



TOZAI TIMES

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The Return of the Fair Play Committee

□ By Frank Abe
Special to Tozai Times

The Fair Play Committee and the story of the Heart Mountain draft resistance are coming home this month to Los Angeles. Anyone who's been reading the letters to the Japanese American vernaculars over the past year will know how timely this homecoming is.

I became personally involved in the story when I learned that the Santa Clara Valley where I grew up was once a hotbed of Japanese American resistance to our wartime incarceration. This was not what I read in the books written by the unofficial keepers of Japanese American history. Those books, the kind sold in the pages of the *Pacific Citizen*, the in-house weekly of the Japanese American Citizens League, told a different story: that while we as a people weren't happy about incarceration, we went along in order to prove our loyalty, ensure good treatment for our families, and make a down payment on our hope for acceptance after the war. And the balance of that payment was made, according to that reasoning, by the publicity created through the sacrifice of our boys who answered the draft and served in the military.

That was always a lot for my generation to live up to. But something still bothered me and others born after the camps. It was first expressed in the naive question, "Why didn't you resist?" The answer was usually a pat on the head and a mild rebuke for applying today's values to events of the past. A number of Nisei chose to misunderstand the question, as if by "resist" we meant protests in the streets. Mr. Bill Hosokawa wrote an entire book, *JACL: In Quest of Justice*, which the flyleaf notes intended "to answer JACL's critics, notably the Sansei . . . many of whom believe their fathers should have resisted the Evacuation during World War II."

Now we know the question is not "Why didn't you resist?" but "Why did you turn your backs on those who resisted?", because that is just what Japanese America did. For fifty years it has, until now, buried the story of the largest organized resistance inside the camps, and that makes me mad. The resistance turned on the

question of the draft, but it was spurred by the still-simmering outrage over the incarceration and a final refusal to be pushed around anymore by the government and by the Japanese American self-government in the camps, the JACL, which acted as an adjunct to the War Relocation Authority.

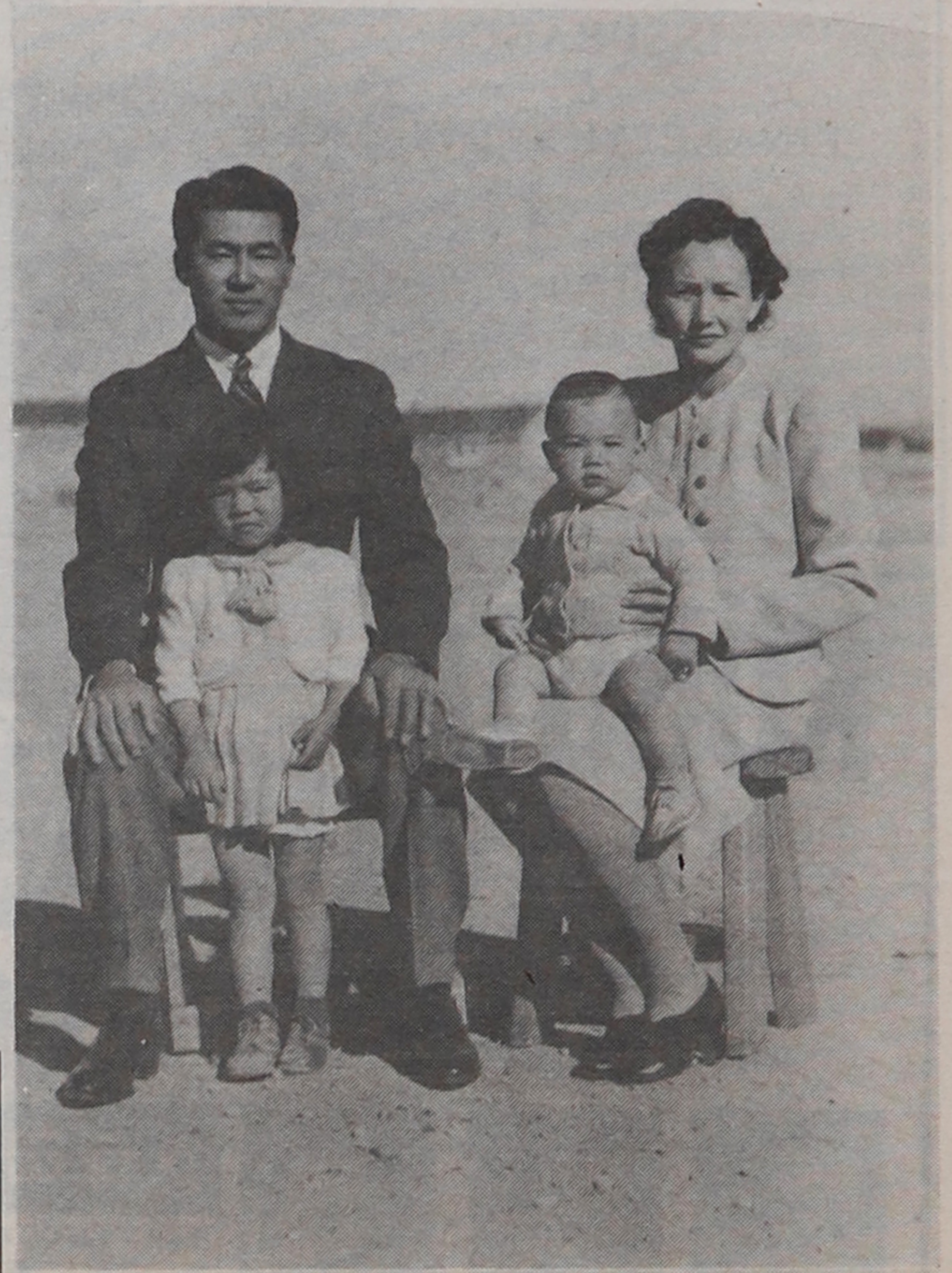
As he was fond of telling us, JACL field secretary Mike Masaoka convinced the government to draft his fellow Nisei out of the camps so they could have the opportunity to "prove Japanese American loyalty with their blood." But at Heart Mountain, sixty-three young men just in their twenties didn't ask Masaoka or anyone else to offer up their blood as the price of postwar acceptance.

