

JIMMIE Y. SAKAMOTO: PRESIDENT 1936-38

# Blind, But With Vision

By BILL HOSOKAWA

Jimmie Sakamoto, one of the colorful of Nisei personalities, was national JACL president from 1936 to 1938. As Nisei history goes, that was a long time ago. His name may be unfamiliar to many of "The Pacific Citizen's" newer readers, but no one who ever met Sakamoto could forget him. He is that kind of man.

Sakamoto was elected at the national JACL convention held in Seattle where he published "The Japanese American Courier," the first all-English Nisei newspaper. I happened to talk with him soon after he was told he had been elected. He was stunned. He had

not expected the office. He was overwhelmed by the honor and honestly concerned about his ability to meet the responsibilities of the presidency.

In the privacy of his sparsely furnished newspaper office, Jimmie talked over his doubts with his wife, Misao, and a few close friends. Only then did he feel free to accept, with humility, the call to office.

In reality, Jimmie Sakamoto was the only person worried in the least about his fitness to lead the Japanese American Citizens League. His election was acclaimed universally as overdue recog-

dition for nearly a decade of stubborn, unremitting, unrewarded labor on behalf of the Citizens League movement.

During those years it was impossible to distinguish between Jimmie Sakamoto's twin roles as newspaper publisher and JACL mainpring. He had founded "The Courier" as the voice of the Nisei, and in his mind the JACL movement was the Nisei movement. But while "The Courier" spoke eloquently and well, it was never a financial success. The Northwest Nisei population was not ready to support a newspaper of its own. The result was that "The Courier" yielded meager material returns and much of the time the Sakamoto family was on the border of actual want.

No doubt it was this knowledge that made Jimmie hesitate about accepting the presidency. But if Jimmie was something less than a money-making success as a pub-

lisher, he had many another quality to fit him for the job of national JACL president.

Jimmie was a man of ideas and action. He was no intellectual, but he was intelligent and he had an instinct for timing. He was also a man of powerful convictions. One of them had to do with the destiny of the Nisei as Americans.

Long before most of them were aware of the meaning of the words, Jimmie was saying as often and as forcefully as he could that the Nisei had both opportunity and responsibility to contribute to the welfare of the greater American community.

Dynamic and persuasive, he inspired others to follow his lead. He was a powerful old school orator. When he rose to speak, others listened. Few who ever

heard him could forget that pale, intense face, the words that poured from his lips.

Most of all, Sakamoto had faith—faith in the goodness and opportunity of America and the Nisei's ability to utilize their heritage of two Pacific cultures.

I first met Jimmie nearly a quarter of a century ago. I was just a kid out of high school and he offered me a job on his newspaper. It wasn't much of a job, really, but jobs were pretty scarce in the depression year of 1933. I worked for him for nearly four years while going to college and it was the best kind of journalistic training. I got to know Jimmie pretty well.

Jimmie was, and is, completely blind. The first time I met him he noticed he had the

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## Yatabe —

(Continued from Preceding Page) office, Dr. Yatabe derives his greatest satisfaction and pride from the fact that the campaigns for Issei naturalization privileges and the Equipment Fund were given their initial start at the time. Today, 20 years later, thousands of Issei have become American citizens, and the Endowment Fund has reached the \$100,000 level with an even higher goal of a million dollars for the future.

What were the other concerns of JACL in 1935? Mainly they were infernal and local in nature. Representations were instituted against various state discriminatory laws, in such matters as fishing and hunting privileges for Issei and, of course, the Alien Land Law.

A serious threat to the unity of the young organization presented itself when Southern California insisted upon proportional representation in the National Council. This was resolved successfully on the argument that JACL must preserve its national stature by retaining the system of the single vote per chapter regardless of size.

"Things are different today," Doc said. "Southern California is now a backbone of the organization."

Meeting the national budget was a perennial headache, as it is today. Doc continued, "In those years it was \$2,000 annually which we couldn't make, and we had a spectacle at the convention with the chapters quibbling for two days over a 25-cent raise in the subscription rate of the Pacific Citizen."

