



Video Story Transcript

On the Train to the Japanese American Incarceration Camps

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Link to YouTube Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bmdx0O9gYb0>

Note: The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, my name is Brenda Wong Aoki. This year, 2017, is the 70th anniversary of the Executive Order 9066, which was responsible for putting 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry, two-thirds of whom were United States citizens, in incarceration camps throughout the country. Now these people, two thirds of them were United States citizens, they lost everything. They lost their jobs. Their bank accounts were frozen. They never got 'em back. Their homes, their businesses, they had to sell for, for, for peanuts because they only had a week to sell everything. And they could only bring what you could carry, which was usually a suitcase and a small child. And some of these people were in these incarceration camps for up to five years, three to five years.

So, recently, uh, my sister-in-law said there was a woman she knew, an Issei woman, second generation Japanese, who had a story that she wanted to tell me, Brenda Wong Aoki, because I am the official, in her mind, Japanese storyteller. And she wanted me to have this story because she wanted me to tell it to the world. It goes like this.

I am a United States citizen, born right here on Grady Avenue. My father fought in World War I. My two brothers were drafted and fought in World War II. I am a nurse. Still am. This year we've helped so many friends die. Ne papa? My husband, he is 87. I am 84, so we think it's time we told this story. It's about the train ride.

It was 1942. We were newlyweds with a week-old baby and a houseful of brand new furniture. Birds eye maple bedroom set, new refrigerator, sofa. We had one week to sell everything. We had 50 bucks. We ran down to the train station with mainly just the clothes on our backs and baby stuff. We didn't know we would be there for five years. When we got to the train station, there were soldiers everywhere. They separated the men from the women. They put me on the train with all the mothers and babies and this is what I wanna tell you.

I see my friend Michi. She and I had just had our babies together over at General (Hospital), only Michi's baby was so sick. The doctor said it would die if it left the hospital. So, Michi got on the train without her baby. But just as we're about to pull out of the station, some soldiers come and throw a baby in one of the empty seats. All the mothers are, "Whose baby, whose baby?"

Do you know, it was Michi's baby! Those soldiers had gone into the hospital and taken the baby out of ICU against doctor's orders and just dumped it on the seat. So Michi sat next to me because, as I told you, I am a nurse. I took one look at that baby. Its cry was so weak. But Dr. Takeshita, the doctor I worked for, he told me he was gonna be on the train, just one car ahead of us. And if anything should happen to any of the mothers or the babies, just go get him. So, at the first stop, I get off the train and a soldier points a bayonet at me. I said, "A baby is sick! A baby may be dying!"

He said, "The next one goes right through you!"

I got back on the train. It was so hot in there because they nailed the windows shut and painted them black. And the ride took almost three days, and they only fed us one time. But I remember the food. Spoiled milk and green bologna, left on the platform like we were animals or something. With nothing to drink, my breast milk was drying up and my baby was crying and crying. (Wooo!) Everybody's baby was crying and crying. But Michi's baby was so quiet. Then I noticed... it was dead. But Michi didn't seem to know. I mean, she knew, but she just... (rocks and sings, ooh, ooh...)

When we finally arrived, we were in the middle of nowhere, nothing. We are city people. We never been to a place like this, the desert.

In all the commotion, Michi slipped away. They couldn't find her for hours. They had to get a jeep to go get her! There she was, walking through the desert with her dead baby in her arms. She was still trying to find a hospital!

My breast milk never came back and my daughter would have died too because all she had to eat the first two weeks in camp was sugar water. But Mac, the Hakugin pharmacist back home, a white guy, he heard about our situation and he sent us formula the whole time. Never charged us nothing!

Decades, decades have come and gone since the train ride. My daughter has had health problems her whole life because of those first few weeks in camp, but she survived. My husband, he married into Michi's family, so he sees her from time to time. But me, I can't come. She won't see me ... because my face reminds her of the train ride.

