

Baker, Norma Saunders
Notarized statements

A United States Family Denied Safe Passage from the Philippines

This is a narrative statement prior to our internment by the Japanese in the Philippines in 1941/1942 after the outbreak of hostilities.

The Saunders family, consisting of my father Frank Saunders, my mother Emma Saunders, my brother Frank Saunders, Jr., my sister Dorothy Saunders and myself, Norma Louise Saunders — as a family, we went to the Philippines in 1939. My father and mother were employed by the National Development Company engaged in textile activities.

My sister Dorothy Saunders married Captain Clarence Riley Bess — U. S. Army (West Point Graduate) who was subsequently taken prisoner at Bataan and ultimately survived the Bataan Death March and imprisonment in Cabanatuan in Japan.

My sister Dorothy Saunders Bess was evacuated as a military dependent in the May of 1941.

I believe it was between June and August of 1941 that my parents decided to return to the United States. My dad would leave the house in the A.M. and come home hours later. His absence was caused by visits to the appropriate military/civilian offices including the High Commissioner's office (Francis Bowes Sayre) in an effort to obtain passage back home for my parents, my brother and myself.

Upon asking Dad why he continued to make these trips, he told me that he was directed to go from one government office to another and that he received the "run around" in response to his inquiry about passage home for his family.

Our "papers" and passports were all in order and up to date. With regularity, my dad would follow up in his effort to obtain passage home for all of us. This process was repeated on several occasions.

Finally, I decided to go with him. Now, I wasn't any different from any other 15 year old girl of today. At age 15 you are smarter than anyone — probably a little more sophisticated, because in my case, I had servants at my beckon call. If I wanted to go anywhere, I would just call a cab whose driver would say, "Yes Mam" and "No Mam".

I knew as a 15 year old ("know it all") that I could see and correct what the officials were doing to delay my father.

At this point, I accompanied my dad on his visitations aimed at securing safe passage home for us. This occurred in the same time frame of June to August 1941.

In visiting the various officials with my dad, I was amazed at the number of places that we were sent; the officials also referred us to a place or places which we had already visited. Some of the places where we had contact, I remember my dad saying, "I was there two or three days ago". I got an education which frightened me. All of us United States citizens were very much aware that the Philippine Islands was still under the jurisdiction of the United States and we were being denied our freedom.