A measure of how far we have come since those days was demonstrated at the 1934 Los Angeles Convention when the proposal to raise the per capita national dues from \$1.50 to \$2.00 was acted upon with such perfunctoriness that it left Sim Togsasaki and Dr. Yatabe scratching their heads.

Sim Togsasaki was the driving force behind the Pacific Citizen, as he still is today. The paper was published in Seattle in James Sakamoto's Japanese American Courier plant.

Since there was no national director, as we have in Mas Satow today, visitations and correspondence to the 20-odd chapters which comprised the national organization fell upon the shoulders of the national officers.

Along with other officers and chapter representatives, Dr. Yatabe attended the emergency National Council Meeting called by National President Saburo Kido in San Francisco in February, 1942.

Their experience of meeting with General De Wirt's staff in an effort to save the evacuation was like running into

Yatabe's long experiences. "It would have been an easy matter to throw up the whole thing and show defiance which we naturally felt inside. But that was the trap our old enemies were waiting for us to fall into. We had to think responsibly, not only of the immediate welfare of our people but of the future welfare of generations to come."

After the decision at San Francisco, there was no alternative but to cling Jason-like to the faith in the ultimate triumph of justice and fair play during the dark days that followed.

As soon as Doc and his family reached the Jerome Relocation Center in Arkansas, he was summoned along with Frank Ishii, James Yoshinobu and Tom Shimazaki to attend the grim emergency national council meeting of November, 1942, in Salt Lake City.

With the JACL fighting for its very existence, "some of the hardest decisions affecting the future of Japanese Americans had to be made then," he said, "but that would be getting into Sab Kido's story."

Attending that meeting had its consequences for him. Whatever anguish he had suffered, no bitterness remained as he described the attempt that was made on his life in the relocation center.

"My glasses flew off in one direction and the next thing I knew I was on the floor under a pile of bodies. A pair of shears was coming down and I remember gripping a wrist. . . . His injuries confined him to doctors' quarters for a month. It was a black winter and the lowest point in his life."

No sooner did the Yatabe family unpack their suitcases at the Brethrens Hotel in Chicago in April of 1943, and a wire from Sab Kido arrived requesting Doc to take charge of the Chicago JACL office. The office on Madison Street was opened in February by George Inagaki to help the evacuees in their relocation; however, a month later Inagaki was called into service.

It was the challenge again, the same as it was 20 years before in Fresno, only this time Doc was an older warrior, aged 46, with a protesting family to contend with. Settling aside his hopes of establishing a new dental practice, he accepted the \$125 per month position. "I couldn't turn Sab down," was the way he explained it.

With the former Fumi Yaki now Mrs. William Hoshiyama of San Francisco, as secretary, he tackled the job of public relations to pave the way for the arriving hundreds from relocation centers.

Cooperating with the WRA, the American Friends, and other civic

student bodies, churches, and civic organizations. He relied upon the same principle of education that he had applied from the days of the old American Loyalty League—to break down the barriers of employment and housing for evacuees. During this phase of work, the one person whom Dr. Yatabe remembers as being most helpful and effective was Dr. Homer Jack, the hard-hitting Executive Director of the Chicago Council Against Racial and Religious Discrimination.

Dr. Yatabe completed two extended speaking tours in 1943 and 1944 outside the Chicago area. They were made possible through funds from a \$5,000 grant of the Carnegie Endowment Fund for Peace, which was the work of Teiko Ishida, now Mrs. Mickey Kurai, who served as Eastern JACL representative.

Featuring Soprano Ruby Yonino, Dr. Yatabe on the Eastern trip spoke on the story of the Japanese Americans in every major city between Boston and Washington, D. C. Contacts and schedules were made possible through the efforts of Peter Aoki, the then New York JACL representative. Some of Doc's memorable experiences were a talk before the Harvard Executive Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a sermon in Trinity Church one Sunday afternoon in Boston, and a rugged schedule of five speeches in one day in Philadelphia.

On the Midwest States tour he took along his whole family. His son Dudley, then 14, was a boy soprano and an accomplished pianist and usually stole the show from his dad, while his charming wife Mary acted as observer.

In all of his experiences on the tours, Dr. Yatabe found ample vindication of his faith in the innate sense of justice and fair play of fellow Americans.