We the members of the Fair Play Committee, are not afraid to go to war — we are not afraid to risk our lives for our country. We would gladly sacrifice our lives to protect and uphold the principles and ideals of our country as set forth in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, for on its inviolability depends the freedom, liberty, justice and protection of all people including Japanese-Americans and all other minority groups. But have we been given such freedom, such liberty, such justice, such protection? NO!!

★ ★ ★

Those words come not from the overheated imagination of a Sansei, but from a bulletin issued by a group that called itself the Fair Play Committee. Here was the answer to every Nisei who says, "You can't judge because you weren't there."

The resisters were there. Their actions were real. Their bulletins bristle with patriotic references to Abraham Lincoln and equal protection under the law. The Constitution they championed was not an invention of the 1960s. A total of eighty-five young men eventually refused to be drafted out of Heart Mountain until their rights as citizens were first restored



Frank and Amy Emi with children Kathleen and Grant taken just prior to conspiracy trial

and their parents released from camp. This qualified them, in the eyes of the JACL and the JACL- and government-run camp newspaper, the *Heart Mountain Sentinel*, as draft-dodgers, as disloyals, as delinquents who would jeopardize "the postwar assimilation of the Nisei."

Where the wartime JACL was mostly urban and professional, the resisters from Mountain View and San Jose and the greater Los Angeles area were mostly rural and unsophisticated. The JACL prized good publicity and collaboration as the keys to hoped-for assimilation; the resisters saw that as the path to permanent subjugation to popular will and sentiment. The resisters stood their ground on law, not publicity. Theirs was a test case for us all.

★ ★ ★

Jimmie Omura, publisher in Denver of the *Rocky Shippo* newspaper, recognized the resisters. Omura had
—Continued on page 12

On the cover: back row (L to R) defendants Frank Emi, Guntaro Kubota and Sam Horino; seated is Mr. Adachi, an Issei resident of Laramie, Wyoming who befriended defendants during their pretrial stay at Laramie County Jail.

Courtroom photo of the 63 Heart Mountain draft resisters, members of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee (U.S. District Court, Cheyenne, Wyoming, May 10, 1944. Newspapers reported it as, "Largest Mass Trial in the History of Wyoming."





San Jose Resisters' Homecoming, May 29, 1992

L to R: Dave Kawamoto, Mits Koshiyama, James Omura, Frank Emi, Kenji Taguma (obscured), Frank Abe
—Photo by Leslie Salzmann

The Fair Play Committee

already been branded "public enemy number one" by the JACL for testifying to Congress that mass "evacuation" would not answer the question of Japanese American loyalty, as the JACL had hoped it would. Omura was the only editor who printed the releases of the Fair Play Committee and who encouraged them in editorials filled with well-understood code words to organize and stand firm. It won him no friends.

