

WOMEN DO HOLD UP HALF THE SKY

What about the role that women played in redress? I think because of the Sansei and because people came out of the “Movement” of the Seventies, it became an issue for the organization. It was decided that if there was any kind of disparagement of women, any show of male chauvinism, it was going to be confronted immediately and discussed right then and there! So there were times that we had to do that, even with my husband Bert, because he came from parents that were Issei and he sometimes had that “Nisei attitude” that could create problems. So we often had to say, “wait a minute, wait a minute, we have to discuss this.” “I think you know you tend to do this and that and that it tends to discourage people, especially women from responding to you.” And then he’d say “Oh! OK!” He was very open to criticism and to correcting things, so that was good.



Bernadette Nishimura

A lot of women assumed leadership positions with NCRR. Not just token things where the men do all the talking and the women do the staffing! During the time we had the Commission Hearings in Los Angeles, we wanted to hold a hearing in the community. We wanted the people to be able to come and speak, so we pushed for a meeting at the Little Tokyo Towers, a senior citizen center. We were able to do this because we connected with Joan Bernstein, who was the Chair of the Commission. She was impressed by the leadership shown by the women of NCRR. In fact, June, Miya and I, met with her directly and worked things out so that we could have an evening meeting so that working people could attend.

Women came forward as equal to men in NCRR, not only in numbers but also in the forefront of the leadership. We had strong leaders like June Kizu and Miya Iwataki and today we have people like Kay continuing that tradition. I think it’s wonderful! They had a lot to do with the success of redress. We gave feedback from the community a feminine angle. You know what they used to say in China during the revolution, women hold up half the sky or half the world, or something like that!

Lily Okamoto



Taken from an oral interview with Lillian and Bert Nakano (2001)