Members of the Harvard Executive Club, after hearing his story, directed questions at him and inquired how they can help to reaffirm the Nisei's faith in America. A little old lady came up to him after his sermon in Trinity Church and pressed a neatly folded dollar bill into his hands, a simple gesture which touched Doc's heart very deeply.

After helping to establish the Chicago JACL Chapter, Dr. Yatabe re-entered the dental practice in 1945. He is still very much active today, as an elder statesman of the National JACL, truly the Grand Father of JACL. There was a twinkle in his eyes as he looked at his wife Mary.

"I can't recall how many times she's had her bags packed and ready to go home because

# Blind But With Vision—

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odd mannerism of raising his sightless eyes and looking toward a calendar on the wall whenever he mentioned dates. I got the weird feeling that he could see.

He was so independent, so sure and natural in his movements that people often forget he lived in darkness.

Some individuals, persons who knew Jimmie as a boy, used to say he never would have amounted to darn if he hadn't lost his eyesight. This is a cruel thing to say, even in jest, and I disagree. I believe his native intelligence and ambition would have carried him to the top under any circumstances. What these old friends were doing was to remember only that he was a spirited, strong-willed youngster who was not at all averse to going far out of his way to raise all kinds of hell. The loss of sight only accelerated the maturing of Jimmie Sakamoto.

He was one of three children, and the only son, of Osamu and Tsuchi Sakamoto, natives of Yamaguchi Prefecture. They arrived as immigrants in Seattle in March, 1894, soon moving to Tacoma to work in the kitchen of a Japanese restaurant.

After that Osamu Sakamoto worked as a farmhand and in a sawmill at Port Blakely before returning to Seattle in 1897 to start the first Japanese restaurant there, a place he called Kagelau.

The older Sakamoto was a pioneer in ways other than the fact of being an early immigrant. In 1898 he started the first Japanese-owned used furniture store. Both he and his wife were in their "mneties" when they died a few years ago.

Jimmie was born in Seattle in 1903. He was named Yoshinori, but he preferred Jimmie, spelled with an "ie." He went to Pacific grade school, and then to Franklin High in Seattle where he became an athletic immortal.

Although he weighed little more than 120 pounds, Sakamoto was a star halfback on the Franklin varsity football team that defeated arch-rival Broadway in 1920 for the first time in the history of the schools. Speedy, pugnaclous and tough, Sakamoto was a brilliant ballcarrier and a defensive bearcat. He also played basketball at Franklin and was something of a star at judo which he had taken up at the age of 6.

Meanwhile, he was showing more than ordinary interest and skill at boxing. He loved to fight. More than once he was admonished by his judo instructor, Prof. Tokugoro Ito, for being too strongly devoted to boxing. But he didn't begin to box seriously until he drifted off to New York, soon after being with the vague intention of going to college.

New York was a fascinating place. School he soon found, held little appeal. Sakamoto took a job as English editor of the "Japanese American" in New York City. One night a week he went to the Dutch Reformed Church hall on West 122nd and Lenox avenues to teach boxing to members of the Japanese Christian Institute.

Judo and fencing also were being taught there. The fencing instructor was a Japanese actor named Sessue Hayakawa.

One day when Jimmie was offered a bout on a pro card he snapped it up to make a little extra money. It was a decision that affected the course of his entire life.

Jimmie cannot recall today exactly how many professional bouts he had. He says they were not numerous, but others remember that he went into the ring often, sometimes under an assumed name so that he could fight more frequently than the regulations allowed. He fought as bantamweight, featherweight and junior lightweight and most of his opponents, he says, were mediocre.

That was the night he boxed Jackie Snyder in the special feature headlining the Kid Kaplan-Babe Hermann world's featherweight championship bout. The names of his other opponents don't mean a great deal today, but for the record they included Clark Anderson, bantamweight title contender; Emanuel Flores of the Philippines and Phil Richards of England.

One day in 1926 Jimmie took a clout on the head that didn't seem to be anything extraordinary at the time. Unknown to Jimmie, the blow had started a detachment of the retina in the left eye.

He continued to fight until some months later another blow completely detached the retina of his good right eye. Only then did an examination reveal that sight of the left eye was fading, and soon he would be blind.

