

An Exemplary Life - timeline

October 19, 1916. Minoru Yasui born in Hood River, Oregon. Third son of Masuo and Shidzuyo Yasui.

1931. Helps to found the Mid-Columbia Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) and serves as president in 1933.

1933. Graduates salutatorian from high school in Hood River.

1937. Graduates Phi Beta Kappa from University of Oregon (UO).

June 1939. Receives law degree with honors from University of Oregon School of Law. First Japanese American graduate of this institution.

September 1939. Admitted to practice law in Oregon, the first Japanese American member of the Oregon State Bar. Unable to find employment with established law firms in Oregon.

1940. Accepts position as Consular Attaché for Consulate General of Japan in Chicago, writing letters and speeches and performing other work requiring use of English.

December 1941. Immediately following bombing of Pearl Harbor, Min resigns his position with Japanese Consulate and returns to Oregon. He had been commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserves after graduating from the University of Oregon. Receives orders to report for duty in Fort Vancouver, Washington, but there he is told his service is not acceptable because of his ancestry.

January 1942. Opens law practice in Portland, OR, to help persons of Japanese ancestry with legal issues during the chaotic and turbulent times following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. He is inundated with requests for legal assistance; at this time, he is the only practicing attorney of Japanese ancestry in Oregon.

February 19, 1942. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066 which authorizes the military to designate areas from which any or all persons could be excluded. Min consults with other attorneys who agree that any orders singling out one racial group for exclusion would be unconstitutional.

March 24, 1942. Lt. General John L. DeWitt, Military Commander of the Western Defense Command, issues Public Proclamation No. 3, imposing travel restrictions and a military curfew upon German aliens, Italian aliens and all persons of Japanese ancestry. The proclamation applies to American citizens of Japanese descent as well, but not American citizens of German or Italian descent. Min views this order as unlawful discrimination based on race/ancestry and a clear violation of the U.S. Constitution.

March 28, 1942. Unable to find a volunteer to bring a test case on behalf of all Japanese Americans, Min decides to do so himself. On the Saturday night that the discriminatory curfew goes into effect, he deliberately violates it. He leaves his law office at 8:00 p.m., after curfew, and walks the streets of Portland, Oregon, while his secretary calls the police headquarters periodically to inform them of his location. After several hours with no result, Min approaches a police officer and insists that he be arrested for violation of the curfew, showing the officer a copy of the Public Proclamation and his birth certificate to prove that he is of Japanese ancestry, but the patrolman tells him to go home. Min then goes to the Portland Police station, where he is arrested, and spends two nights in jail before being released on bail the following Monday.

May 1942. Evacuation orders are posted in Portland. Min notifies the authorities that he has no intention of obeying what he considers "unconstitutional, illegal and unenforceable" orders, gives the military his Hood River address, then heads back to his family home. Soon after, military police arrive at the Yasui family home in Hood River and escort Min back to Portland, depositing him in the North Portland Livestock Pavilion, which has been hastily fortified and renamed the Portland Assembly Center. There he awaits his trial, living in what he calls the "Portland PigPen" with some 3000 other Japanese Americans.

June 12, 1942. Min's one-day trial begins before Judge James Alger Fee in the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon. After quickly establishing the facts of the curfew violation, the remainder of the trial focuses on Min's loyalty to the USA, with the prosecution emphasizing his employment with the Japanese Consulate and a "racial characteristics" argument. The trial ends at 5:00 p.m. and the judge reserves ruling in order to consider the evidence.

June 12, 1942 to September 1942. Min is sent back to the Portland Assembly Center. He spends the remainder of the summer there, talking about his case with other internees and doing free legal work.

September 1942. Min is sent, by military transport, to the Minidoka Relocation Camp in Idaho along with all other Japanese Americans from the Portland area.

November 1942. Min is taken, under armed guard, from Minidoka back to Portland, to hear Judge Fee's decision in his case. Upon arrival, he is put into an isolation cell in Multnomah County Jail. The next day he is removed from that cell in handcuffs, chained around the waist, and walked to the courtroom one block away. Judge Fee rules the curfew order as applied to American citizens was unconstitutional. But he then rules that Minoru Yasui is not a United States citizen, concluding that Min's work for the Japanese Consulate in Chicago, effectively resulted in a renunciation of his U.S. citizenship. Therefore, according to Fee, Min disobeyed a lawful

regulation governing enemy aliens and is found guilty as charged. He is sentenced to the maximum penalty: one year in jail and a \$5,000 fine. Elated by the ruling on the curfew but dumbfounded by the ruling on his citizenship, Min immediately instructs his lawyer to appeal his conviction.

November 1942 – August 1943. Min spends nine months in solitary confinement, in a six-by-eight-foot windowless cell in Multnomah County Jail, awaiting his appeal.

April 1943. After arguments are filed, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals certifies Min's case to the Supreme Court of the United States.

