

## Japanese Internment (American)

GENERAL DeWitt kept reminding us that E day, evacuation day, was drawing near. "E day will be announced in the very near future. If you have not wound up your affairs by now, it will soon be too late."

Father negotiated with Bentley Agent and Company to hire someone to manage his business. Years ago Father had signed a long-term lease with the owner of the building and the agent had no other alternative than to let Father keep control of his business until his time ran out. He was one of the fortunate few who would keep their businesses intact for the duration.

And Mother collected crates and cartons. She stayed up night after night, sorting, and re-sorting a lifetime's accumulation of garments, toys and household goods. Those were pleasant evenings when we rummaged around in old trunks and suitcases, reminiscing about the good old days, and almost forgetting why we were knee-deep in them.

The general started issuing orders fast and furiously. "Everyone must be inoculated against typhoid and carry a card bearing the physician's signature as proof."

On the twenty-first of April, a Tuesday, the general gave us the shattering news. "All the Seattle Japanese will be moved to Puyallup by May 1. Everyone must be registered Saturday and Sunday between 8 A.M. and 5 P.M. They will leave next week in three groups, on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday."

Up to that moment, we had hoped against hope that something or someone would intervene for us. Now there was no time for moaning.

Henry went to the Control Station to register the family. He came home with twenty tags, all numbered "10710," tags to be attached to each piece of baggage, and one to hang from our coat lapels. From then on, we were known as Family #10710.

On the morning of Japanese Internment... When I went into the bathroom and looked into the mirror, tears suddenly welled in my eyes. I was crying, not because it was the last time I would be standing in a modern bathroom, but because I looked like a cross between a Japanese and a fuzzy bear. My hideous new permanent wave had been given to me by an operator who had never worked on Oriental hair before. My hair resembled scorched mattress filling, and after I had attacked it savagely with comb and brush, I looked like a frightened mushroom. On this morning of mornings when I was depending on a respectable hairdo so I could leave town with dignity, I was faced with this horror. There was nothing to do but cover it with a scarf.

As we were leaving our house, Mother turned back once more to look at our brown and yellow frame house and said almost gayly, "Good-by, house."

Old Asthma came bounding out to the front yard, her tail swaying in the air. "And good-by, Asthma, take good care of our home. *Yoroshiku onegai shimasu yo.*"

"Quarter to eight," Dunks gently reminded us. We took turns ruffling Asthma's fur and saying good-bye to her. The new tenants had promised us that they would keep her as their pet.

At ten o'clock, a vanguard of Greyhound busses purred in and parked themselves neatly along the curb. The crowd stirred and murmured. The bus doors opened and from each, a soldier with rifle in hand stepped out and stood stiffly at attention by the door. The murmuring died. It was the first time I had seen a rifle at such close range and I felt uncomfortable. This rifle was presumably to quell riots, but contrarily, I felt riotous emotion mounting in my breast.

Newspaper photographers with flash-bulb cameras pushed busily through the crowd. One of them rushed up to our bus, and asked a young couple and their little boy to step out and stand by the door for a shot. They were reluctant, but the photographers were persistent and at length they got out of the bus and posed, grinning widely to cover their embarrassment. We saw the picture in the newspaper shortly after and the caption underneath it read, "Japs good-natured about evacuation."

We were assigned to apartment 2-1-A, right across from the bachelor quarters. The apartments resembled elongated, low stables about two blocks long. Our home was one room, about 18 by 20 feet, the size of a living room. There was one small window in the wall opposite the one door. It was bare except for a small, tinny wood-burning stove crouching in the center. The flooring consisted of two by fours laid directly on the earth, and dandelions were already pushing their way up through the cracks.

The block leader knocked at our door to announce lunchtime. He instructed us to take our meal at the nearest mess hall. As I untied my seabag to get out my pie plate, tin cup, spoon and fork, I realized I was hungry. At the mess hall we found a long line of people. Children darted in and out of the line, skiing in the slithery mud. The young stood impatiently on one foot, then the other, and scowled, "The food had better be good after all this wait." But the Issei stood quietly, arms folded, saying very little. A light drizzle began to fall, coating bare black heads with tiny sparkling raindrops. The chow line inched forward.

Lunch consisted of two canned sausages, one lob of boiled potato, and a slab of bread. Our family had to split up, for the hall was too crowded for us to sit together. I choked my food down.