Sakamoto took the news philosophically and with characteristic courage. Winding up his affairs in New York, he returned in November, 1927, to his parents' home in Seattle. To prepare for approaching blindness he would tie a handkerchief over his eyes and walk up and down stairs and through the house to familiarize himself with every room and hallway.

The Jimmie Sakamoto who came home to Seattle at 21 was a more thoughtful, more mature man than the lad who had gone east a half dozen years earlier. He was disturbed to find the Japanese community divided by a bitter rivalry between two athletic clubs, the Taiyos and the Nippons.

President and founder of the Taiyos was George Ishihara, a boyhood friend of Jimmie's. Sakamoto urged Ishihara to unite the Taiyos with the Nippons to end the ill feeling. Ishihara countered with a proposal that Sakamoto try to unite the community by revitalizing a semi-defunct local organization with the formidable name of Seattle Progressive Citizens League.

This was a group founded in Seattle in the spring of 1921, after Sakamoto had gone east, with the hope of combating an anti-alien land law movement in Washington. Shigeru Osawa, one of the Northwest's first Nisei, was elected president. Ishihara was secretary and Miss Yuki Higashi was treasurer.

Despite the Progressive Citizens League's efforts, Washington adopted the anti-alien land law and the organization all but folded up. From 1921 until 1928 it held but three meetings and the original officers continued in their posts.

Sakamoto saw the League as a logical rallying ground for all Seattle area Nisei. He also realized that the Nisei need a voice, a newspaper.

On the basis of his three years' experience as English editor in New York, and with the meager savings he had accumulated, he launched "The Courier" as a weekly newspaper on Jan. 1, 1928. He was practically blind at the time.

The first issue carried an editorial which outlined the need for reorganizing the Progressive Citizens League. Shortly, with Osawa's approval, a League meeting was called. Clarence Arai, an attorney, was elected president. Other officers were George Ishihara, vice-president; Kimi Takayoshi (who later became Mrs. Ishihara), secretary; Yuki Higashi, treasurer.

The first order of business was to re-align the League's aims. It had been organized to combat anti-Japanese legislation. Sakamoto insisted that this negative stand should be scrapped for one of positive Americanism.

"Instead of worrying about anti-Japanese movements," he said, "we must exert our efforts toward building the character of the second generation so that we may become loyal and useful citizens who can contribute toward the greatness of American life."



Jimmie Sakamoto (second from left) stands in front of his newspaper office with members of his staff, including his wife and the author of this story (to the right).

Citizens League adopted a strong missionary attitude. Soon after its reorganization, Arai was dispatched to help Oregon Nisei found the Portland Progressive Citizens League.

Meanwhile, similar movements were stirring among California Nisei. In August, 1928, the Seattle group was invited by the American Loyalty League of Fresno (where Dr. T. T. Yatabe was a prime mover) to a conference of Nisei leaders. Arai and Ishihara were delegated to attend.

The two were en route to Fresno when Sakamoto's office received a telegram saying the meeting had been cancelled. After hurried consultation it was decided to instruct the two emissaries to continue their trip and carry word of the "Citizens movement" throughout California. They traveled as far as Los Angeles in San Francisco they met with Saburo Kido, Susumu (Slim) To-gasaki, Dr. Henry Takahashi, Tamotsu Murayama and others to lay plans for a coast-wide conference there in April, 1929.

That meeting was held as scheduled. Representing the Seattle group, Arai presented three proposals which had been drawn up in "The Courier" office: To form a national organization; to hold a founding convention in Seattle in 1930; to call the organization the Japanese American Citizens League. These proposals were adopted and Arai was elected president pro tem.

A sturdy handful of Nisei registered for the convention in Seattle. California sent delegates from Brawley, Fresno, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Newcastle, Stockton and San Jose. Washington had representatives, in addition to Seattle, from Bellevue, the Yakima Valley, Auburn, Spokane, Renton, Island, Fife, Tacoma, Kent, Winslow, and five members of the Uno family from the town of Foster. Portland was represented by five Nisei: Hawaii sent Tsuke Yamagata, Seichi Konzo came from Ubahua, Il Tokutaru Nishimura Stocum registered from New York.