May 10 and 11, 1943. The Supreme Court hears oral argument on the Hirabayashi v. United States and Yasui v. United States cases. Though the Yasui case was initiated several months before the Hirabayashi case, Yasui is heard as a companion case to Hirabayashi. Min's defense team includes E. F. Bernard from Portland and A. L. Wirin from Los Angeles. Solicitor General Charles Fahy argues the case for the United States.

June 21, 1943. The Supreme Court reverses the lower court on both counts, ruling the curfew order constitutional as applied to United States citizens due to "wartime necessity" and that Min Yasui did not lose his U.S. citizenship. Thus the High Court upholds the lower court's conviction of Min, but frees him from further incarceration for the time he has already served in the Multnomah County Jail.

August 1943. Min trades one prison for another. He is released from the Multnomah County jail in Portland and taken under armed guard to Minidoka Relocation Camp in Idaho.

June 1944. Released from Minidoka for employment as a laborer in an ice plant in Chicago.

September 1944. Moves to Denver, Colorado where his mother and sister are residing and enrolls in a bar exam review course at the University of Denver.

1944-1986. As before and during internment, Min continues to be an active, vociferous member of the JACL, on both the local and national levels, until his death at the age of 70 in 1986. In Denver, he is a founding member, and holds various offices in the Mile High chapter and the Mountain-Plains district.

1945. Min continues his fight against racial bigotry and hatred in Colorado. At great personal risk, Min speaks out vigorously against legislation introduced in the Colorado General Assembly to prohibit aliens from owning land. It is clear that the intent of this bill is to keep Japanese issei (first generation immigrants) from resettling in Colorado and purchasing land.

1945. Sits for Colorado bar examination. Although he receives highest score among group of candidates that year, Min is denied admission to the Colorado bar because of his criminal conviction. Represented by Samuel L. Menin, Min appeals to the Colorado Supreme Court and wins the right to practice law in Colorado.

1945-1962. Scoutmaster of the multiracial Boy Scout Troop 38. Arranges a trip to Japan in 1962 as his farewell gift to the troop. He continues to support various Boy Scout of America activities.

1946-1954. Helps found the Urban League of Denver, a group dedicated to addressing issues of concern to the African-American community and serves on its board until 1954.

January 1946. Admitted to the Colorado bar. He rents an office in downtown Denver (future Japantown); long hours and low pay characterize his practice. Many of his clients can only afford to pay him in-kind, or not at all.

November 1946. Marries True Shibata, originally from California, but interned at the Amache Relocation Camp in Granada, Colorado. She relocates to Denver after her release from Amache. Min and True have three children – Iris, Laurel and Holly.

1948. Evacuation Claims Act of 1948. Min works countless hours, until the 1960s, helping file claims for Japanese Americans who suffered economic losses because of their forced evacuation. However, only about 4 percent of the economic losses is compensated.

1948-1986. Newspaperman and journalist. Min works as regional correspondent for *Nisei View* of Chicago from 1948-50; columnist for the *Rocky Shimpō* of Denver from 1950-52; English editor of the *Colorado Times* from 1952-58; editor and publisher of *the Mountain-Plains AJA* (Americans of Japanese Ancestry) *News* from 1960-65; and contributor to the *Rocky Mountain Jiho* of Denver and the National JACL newspaper, *Pacific Citizen*, until his death in 1986.

1951-54. Min and the JACL lobby for passage of the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, which removes the prohibition on Japanese aliens applying for U.S. citizenship. Prior to passage, Japan-born issei (first generation immigrants) in the United States were deemed ineligible for citizenship. After passage of this Act, Min helps many elderly Japanese issei through the naturalization process to become U.S. citizens.

1952. Awarded "Nisei of the Biennium" at the National JACL Convention in San Francisco, California.

1959-1967. Appointed to Denver's Commission on Community Relations. Min serves for eight years on the commission as a member, and holds the position of vice-chairman and chairman during this period.

1963-1972. Helps found Latin American Research and Service Agency (LARASA –now called CLLARO – Colorado Latino Leadership, Advocacy and Research Organization) and continues as a consultant until 1972.

1967-1983. Appointed by Mayor of Denver to be Executive Director of the Commission on Community Relations. Min holds that position until his retirement from city service in 1983. During his tenure as Executive Director, he initiates various agencies, including the Commissions on Youth, Aging, Human Services, the Council on Disabled and the Office of Citizen Response.

1967- Member of Denver Public Schools Advisory Committee on Equality of Educational Opportunity

1968-1975. Board member of Denver Opportunity ("War on Poverty" program); chairman in 1969 and 1973.

1968- Helps organize Denver Native Americans United (DNAU – now called the Denver Indian Center) and continues as a consultant.

1974-1977. Sponsor of Presidential Classroom program for Denver Public Schools (sends high school students to Washington D.C.).

1974-1983. Sponsor of Executive Intern program for Denver Public Schools. Mentors two high school students per year at the Commission on Community Relations during this period.

1974- Member of National Association of Human Rights Workers (NAHRW)

1975- Member of the Colorado State Advisory Committee (SAC) of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights; in 1979, Min serves as chairman of the Colorado SAC

1976-1986. National JACL Committee on Redress, founding member. Min is elected Chair of the National JACL Committee on Redress as the movement gains strength and nationwide recognition. This is the main cause to which he devotes himself until his death (see below).

