

Legacies of Silence Interview

Shigata ga nai, “it can’t be helped”

Isabel (b. 1915) discusses the silence of the *issei* (or first generation Japanese Canadians) about their internment experiences.

Excerpt from Landscapes of Injustice oral history interview with Isabel Hiroto

ERIN YAREMKO

While your parents were still alive, were they quite open about speaking about their experiences about the internment?

ISABEL HIROTO

No, that’s one thing that the Japanese didn’t do, was they didn’t speak about their hardship, they kept quiet. That’s why all the younger generations don’t know what happened during the war. I think that’s in some way the Japanese people were ashamed they were discriminated against. That’s how they felt. You know there is this word Shi-ga-ta-ga-ni which means it can’t be helped in Japanese and a lot of Japanese felt that way. That it can’t be helped that we are discriminated against. I think that is the reason why when the Japanese were told to evacuate they didn’t put up too much ... too much fuss. They went quietly, exactly as the government told them to do. And I think that’s one of the, that’s how these Japanese people were in those days. They bow to, to ... government and higher ups.