And thus was the JACL born, fathered in some considerable part by the vision of sightless Jimmie Sakamoto.

Jimmie is the first to disclaim credit. In response to some questions I asked him while preparing this story, Jimmie wrote:

"Whatever credit people gave me while doing JACL work really belongs to others who in their kind way favored me with their support. I say this not out of modesty since I could never have done anything myself without the wholehearted cooperation and efforts of others.

"The man I would like to see give greater recognition for his JACL work is Slim To-gasaki. Without him, I doubt that the JACL could have become the organization that it is today. He was the man behind the scenes, giving the JACL strength and vitality to carry on as a national organization."

The JACL movement grew rapidly. As more and more Nisei became of age, chapters sprang up in various parts of the three western states.

But Sakamoto's "Courier" was having a rough time. Within four

months the newspaper office was in a shambles. The market crashed and the depression began. Somehow "The Courier" limped along from week to week with Jimmie and his bride, Missa, managing to meet deadlines and bills only with heroic effort.

By the fall of 1931 "The Courier" had progressed to the point where the Sakamotos thought they could see daylight ahead. Then tragedy hit the entire Northwest Japanese community with a body blow in the shape of a bank failure. The Japanese Commercial Bank in Seattle, where virtually all the Japanese did business, went broke.

All "The Courier's" money was tied up in the bank. So were Jimmie's personal funds, and his father's. Worse yet, "The Courier's" advertisers and subscribers were hit, too, and out of consideration for them no bills were issued for several weeks.

When at last some funds were collected the Sakamotos deposited the money at the American Exchange Bank and prepared to do business again. Sixty days later this bank, too, closed. Some "Courier" checks, written originally on the Japanese Commercial Bank, re-written on the American Exchange Bank, were caught short again. The Sakamotos paid some bills three times. The economy of the community hit rock bottom and "The Courier's" income reflected this state of affairs.

Jimmie, his wife, infant daughter and parents were living at this time in a dark, rickety old house on Washington Street. The house was not far from the red light district high on a hill overlooking downtown Seattle. It had a wonderful view but not much of a foundation. The hill was slowly sliding away. Each new storm threatened to send the house crashing down the slope and, as everyone knows, it rains almost all the time in Seattle. Eventually the Sakamotos did move, and the house was demolished soon afterward.

Meanwhile, "The Courier" was performing yeoman service for the community. In addition to publishing the news, it sponsored baseball, football and basketball leagues for young Nisei, ran a radio program for the JACL, sponsored a cooking school.

Unfortunately, the athletic leagues had the cream taken off them by the English sections of the two daily Japanese newspapers. They published scores and detailed accounts of the games the day after they were played while "The Courier" had to wait a week.

Most Nisei in those days were hard put to scratch together \$2 for a "Courier" subscription. They thought "The Courier" was swell, but they looked for their news in the English sections of the papers their parents subscribed to.

Throughout "The Courier's" 14 1/2 years of life, ended by Gen. John DeWitt's evacuation order in 1942, Sakamoto insisted on devoting a large amount of space to matters that failed to interest the majority of Nisei.

Accounts of national and international events took up a large part of the front page. On page 2 were lengthy editorials about

non-English word, was taboo, which made a headlin.

"The succession of Nisei newsmen who worked for Jimmie argued often for a more popular level of editorial content but he was adamant. He insisted that the Nisei must be made aware of the world about them. It was a noble ideal, but practically speaking the Nisei were scarcely ready for such a reading diet.

Jimmie ran the editorial side with the help, over the years, of a number of aspiring Nisei newspapermen. Missa had charge of the backshop, kept the books, sent out the bills, swept out the office with the help of young Sakachi Hoshi who lived with the Sakamotos. Jimmie covered the town by telephone. He memorized scores of numbers and dialed them himself. He typed out his stories on a little Underwood portable.

When the issue was off the press, Missa and the current secretary would wrap and mail the papers, after which Missa and Jimmie would set out together to try and sell a few ads or collect overdue bills.

"The Courier" was leading just such a precarious existence when Jimmie was elected JACL president. Together with the problems of his own existence, he took on the issues that beset the national organization.

