

Citizen Grandpa

Grandpa said: "They say I can get that paper now, but I don't want it. I worked 40 years to build up this valley, and those white people did nothing and they had that paper all along, and they said I couldn't have it. And so I don't want it now."

I said: "Okay, Grandpa."

Later Grandpa said: "I changed my mind. I should get that paper. Otherwise it might hurt your future."

I said: "It's not going to hurt my future, Grandpa."

Grandpa said: "I still want to have it just in case. But I not going to study for it like all the Issei women reading the little booklets, and reading some more and talking to themselves. They try to memorize everything. I am not going to read those booklets. I am never going to do that."

And so the day comes when the Immigration Officer arrives in Worland, Wyoming, and Grandpa is the only person scheduled to take the test. At 84, he was entitled to take an oral test. I go with Grandpa, to help with translation and maybe help a little with an answer or two.

In a small office in the local court house, the three of us sit down.

The first question Immigration Officer asks: "Okay, Mr. Ujifusa, what does the United States Congress do? Grandpa does not know the answer."

The Immigration Officer asks a second question: "Mr. Ujifusa, what does the Supreme Court do? Grandpa does not know the answer."

The Immigration Officer then asks: "Mr. Ujifusa, what are the first Ten Amendments to the Constitution called? Grandpa does not know the answer."

Finally the Immigration Officer asks:

"Mr. Ujifusa, Who was the first president of the United States? Grandpa says, A re wa (I point to) George Washington. The Immigration Officer says: You Pass."

I have Grandpa's citizenship paper, complete with his photo, framed and hung above the desk where I helped to write 14 editions of The Almanac of American Politics. It's a book about what Congress does.