And instead of praising the resisters for their courage while standing behind them at a safe distance, the group that ironically claimed to lead the fight for citizenship rights of Japanese Americans and steadfastly stated to be looking out for Japanese Americans' best

interests, urged full prosecution of Omura and the resisters. Fair Play Committee leader Frank Emi posed for one last photograph with his family just before leaving for trial. Guntaro Kubota was an Issei man who wasn't even eligible for the draft, but he openly translated Fair Play Committee bulletins into Japanese and wrote appeals for Issei support, because he said he liked what the Fair Play Committee was doing to clarify the rights of the Nisei.

In two separate trials, one of which was and probably still is the largest mass trial in Wyoming history, the resisters were convicted of draft evasion and counseling draft evasion. Omura was acquitted. The convictions were later overturned on appeal or lifted by presidential pardon, but the damage was done. The resisters served average sentences of about two years each. The JACL would later champion citizenship rights of the Issei and the resistance was quietly forgotten by Japanese America.

Those are the facts. Once I discovered them, I went back to San Jose to seek out some of these men, now in their seventies. I could have known them all along. My mother knew Kozie Sakai, a friend to the resisters from *shigin*, Japanese folk-singing class. Mits Koshiyama had been a gardener, like my father. They lived, in a sense, just down the road. They're retired from construction or running restaurants—ordinary guys, not misfits, not oddballs. Not the boogiemen described by the JACL. I never had the chance to knock on their doors and tell them they had a lot of guts to, as they call it, "buck the draft."

These are the men to whom the national JACL, in 1990, offered belated recognition, carefully noting that "they too deserve a place of honor and respect" in Japanese American history, avoiding any direct apology. With that resolution came no presentations, no programs, no invitations to speak.

The time has come for healing.

★ ★ ★
Last May in San Jose, California, a group of us brought home the story and the boys of the Heart Mountain resistance. We brought them before a hometown audience of family, friends, community and an invited audience of nationally recognized Asian American scholars. For two and a half hours, the resisters read from letters and articles

—Continued on next page

The Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee, family and friends
Request the Pleasure of your company at
The Return of the Fair Play Committee to Los Angeles.

See Fair Play Committee members Frank S. Emi, Mits Koshiyama and Gloria Kubota present "The Fair Play Committee Papers" with friends, Journalist James Omura Writer Dwight Chuman, Poet Lawson Inada and Journalist Frank Abe.

Attend the 1944 stockade interrogation of Frank Emi

by Heart Mountain Project Director Guy Robertson, recreated by Pharmacist Grant Emi and Attorney Grace Kubota Ybarra. Join us for potluck supper.

2 p.m., Sunday, February 21, 1993
Centenary United Methodist Church
300 Central Avenue, Los Angeles, CA

For information on potluck, please call (818) 353-4359



JIMMIE OMURA . . . never thought the Sansei had the guts, in his words, to risk ostracism by looking him up and writing about him. Like the resisters themselves, he always thought he would only be remembered 50 years after he was dead.

In fact, many thought he *was* dead. He is singled out for quotation by such historians of Japanese America as Roger Daniels, Douglas Nelson, Morton Grodzins and Michi Weglyn, but he's been actively ignored by those whom Daniels now identifies as "JACL apologists."

Omura published the only national magazine of Nisei art and ideas before the war called *Current Life*. Before a joint Congressional field hearing in February, 1942, he protested the threatened evacuation as unnecessary, rejected the leadership of the JACL and asked if "Gestapo tactics" were not being used to deal with a racial minority.

He voluntarily moved to Denver, where he set up a free Evacuee Placement Bureau and took over editing the English section of the *Rocky Shimo* newspaper. In that post he was the only Japanese American writer of any kind to seriously consider the actions and argument of the resisters as they emerged in camp. Two of his editorials that appeared under the heading, "Nisei America: Know the Facts," were cited in his federal indictment for conspiracy to counseling draft evasion. He was tried in Wyoming together with the seven leaders of the Fair Play Committee, whom he had never met and whose letters he carefully avoided answering or forwarding to avoid just such a conspiracy charge. He alone was acquitted, on ground of First Amendment protection, but his career in Nisei journalism was over and he returned to Denver to make a living in obscurity as a landscape contractor.

He resurfaced in testimony before the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. The Asian American Journalists Association made him the first recipient of its Lifetime Achievement award in 1989. He was praised for having shown "true courage in journalism."