One of his first acts was to launch the "second generation development program" under the direction of Masao Satow, then assistant national secretary. Sakamoto's intention, once again, was to press for strong, loyal Nisei citizens who could contribute to America socially, economically, and politically as intelligent voters.

The JACL attracted international attention when Sakamoto moved to reply to the Japanese foreign minister, Koki Hirota. Bunn Suzuki, a left-wing member of the Japanese diet, had questioned Hirota about the government's plans for educating the Nisei, and Hirota's reply was not to Sakamoto's liking.

Bristling, he promptly issued the following statement:

"As Foreign Minister Hirota said, we are Japanese by race. However, we are Americans at heart. Legally, we are American citizens and that legal status is our most cherished possession over which we do not desire, nor will we ever permit, Japan or any other foreign power to exercise influence or control. Loyalty is the higher essence of ethics. Being American citizens is not only a matter of pride with us, but a matter of loyalty to the United States."

A copy of the statement was dispatched to the Japanese ambassador in Washington, and the wire services picked it up. The story was printed on both sides of the Pacific. Hirota followed up quickly with a statement to the effect that his reply to Suzuki had been misconstrued, and that the Japanese government had no intention of influencing the education of the Nisei in America or in any other country. It was exactly what Sakamoto wanted.

When war came, Sakamoto as past national president was among those summoned to the JACL emergency conference in San Francisco. There, JACL officers and counselors decided to move national headquarters to Salt Lake City, and it agreed that as an evacuation order, if it came, must be obeyed.

"You will recall," Jimmie wrote to me, "we in Seattle agreed to march loyally, if the evacuation order came, to assist the American war effort. The same spirit was expressed at the conference and I am happy to say that while there was sadness in the hearts of everyone, that, not a dissenting voice, was raised to fight the evacuation. If the government should order it, that was a matter of our Americanism and we came through flying colors." In Seattle, Sakamoto had ex-

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(Continued from Preceding Page) of war, interpret bewildering government red tape and otherwise ease the burdens of the community. Under his direction the committee collected a mass of information about the economic contribution Japanese Americans were making in the Northwest. This information, which surprised the Nisei themselves, was printed and widely circulated after it had been submitted to the Tolson Committee in an effort to forestall the evacuation order.

Appearing before the committee, Sakamoto spoke eloquently against indiscriminate mass evacuation. He concluded his testimony by pledging loyal cooperation if the government would that be and his people must be uprooted.

But once the urgency of the dark days immediately after Pearl Harbor had been replaced by the tensions and frustrations of relocation center life, Sakamoto suddenly found himself being made the scapegoat.

Disgruntled individuals, first at Puyallup Assembly center and then at Minidoka WRA camp in Idaho, blamed him for everything from the evacuation itself to inadequate food and clogged latrines. For Jimmie it was a period of disillusion. He quietly bowed out of camp politics. He made one gallant, futile gesture—volunteering for military service. The army had no place for a blind man.

Relocation divided the Sakamoto family in the summer of 1944. Misao took her two older daughters, Marie and Marcia, to St. Mary's College in South Bend, Ind., where she could work and the children go to primary school. Jimmie remained in Minidoka with his parents (both 81 years old at the time) and one-year-old Denise who had been born at Minidoka.

When the west coast was reopened, Jimmie returned alone to Seattle in July, 1945. Some old friends, Harold Schaeffer and his wife, helped Jimmie locate a house. Two months later Jimmie's parents joined him in Seattle. In June, 1946, Misao, with the baby and the other two children came home.

Many friends urged Jimmie to start up "The Courier" again. Jimmie pondered his sense of responsibility toward the people then returning to the Northwest. He remembered the lean years as

a publisher, considered his obligations to his growing family. Other friends offered to set him up in business. One proposal was to take over a dress manufacturing concern. Another was to go into the investment and realty business. Jimmie was still undecided when his good friend, Father Leopold Tibesar dropped by and invited him for a ride. Father Tibesar was the Maryknoll priest who had converted the Sakamotos to Catholicism.

