the aisle of the store, a lady came up and kicked me in the shins and walked away. Then at another place, I was walking along the street, and a bunch of men came up close to the sidewalk and yelled at me real loud. It scared me. Then when we went to Des Moines, we had to look for a place to stay, so we bought a newspaper and saw a lot of ads for rent. We went to one place. This man was sitting on the porch, and he said, "Get out of here." I wasn't going to let that

scare me, so I went to the door and I asked her if there's a place here for rent. She said, "Oh! I just rented this place and I haven't had time to take the sign down yet." We had that kind of experience many places that I went to. There was a minister who heard about our difficulty through my brother-in-law, a minister of the Central Christian Church in Des Moines. He said, "Well, they can come to our apartment." He had a two-story house with a couple of apartments in there, so he said, "You can stay at the lower apartment and we'll move to the upper apartment," because my husband – he had polio and he was on crutches, so he could have the lower apartment. That was very nice. We had a place to stay.

AC: And you had a new baby.

LT: Oh yes.

AC: It was a daughter?

AC: Was she born in camp?

AC: Had they been people your family knew?

LT: Yes, she was born in camp. When we left she was only eleven months old. She grew up in Des Moines, went to schools there.