The block monitor, an impressive Nisei who looked like a star tackle with his crouching walk, came around the first night to tell us that we must all be inside our room by nine o'clock every night. At ten o'clock, he rapped at the door again, yelling, "Lights out!" and Mother rushed to turn the light off not a second later.

Throughout the barracks, there were a medley of creaking cots, whimpering infants and explosive night coughs. Our attention was riveted on the intense little wood stove which glowed so violently I feared it would melt right down to the floor. We soon learned that

this condition lasted for only a short time, after which it suddenly turned into a deep freeze.

I was glad Mother had put up a makeshift curtain on the window for I noticed a powerful beam of light sweeping across it every few seconds. The lights came from high towers placed around the camp where guards with Tommy guns kept a twenty-four hour vigil. I remembered the wire fence encircling us, and a knot of anger tightened in my breast. What was I doing behind a fence like a criminal? If there were accusations to be made, why hadn't I been given a fair trial? Maybe I wasn't considered an American anymore. In their twenty-five years in America, my mother and father had worked and paid their taxes to their adopted government as any other citizen.

Of one thing I was sure. The wire fence was real. I no longer had the right to walk out of it. It was because I had Japanese ancestors. It was also because some people had little faith in the ideas and ideals of democracy.

Our first weeks in Puyallup were filled with quiet hysteria. We peered nervously at the guards in the high towers sitting behind Tommy guns and they silently looked down at us. We were all jittery. One rainy night the guards suddenly became aware of unusual activity in the camp. It was after "lights out" and rain was pouring down in sheets. They turned on the spotlights, but all they could see were doors flashing open and small dark figures rushing out into the shadows. It must have looked like a mass attempt to break out of camp.

We ourselves were awakened by the noise. Henry whispered hoarsely, "What's going on out there anyway?"

Then Mother almost shrieked, "*Chotto!* Listen, airplanes, right up overhead, too."

"I wonder if by accident, a few bombs are going to fall on our camp," Father said, slowly. I felt a sickening chill race up and down my spine. The buzzing and droning continued louder and louder. We heard Mrs. Funai and her husband mumbling to each other next door. Suddenly the plane went away and the commotion gradually died down.

Early the next morning when we rushed to the mess hall to get the news, we learned that half the camp had suffered from food poisoning. The commotion had been sick people rushing to the latrines. The guards must have thought they had an uprising on hand, and had ordered a plane out to investigate.

Every morning at six I was awakened by our sadistic cook beating mightily on an iron pot. He would thrust a heavy iron ladle inside the pot and hit all sides in a frightful, double-timed clamor, BONG! BONG! BONG! BONG!

At the mess hall I gnawed my way through canned stewed figs, thick French toast, and molten black coffee. With breakfast churning its way violently down to the pit of my stomach, I hurried each morning to the Area A gate. There I stood in line with other evacuees who had jobs in Area D. Area D was just across the street from A, but we required armed chaperones to make the crossing. After the guard carefully inspected our passes and counted noses, the iron gate yawned open for us, and we marched out in orderly formation, escorted fore and aft by military police. When we halted at the curb

for the traffic signal to change, we were counted. We crossed the street and marched half a block to the Area D gate where we were counted again. I had a \$16 a month job as stenographer at the administration office. A mere laborer who sweated it out by his brawn eight hours a day drew \$12, while doctors, dentists, attorneys, and other professionals earned the lordly sum of \$19 a month. For the most part, the camp was maintained by the evacuees who cooked, doctored, laid sewer pipes, repaired shoes, and provided their own entertainment.

We had been brought to Puyallup in May. We were still there in August. We knew Puyallup was temporary and we were anxious to complete our migration into a permanent camp inland. No one knew where we were going or when we were leaving. The sultry heat took its toll of temper and patience, and everyone showed signs of restlessness. One day our block leader requested us to remain in our quarters after lunch, and in the afternoon a swarm of white men, assisted by Nisei, swept through the four areas simultaneously for a checkup raid. A Nisei appeared at our door. "All right, folks, we're here to pick up any contraband you may have, dangerous instruments or weapons. Knives, scissors, hammers, saws, any of those things." Father's face darkened, "But we need tools. I made everything you see here in this room with my own hands and a few tools! There's a limit to this whole business!" The young man tried to control his rising temper. "Don't argue with me, Oji-san. I'm just carrying my orders out. Now, please, hand over what you have."

Later, we were ordered to turn in all literature printed in Japanese. Mother went to the central receiving station to plead with the young man. "I have a few things, but they're not dangerous, I assure you. Why does the government want to take away the little I have left?"