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FRANK EMI . . . was amazed and angry when he saw how the government tried to set him up at the Fair Play Committee's 1944 conspiracy trial.

According to declassified FBI reports, a neighbor named Jack Nishimoto offered to gather incriminating information against what he called the "big shots" of the Heart Mountain resistance. "It seemed he was trying to get close to me for a purpose," Emi now recalls. Nishimoto took the stand to describe Emi's efforts to obtain mimeograph ink for printing of the FPC's bulletins, told how he had seen suspicious-looking papers in Emi's barracks unit and claimed that Emi had counseled draft evasion by offering the FPC's support to the mothers of those boys who failed to report for induction.

Emi says those are all lies, concocted by the government because he, under repeated interrogation, did not reveal "one bit of information" that could tie him into an illegal conspiracy. Despite that, the Fair Play Committee leaders at trial admitted to everything they were accused of doing, to put focus on their stance that applying the draft to those in camp was not only morally wrong, but unconstitutional as well. "The district attorney seemed taken aback," says Emi and Nishimoto "just made an ass of himself," but the jury convicted the resisters anyway.

Frank Seishi Emi was the strongly-centered moral integrity of the Fair Play Committee. Kiyoshi Okamoto was a brilliant writer and bombastic speaker given to fits of temper. Paul Nakadate spoke well before groups, but tended to buckle under hostile pressure. Emi was the cool-headed, plain-spoken, dignified and unpretentious common man people tended to trust.

Emi was born in 1916 and raised on a farm in San Fernando. His family operated a grocery store just outside Little Tokyo when the war broke out. At the time of his trial he was a 27 year old married man with two small children. Emi now lives in San Gabriel, holds a sixth-degree black belt and has taught at the Hollywood judo dojo since 1937.

—Continued from previous page they'd written during the war and after.

They sat in front of an enlarged photo of themselves taken in Wyoming federal court on the first day of their 1944 trial. The resisters were joined by James Omura, who for some time was thought to be dead, so long and deep was his postwar silence. Many were surprised to find that he is alive and living in Denver.



Background: Photomural of the 1944 trial of the 63 resisters in Wyoming Federal Court
 Foreground: (L to R) Grace Kubota Ybarra, Gloria Kubota, Dave Kawamoto, Mits Koshiyama

We re-enacted the stockade interrogation of Frank Emi, with the attorney daughter of Guntaro Kubota reading the words of the camp director and Kenji Taguma, the son of an Amache camp resister reading the words of Emi, from an actual transcript that Emi had the presence of mind to request and save to this day. We all marvelled at Emi's cunning refusal to be trapped into admissions of illegal conspiracy. We ended the evening with a potluck supper.

Hosting the event was poet Lawson Fusao Inada. We videotaped the entire evening for use in a documentary for public television and classroom use.

The warm feelings and sense of history generated in San Jose were felt in Los Angeles, where local resisters now plan to stage their own ceremonial homecoming at 2 p.m. on Sunday, February 21st, the weekend of the 51st anniversary of Executive Order 9066. They've found a site in Little Tokyo, the Centenary United Methodist Church (300 South Central Avenue in Los Angeles).

The photomural will be taken out of storage and shipped to Los Angeles. This time, Frank Emi's son, Grant, will read his father's words from the stockade interrogation. We will again have a potluck supper afterwards. Kenji Taguma is organizing his own resisters panel at Sacramento State University on February 23rd.

There's a sense of liberation whenever we get together to tell the story of the resisters. Lawson Inada calls it setting the record straight with the pages of history. To tell their story is to

