

C H A P T E R X V

"THE SAGA OF THE OGINO FAMILY"

Yoe Ogino

The Saga of the Ogino Family

My parents are Shi-ga-ken and they both came from the country, where my fathers' parents farmed and my mother's parents farmed and owned a dry goods store besides. When father first came to America in 1909 his first job was in a sawmill located in Fife, Washington. His father who came to America a few years before him stayed for about ten years. My mother came in the August of 1914 and then they both settled in a little town called, Kapawsin, where they owned a laundry.

They have many close relatives in Japan. Father has three brothers, one uncle and aunt, two cousins, and nine nieces and nephews. Mother has a eighty-five years old mother, one sister, one brother and also nine nieces and nephews. In Vancouver she has a brother and sister and ten nieces and nephews. That is about all I could tell on my parents' personal history, for I don't know any more than that. Next I shall record about my brother and sisters, besides myself.

(Their) There are seven children in our family, six girls and one boy. The oldest is twenty seven and the youngest -- that's me. There names are Mary, Rose, Benjamin (Ben for short), Hellen, Jessie, Florence and myself. Hellen is married and at the present in Montana. The three oldest were born when our parents still owned the laundry, the rest of us were born after father and mother moved about a mile away from the laundry and bought about forty acres of land.

At that time the place was all woods except for a path leading to our newly built house. After many years of toiling on the land, we finally got thirty-five acres cleared and put into fields. Because the land was so rocky and hard, the only thing it was good for was raising hay, strawberries and pasture land. Our chief occupation was dairying, but we also grew peas, carrots, beets, strawberries, potatoes, gooseberries, ^acurrents, strawberries and many other things for our own home use. We also had orchards of apples, Cherries, plums and a few other fruit trees. We had fourteen heads of cattle and six were milking ones. Since we girls had only one brother, we did a lot of manual labor. Milking cows was one kind, and sawing wood, driving a tractor and planting were a few of the

others. My sister and I milked six cows every morning and night at 5:30 p.m. & a.m. for about three and a half years. Then in the September of 1940, the family moved to Tacoma, Washington, except my sister, brother and I. My sister wanted to finish her last year of school, and besides, we had to put away the things at home. My brother worked at Eatonville, which was about ten miles away, but came home every day. His job was in the Eatonville Lumber Company where he worked as a planer in that department for about two years. The last year and a half he was the foreman of the night crew on the planer job.

After we sold thirteen heads of cattle, the work was easier, but there still was a lot to do. After my sister graduated in 1941 she went to Tacoma too, so that left me alone with Ben. Since he worked at night from 5:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. I was home all by myself at night. My work was to cook, clean house, milk a cow and other little odds and ends. School started at 9 a.m. and the bus stopped for me at 8:45 so I got up a little earlier to do my chores.

On January 19, 1942, which was the end of the semester, I moved to Tacoma and Ben stayed in Eatonville, where there was a camp, (as they called it) which was right next to the saw mill. I entered the McCarver Junior High School and I felt queer because there were so many Japanese students there, and where I came from we were the only Japanese family there. At first it was quite difficult to get used to their school system, because they had things like 9B & 9A. I helped in my parents' laundry for about three and a half months, when Orders for evacuation came. Every body was excited and busy, because they had to put away household goods and sell their business or rent it. To put away property was no picnic, especially for us. Because of the curfew it was difficult to make arrangements for our property at Kapowsin.

The day finally came and our destination was Pinedale, California. May 18, 1942 at 3:30 p.m. we boarded the train. A lot of our caucasian friends were there to see us off. We ate supper before the train started moving. That was about 4:00 p.m. The meals were all good and the service(s) given by the negro waiters were appreciated by every one on the train. A party from Tacoma arrived in Pinedale the day before we did and they all were out by the gate to greet us. As luck would permit we were supposed

to have arrived on one of the hottest days they ever had. We agreed with them on that point, and many proved it by fainting, or at least Rose did. One room had a tarred floor and a big clumsy door with large cracks in it. To get a meal of cold meat (baloney) and rice, we waited in a long line for about half a hour with the sun beating down on the crowd. We got used to everything even the number of Japanese we found there. Every day was hot as another, but when news came that we were to be relocated here at Tulelake we were very glad, because some people said it was cooler up here. July 18, we boarded the train again and headed for Tulelake. The size of the camp and number of people here, was most surprizing. We found conditions much better, here and seemed to enjoy ourselves with the many activities going on. We all dislike this bitter cold weather, but that can't be helped. All I am wishing for is, I hope this war ends soon so we could go back to our own homes we left behind. I think you are all hoping the same.