Jimmie remembers the day Father called. It was the hot, sultry afternoon of August 22, 1946. Father said he wanted to see Pete Emt, general manager of the St. Vincent de Paul Salvage Bureau. Says Jimmie:

"Being a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, it did not seem odd for me to go along. Father and I sat in Pete's office, talking about one thing and another, for almost an hour. Then suddenly Father Tibesar asked me if I would like to work at the Bureau. Pete joined in the question. I told them about the business proposition I had, but after another half hour of discussion they finally got me to agree to come down on Monday and try it out. I am still trying it out, in my tenth year now."

Emt had been skeptical about employing a blind man when Father Tibesar first talked to him about Jimmie. "Jimmie Sakamoto can do anything," Father Tibesar assured him. "Give him a desk, a telephone and two weeks and see what happens."

Jimmie started a telephone solicitation campaign. All day long he called from a list of numbers that had been prepared for him, asking for discarded goods that cluttered basements and attics. The salvage business boomed.

A year ago, Jimmie Powers of the New York "Daily News" had occasion to remember Sakamoto in his daily "The Powerhouse" sports column. Quoting a correspondent, Powers wrote for his millions of readers:

"Jimmie is head of the pickup and telephone solicitation department of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul on the shores of Lake Union in the center of Seattle. . .

"It is one of the largest salvage operations in the world and you can find Jimmie at work there from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. sparking the operations of the bureau, sal-



Rare and valuable items sometimes show up in the salvage collection. This pair of Shinto images were returned to their original owners when newspaper publicity brought attention to its real value. Salvage Bureau employees call the pair, "Leo, the Lip" and "The Visiting Fireman."

vaging everything from broken glass fisherman's floats to several old ships that are tied up at the dock. The Maryknoll Fathers got Jimmie his job and his superior says: "I was doubtful as to what a blind man could do in this 3 1/2-acre madhouse . . . but Jimmie's coming raised the standards of personnel performance and office practice . . . the undertaking was parlayed up from a handful of clothes and shoes to a yearly gross of \$500,000, a payroll of \$390,000 for 200 workers. More than 52,000 free meals were served last year and food, clothing and furniture distributed from 14 branch retail stores by 28 trucks . . ."

The grim, hungry days seem far away now, but the Sakamotos have not forgotten those times. They recall, for instance, when they wept over a check

they found in the mail one morning after they returned to Seattle.

Unknown to the Sakamotos, old friends like Dr. Russell Wehara and Sim Togaasaki had raised a fund among Jimmie's prewar associates.

They had sent the money to Jim and Misao, suggesting that it be used to get a Seeing Eye dog, or be spent in any other way that would help the Sakamotos get on their feet.

Jimmie decided there were 613 who needed one of the limited number of dogs more than he did. Some of the money went for an operation he needed. The rest was applied on a down payment for a modest house.

"We were so grateful for the money," Misao says. "But we wept because we were so happy

to have been remembered."

Jimmie's day starts now at 4 a.m. He goes through some brisk calisthenics, showers, makes his way alone to the bus while the streets are still uncrowded. He is at his desk by 6:15 or 6:30 a.m. and spends a brief period planning the day's work mentally. He works steadily through the day, is home by 5 p.m. He listens to radio newscasts, enjoys conversation with the family at the dinner table. By 7 p.m. he is usually ready for bed.

On Sundays and holy days, Jimmie and Misao go to church together. Sometimes he visits with his daughter Marie and her husband, George Ishii, and plays with his grandson, James Roby, born last June 16. His second daughter, Marcia, entered Seattle University this last fall. Denise, now 12, is in grade school.

"I'm just an ordinary individual now," says Jimmie, "and I'm enjoying it immensely."

But he has not forgotten that he is a Nisei, nor has he lost any of his crusading spirit. Pressed for a statement on the destiny of the Nisei, he voiced anew the old ringing ideals. It was almost like old times to hear him say:

"The destiny of the Nisei in America should be a most enviable one. As first generation Americans of Japanese ancestry, they are pioneers in their own right. The challenge of the future still faces them, the challenge to fill a more substantial niche in American life.

"Upon the proper and solid establishment of their spiritual, civic and economic foundation will be told the true greatness of this generation. The destiny of the third generation, pronounced into a pattern of American life through the ideals and principles of American democracy, should be truly a bright one.