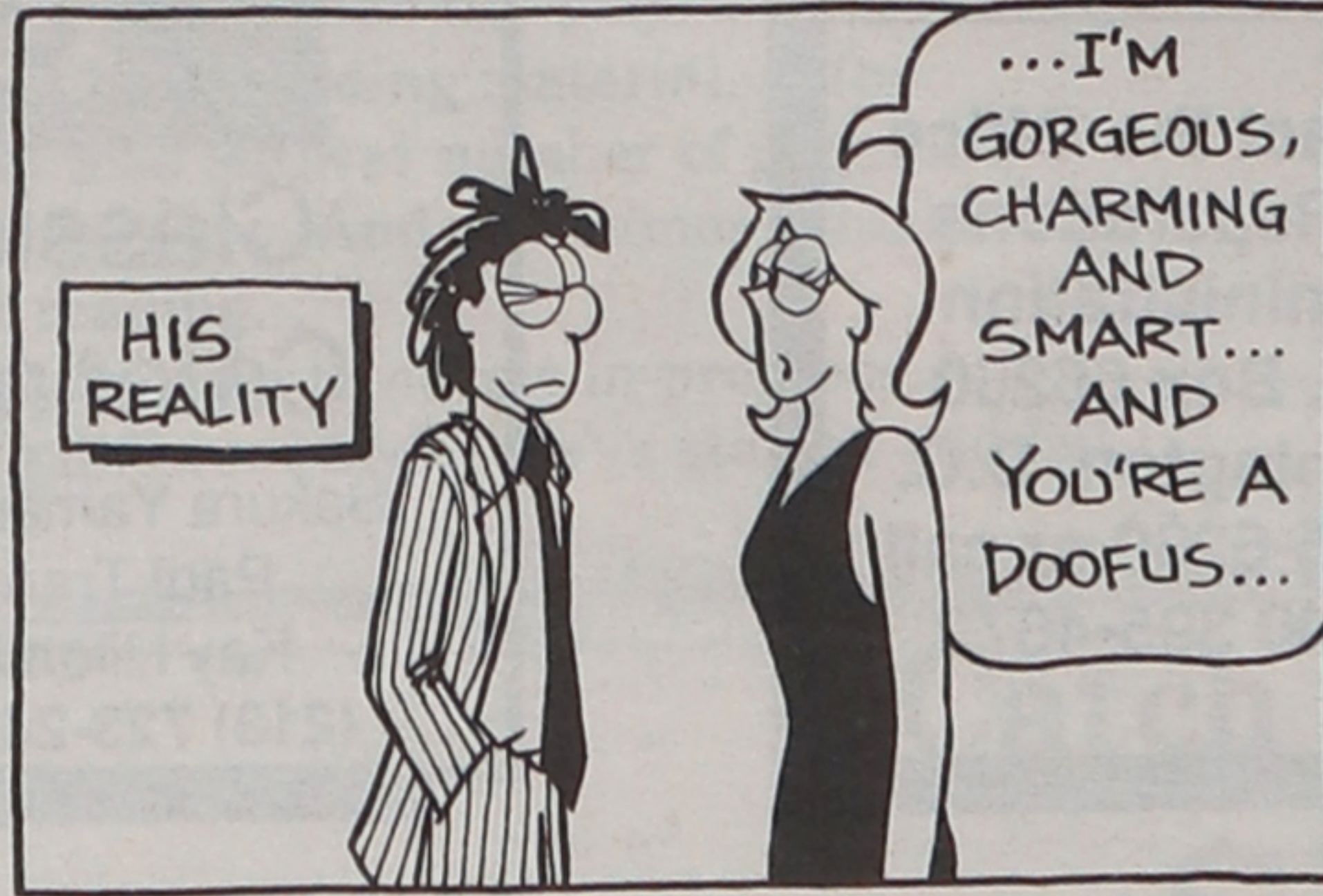
triumph over our own blithe acceptance of buried or falsified history. For me, it's a chance to go back and knock on their doors and say thanks for standing up for our rights.

I'm only sorry we didn't come sooner. □

Frank Abe is a reporter for the CBS-TV and Radio affiliate in Seattle. He is independently producing a video documentary on the Heart Mountain resistance. The project currently seeks wartime photos of the leaders of the Fair Play Committee, especially Kiyoshi Okamoto, Paul Nakadate, Sam Horino and Ben Wakaye. Frank Abe can be reached at (206) 722-3482 or through KIRO Newsradio at (206) 728-5497.

OPPOSITES

ATTRACT



Attorney at Law

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willing to serve before I designate them as executor, guardian or custodian? Probably yes. Some people and banks and trust companies may not consent to serve and may not be qualified to act.

19. What happens if I make a gift in this statutory will to someone and they die before I do? A person must survive you by 120 hours to take a gift under this will. If they do not, then the gift fails and goes with the rest of your assets. If the person who does not survive you is a relative of yours or your spouse's, then certain assets may go the relative's descendants.

20. What is a trust? There are many kinds of trusts, including trusts created by wills (called "testamentary trusts") and trusts created during your lifetime (called "revocable living trusts"). Both kinds of trusts are long-term

arrangements where a manager (called a "trustee") invests and manages assets for someone (called a "beneficiary") on the terms you specify. Trusts are too complicated to be used in this statutory will. You should see a lawyer if you want to create a trust. □


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