

IN SEARCH OF *NO-NO BOY*: CLASSROOM EDITION

Resources: Biography of John Okada

John Okada was born in 1923 at his father's hotel, the Merchants Hotel in Seattle's Pioneer Square. He attended Bailey Gatzert Elementary School and Broadway High, and was midway through his sophomore year at the University of Washington when he and 110,000 other Americans of Japanese ancestry were expelled from their homes on the West Coast and incarcerated in one of ten American concentration camps. The Okada family was shipped first to the detention center inside the Puyallup Fairgrounds along with most of the Seattle Japanese American community, and then put on a train for the camp at Minidoka, Idaho.

Okada was among the first group of young Nisei to obtain clearance to leave camp to attend college on the outside, enrolling at Scottsbluff Junior College in Nebraska. After finishing the school year he enlisted in the Army and was trained as a Japanese language translator by the Military Intelligence Service at Camp Savage in Minnesota.

He took basic training at Camp Blanding near Jacksonville, Florida, and was assigned to the 8th Army Air Forces Radio Squadron Mobile in Guam, known as the "Flying 8 Ball." He earned the rank of sergeant and volunteered to fly dangerous missions in B-24's over Japanese-held islands, translating intercepted radio messages. After V-J Day Okada served five months as an interpreter with the U.S. Occupation Forces.

Okada returned to Seattle to earn his Bachelor's degree in English from the University of Washington, where he wrote and staged at least one student play at a campus playhouse. He earned his Master's degree in English from Teachers College at Columbia University in New York City, where he met Dorothy Arakawa. The two married on June 24, 1950, in Seattle, where within a little more than two years a daughter and son were born. Okada earned a second B.A. from the University of Washington in Library Science and worked as an assistant in the Business Reference section of the Seattle Public Library.

Okada moved his young family to the Midwest where he took a job first at the Detroit Public Library, then as a technical writer for Chrysler Missile Operations in Sterling Township. While in Detroit Okada completed the manuscript for *No-No Boy*, which was published in Japan in 1957 by Charles E. Tuttle Company.

Around the time of publication, Okada moved his family to Fullerton in the Southern California area, where he worked as a technical writer for Hughes Aircraft and then as publications manager for an aerospace contractor, Analog Technology. He was at work on a second novel about the Issei when he died at their home in South San Gabriel of a heart attack in 1971, at the age of 47. He is interred at Evergreen-Washelli cemetery in Seattle.

– Frank Abe