

Japanese American National Museum Los Angeles, CA

Masako: I started in 1986, I was probably the first volunteer and whose lasted as long as I have, I've been here for 25 years.

Richard: Mu...Masako and I met here at the museum as volunteers, and we're the first volunteers to meet here and get married. So we married, what, 13 years ago?

Masako: 14.

Richard: 14? heh, ok. Uh, and that's one of the rewards of being a volunteer here, that, uh, I met and married, uh, Masako.

Masako: We had our formal wedding and reception at the hotel, but we had a reception for the volunteers, and it was great, and the staff, so we had a great time.

Richard: The particular event, which was the most meaningful for me, was the first exhibit that I was a gallery docent, and that was exhibit America's concentration camps. That is one of the reasons why I became and remained a volunteer, because then we were able to tell our story of what happened to Japanese Americans during World War II. And, this exhibit traveled to Ellis Island in New York and to San Francisco.

Masako: I was in two camps, and my parents were in their 20s and, uh, we were sent to Gila River, Arizona, and Tule Lake Concentration Camp in northern California.

Richard: I was in three different camps. I started first in Tule Lake, we were transferred to Jerome, Arkansas. So then from Jerome, we were transferred to Heart Mountain, Wyoming. I spent one year in each camp. I was 10 when I first went in and 13 when I came out.

Masako: In this typical Japanese American families, we hardly ever talked about the war years, what happened in camp. I was young, but my mother is still alive, she's 96, but when I ask her questions about camp, she says, "I don't want to talk about it." And so she will not discuss it at all.

Richard: Yea, no, same as in our family. My parents never discussed about camp. And my father passed away before I became a volunteer, and after I became a volunteer, my mother did talk a little bit about camp, but not much.

Masako: Last Friday, our granddaughter's class came to the museum and, uh, you know, we don't talk about our experiences during World War II directly to the children. We probably are the same as our parents were, so for them to be exposed to the museum, and to hear the docents give their tour, I think it's, it's very, very important and I think they themselves have a lot of questions. Our other grandson also came from his school and I think they really gained a lot of knowledge from it. They've asked us questions after the tour, and for some of the students, I think it's a brand new experience, and, in fact most of the students.

Richard: We always say, you know, there were 120,000 of us that were put in camps or removed from the west coast, and so there are 120,000 stories. And so, in talking to and listening to other volunteers that were affected in World War II, all the stories are different, similar but different, and, uh, I think that is one of the things that I, uh, really enjoy about this place is the education that I have received from the volunteers, the staff, our exhibits, and our programs.

Masako: Well, I think without the museum, my life would be pretty empty, uh, we get our children involved in it, our grandchildren are involved in it, and, uh, I am very grateful for everything I have learned here, all the people I've met here, and, uh, I hope to keep continuing to volunteer.

END OF TRANSCRIPT