By Yoe Ogino

EPILOGUE

As the 110,000 Issei, Nisei and Kibei settled down in the ten relocation centers, the extensive heterogeneity of that population became increasingly clear with the passage of each month. The widely shared aspects of culture, common group experience, and unifying sentiments provided the bases for efforts to construct a new kind of community life under very difficult circumstances. There were, however, deep divisions among them which added to the difficulties that had to be resolved in order to establish a stable community. Differences among generational groups, linguistic impediments to communication, contrasts in educational experience in Japan and America, widely varying degrees of access to experiences that advanced acculturation, variability of backgrounds in terms of class origin, occupation, and place of residence as well as dissimilarities in attachments, political interests, and loyalties all remained significant.¹ In some substantial measure, the fact that all the evacuees in each re-

¹In his efforts to aid the strategically important Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson, to understand more fully the problems of administering relocation centers, the Director of the W.R.A., Dillon S. Myer, wrote a letter dated March 11, 1943, in which, among other things, he explains the importance of the heterogeneity of the evacuee population "One of the most serious [problems] arises from the fact that we have thrown together in closely-packed, somewhat rudimentary communities thousands of people who have a common racial ancestry but who are highly heterogeneous in almost every other respect. Citizens are mixed in with aliens; the well-to-do with the poor; farmers with city-dwellers; the highly educated with the near illiterates; those whose cultural background is primarily Japanese with those who have never visited Japan and have no desire to go there. This mingling of people with widely varying economic status and cultural backgrounds under the conditions of relocation center life has created many conflicts and has intensified others which existed prior to evacuation. It has produced a widespread feeling of individual and collective insecurity and has led to frustrations, fears, and bitterness. It is, I feel, one of the fundamental causes lying behind nearly all the demonstrations that have occurred in assembly centers and relocation centers to date." Myer, op. cit., 161.

location center shared the critical hardships of being uprooted and interned brought them into a greater awareness of common interests and purposes. At the same time, the responses of the people to the frustrations and hardships of their circumstances reflected the depth of internal fissures. Critical problems that arose in the conduct of the affairs of the relocation center communities were made more critical by the extensive internal differences among the colonists and the strains of recurring crises served in turn to aggravate these internal divergencies.

The problems of administering internment camps for a population composed of both enemy aliens and American citizens and to do it in ways compatible with national democratic ideology were staggering. Yet the War Relocation Authority acquitted itself commendably, given the asperities of the situation. If, from the beginning, the W.R.A. and its project personnel had had a greater understanding of the social and cultural characteristics of the Japanese-American population many of the difficult periods of crisis could have been much mitigated and some of them perhaps avoided altogether.

As it was, crises in relocation center affairs did occur, and some, like the registration crisis in early 1943, were quickly picked up by the press. The events and circumstances of camp life were represented in grotesque distortions for public in the interest of reader excitement and agitation. By Spring of 1943, concern over the conditions in relocation centers, as they were represented in the media, was being manifested in the Congress and in the executive branch of government. Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War, wrote a letter dated May 10, 1943 to Dillon S. Myer, asking for the elimination of "activities of a vicious, well-organized, pro-Japanese minority group to be found at each relocation center."¹

¹Ibid., 165.

In that same month, the W.R.A. decided to carry out a mass segregation program among the approximately 100,000 persons remaining in the ten camps. In this process of segregation, various categories of persons were to be selected out of relocation center populations and removed to one of the centers which would then become the segregation center. Among those to be thus segregated were, it was announced, (1) persons applying for repatriation or expatriation as of July 1, 1943 (and family dependents), (2) persons answering "no" to items on loyalty in the questionnaire for leave and military clearance that had been administered several months earlier, and (3) those individuals who had been denied applications for leave from W.R.A. centers.¹

It was hoped that this process would make it possible to establish a more harmonious community life in nine of the relocation centers by removing those elements most likely to cause unrest. The W.R.A. hoped at the same time to relieve the pressure on other elements of the population exerted by the minority of strong-armed pro-Japanese "toughs."² There was a further hope that public awareness of the relative stability of other relocation centers would be advanced by this process of concentrating the most dissident elements in a segregation center; public acceptance of the loyal evacuees, it was expected, would be furthered thereby.

The Tule Lake Relocation Center was designated to become the segregation center. In planning for the segregation center, it was decided that there would be no elective self-government as existed

¹See ibid., chapter 12.

²Ibid.

in the other centers and there would be no persons allowed to relocate. In effecting segregation, thousands of families were transported from Tule Lake to various of the other centers or were relocated elsewhere. Thousands in turn came to Tule Lake from other centers. Fifteen thousand persons were involved in the exchange.¹ Approximately four thousand non-segregants remained at Tule Lake, preferring to remain there until they could return directly to their homes. Despite the segregation process, it should be noted, internal divisions remained critical at Tule Lake, and the segregation center experienced much turmoil before it was ultimately closed down seven months after the last of the other nine centers was locked up in December, 1945.