The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) is created by Congress in 1980 and hearings take place throughout the country in 1981. The final results are published in 1983 under the title Personal Justice Denied, which serves as the basis of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, granting survivors a public apology, reparations of \$20,000 per internee and a public education fund.

1976- Member of International Association of Human Rights Agencies (IAOHRA).

1976- Board member of Metropolitan YMCA of Denver.

1976- Helps found "People-to-People Corporation of Denver, Colorado" an international friendship association later changed to Denver Sister Cities International, and serves as chairman, then member of the board

1976 – present. Min Yasui Community Volunteer Award (MYCVA). As director of Commission on Community Relations, Min institutes a monthly award to recognize individuals in the community who give their time to worthy causes, providing a substantial donation to the organization of their choice. In 1976, this award is renamed the Minoru Yasui Community Volunteer Award (MYCVA), in recognition of Min's tireless spirit of volunteerism. The Denver City Council passes an ordinance to financially sponsor MYCVA, which is now a project of the Denver Foundation. See www.minyasui.org for more information.

1978-1983. Member of Inter-faith Forum, serving as Secretariat in 1980.

1978- Board member of Colorado Alliance of Pacific/Asian Americans

1979-1983. Member of the Mayor's Task Force on Refugee Affairs.

1980- Board member of Colorado Council of International Organizations

1981-1986. Chair of National JACL Committee on Redress; split into Legislative Education Committee in 1985 for lobbying purposes. In 1981, Min criss crosses the country to attend all the hearings of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC). After the hearings, he continues to speak, give interviews and lobby for passage of Congressional legislation on redress. He makes hundreds of speeches, writes thousands of letters and papers and attends thousands of meetings throughout the nation, drumming up support for redress.

1982. Awarded "JACLER of the Biennium" at the National JACL Convention, Los Angeles, California.

February 1, 1983. Min's lead attorney, Peggy Nagae, files a writ of error coram nobis in the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon in order to re-open his World War II case. In addition to his untiring commitment to the redress movement, Min remains adamant in his desire to see the discriminatory World War II curfew overturned. The release of previously classified documents under the Freedom of Information Act provides a basis for his coram nobis case. Min's petition requests the court to vacate his conviction, dismiss the underlying indictment, make findings of governmental misconduct and declare unconstitutional Public Proclamation No. 3, under which he had been convicted.

March 1983. Proclaimed "Honoray Life Member" of the Company K Club, 442nd Regimental Combat Team, Veterans Association.

September 1983. Receives Oregon State Bar Association "Award of Merit."

November 1983. Receives American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Oregon "E.B. McNaughton Award."

December 1983. Receives, with Gordon Hirabayashi and Fred Korematsu, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Northern California "Earl F. Warren Civil Liberties Award."

January 26, 1984. District Court Judge Robert C. Belloni issues his ruling on Min's coram nobis case in Portland, Oregon, vacating his conviction, but agreeing with the government to dismiss the petition on the remaining issues. Min believes that the reversal of his conviction is not sufficient and appeals the judge's decision on the dismissal of the remainder of his writ.

February 1984. Receives American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Colorado "Carl E. Whitehead Award."

March 1984. Receives U.S. Department of Justice "Community Service Award."

March 3, 1984. "Minoru Yasui Day" proclaimed by Colorado Governor Richard Lamm and Denver Mayor Federico Peña.

1985-86. Appointed chair of the National JACL Legislative Education Committee, a position to which he devotes himself until his death in 1986.

November 12, 1986. While his case is on appeal at the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, Minoru Yasui dies in Denver, Colorado.

November 1986. The government moves to dismiss Min Yasui's coram nobis appeal on the grounds that the plaintiff is deceased and, therefore, the case is moot. The Ninth Circuit grants the government's motion to dismiss, and the case is appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

October 5, 1987. The U.S. Supreme Court upholds the lower court's ruling, thus ending the coram nobis appeal.

But the legacy continues ...

August 10, 1988. Civil Liberties Act of 1988 signed into law by President Ronald Reagan, granting redress of \$20,000 and a formal apology to every person of Japanese ancestry incarcerated during World War II.

1996 - Minoru Yasui Inn of Court established in Denver, Colorado.

2001 - Minoru Yasui Community Volunteer Award celebrates its 25th anniversary.

2012 - University of Oregon School of Law Minoru Yasui Endowment for Civil and Human Rights established.

2013 - Minoru Yasui Legacy (Tribute) committee formed to plan for 2016 centennial.

2015 - Minoru Yasui awarded the **Presidential Medal of Freedom** by President Barack Obama

2016 - University of Oregon School of Law Minoru Yasui Fellowship established.

2016 - Oregon state legislature unanimously designates March 28 as **Minoru Yasui Day** in perpetuity.

2017 - University of Oregon School of Law Minoru Yasui Justice Award established.

2018 - Minoru Yasui film, *Never Give Up! Minoru Yasui the Fight for Justice* completed and Educational Package available.