"This will depend in large measure upon what we of this generation can accomplish as Americans, just as the boys of the 442nd and other units of Japanese ancestry did for those of us who remained at home. In the destinies of both the second and third generations rests an obligation and responsibility of contributing their efforts toward the advancement of the"

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Hito Okada, two-term (1946-1950) national JACL president, preparing for a hunting trip last fall.

## Sakamoto--

(Continued from Page 6)

civic, economic, social and cultural life of America.

"With what this generation has gone through, there is much that can be drawn from their background which should prove to be of benefit to this nation, and in particular toward the advancement of human understanding."

\*\*\*

(As a finale to Bill Hosokawa's main story, which was submitted to us about a month before Jimmie Sakamoto met death while crossing a Seattle street, we are reprinting part of Bill's eulogy made two weeks ago in his regular PC column. Editor.)

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DENVER.—Late of a wintry Saturday afternoon the telephone rang. It was Johnny, at the office. "Telegram just came for you, Bill," he said. In my business, telegrams are routine things. They come, and they go.

\*\*\*

"Do you want me to read it to you?" Johnny asked. I almost told him not to bother, that I'd catch it Monday morning. But that would have been ungrateful after Johnny had taken the time and effort to telephone. "Sure, go ahead," I said.

There was a small pause as Johnny tore open the envelope. "Oh-oh," I heard him say. "I'm afraid this is bad news."

Bad news has a habit of coming, unexpectedly. Suddenly concerned now, I waited for the details. Johnny read the terse message. It was from Chet Gibbon, Sunday editor of The Seattle Times. Jimmie Sakamoto had been struck by an automobile and killed.

Saturday night, while I was out of the house George Ishihara telephoned from Nampa, Idaho. George had been a boyhood friend of Jimmie's. He knew Jimmie as few men did. He wanted to let me know. A few hours after that, The Pacific Citizen's Harry Honda notified me by wire. Now there were more details.

And so the news spread, and

there would be many who would grieve. Welly Shibata and Tadao Kimura in Tokyo. They had helped Jimmie launch the Japanese American Courier in Seattle back on New Year's Day, 1928. Tooru Kanazawa in New York, Jimmie's managing editor of long years. Takeo Nogaki in New Jersey. Toshio Hoshide in Washington, D. C., friends and pioneers together in the JACL movement. John Funai, who somehow got type set on the ancient linotype machine in The Courier's backshop. And in Kyoto, Father Leopold Tibesar, the man who converted Jimmie to Catholicism with all its implications for the spiritual life of James Yoshi-noori Sakamoto.

A few months ago, Editor Honda, preparing for the PC's holiday issue asked me to put together a profile on Jimmie. He had been my boss and wise and good friend a long time ago. He was still my friend, but I hadn't had a chance to see much of him for many years. So I wrote to Jimmie for updating information.

He replied promptly, saying that if it weren't for the 25th anniversary of the JACL, he would prefer not to be written up in any prominent way. But a request was a request so he sent me some notes. Throughout those notes ran a single theme. Jimmie Sakamoto goes with a smile. That would be the JACL was everything in character of his indomitable Jimmie's life. He helped found it

He launched and kept alive an eminently unprofitable newspaper to promote and advance the JACL. Jimmie's devotion to the JACL was like that of a priest to his church; all other matters were secondary. And that's the way I tried to write the Sakamoto story for the holiday issue.

\*\*\*

The nicest thing that ever happened to Jimmie was his marriage to Misao Nishitani. She was, and is, a woman of exceptional kindness, wisdom, patience and courage. She was always at Jimmie's side. Their lean years were hard on her, but I don't ever remember hearing her complain. As Jimmie's widow she can take comfort in the knowledge that she was a tower of strength in Jimmie's darkest hours, that her companionship made Jimmie's life more full more meaningful. She helped him gain his destiny as no other person could do.

\*\*\*

Blindness that struck Jimmie Sakamoto in the most vigorous years of his life placed a geographical limit on his activities but failed to quench his adventurous spirit. Now his mission here completed, Jimmie has embarked on a new adventure—the greatest adventure I know he to love and regard for the JACL. He helped found it

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