In October, 1943, the last of the contingents from other centers settled into Tule Lake. Segregation Center community life was much different from that of the earlier Relocation Center; the population differed in significant characteristics; the administrative policies were altered.

A great many of the students who wrote the compositions and essays included in this volume were by this time in other relocation centers or had relocated. For those who remain, however, community life at Tule Lake had profoundly altered. Some of the teachers remained at Tule Lake after its transformation. Many of the Nisei high school students and pupils in the grade schools who remained with their families found their difficulties greatly compounded as this letter reveals.

¹Ibid., 77.

Newell, Calif.
Feb. 23, 1943

Dear Mrs. Billigmeier

Surrounded as I am by disloyal, there are certain times when I feel discouraged and doubtful. Your wonderful letters are really a source of hope to me. You see, the teachers in school purposely avoid mentioning the subject of the American way of life, etc., and so many of these self-styled Propaganda Ministers in this camp spout off the blatant nonsense of the supremacy of Japan, that sometimes I'm just plain "down in the dumps." The people I write to outside are mostly school mates--and we don't talk about such things--you know how kids hate to get serious with each other, and so sometimes I'm just fed half of a point of view. It's not that I'm in doubt as to where my heart lies, I'm never in doubt of that, but I just plain "lose fight."

School's getting along as well as could be, and I'm getting into the swing of it now. Somehow, I just can't seem to have the fun out of school as I did last year.

Perhaps this Sgt. Tsukahara that you mentioned is acquainted with my brother. He's also with the language unit in the South Pacific, on New Caledonia, to be exact. The other one is up in Alaska, where he's seen some action.

It seems as if my other brothers will soon be in the Army. The last time he wrote he said it's just a matter of time. He's not very good at putting his thoughts on paper, even worse than I am, but I was really proud of him. He told me he wanted to live as much as anyone else did, but there was no use in his ducking the dirty work. He's going out to carve a place for himself after the war, and the only time he can do it is now. Maybe it sound corny, but I know how he was thinking.

I was surprised at the number of old students left here. . . . There are quite a few who don't come to Hi-School at all. . . .

The curfew lifted a few nights ago, and things are just about normal now. Since November, we couldn't leave our own blocks after 7 P.M. but that's all over now. I only hope it stays that way. . .¹

In the meantime in the other nine relocation centers, in contrast to the Tule Lake Segregation Center, the W.R.A. encouraged the evacuees to leave for communities "on the outside." Continuing concern on the part of evacuees, however, about their acceptance

¹From the private correspondence of Hanny Billigmeier.

in general American society inhibited their departure for other areas--the fear of antagonism, damage to their property, even physical violence continued to haunt them. Many Issei had children in the armed forces and were reluctant to resettle without them; problems of getting jobs, housing, insurance, and needed services loomed large. Feeling keenly the uncertainties of the time, many simply feared the loss of sanctuary and security provided by relocation center life and wanted to remain until the end of the war when their position would be clarified.

On December 17, 1944, the Army made known its decision to revise the original exclusion orders; the modification of the orders was to be effective on January 2, 1945. The West Coast was opened for the return of all Japanese-Americans except for the persons at Tule Lake and other centers who had been denied clearance for leaving. The W.R.A. announced plans to close all relocation centers within a period of six months to a year; in the meantime all essential services were to be maintained.¹ Director Dillon S. Myer stressed in a communication directed to all residents of the centers that "The re-opening of the evacuated area and the broadening of the relocation program come at a fortunate time. . . Largely as a result of the splendid record which your sons, brothers, and husband have achieved in the armed services, the American public has come to a recognition of the essential good faith and loyalty that characterize the great majority of the people of Japanese descent."²

¹Myer, op. cit., 186.

²Ibid.

At the time the exclusion orders were modified, approximately 80,000 people still lived in the the relocation centers. Immediately after the new policy was announced, the W.R.A. established field offices in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle to prepare the way for the return of Japanese-Americans to areas throughout the West Coast.

As the Second World War wound down and finally came to an end, the Japanese-Americans reentered the mainstream of American life. They became a part of the migratory movements that were occasioned by the end of the War and the gradual shift, though incomplete, to a peace-time economy; the demobilization of military forces added to the migratory shifts. Even before the end of the war a vanguard of settlers had returned to the West Coast from relocation centers and from other parts of the United States where Japanese-Americans had established themselves. The first movements were largely exploratory; those who first returned were much concerned about their acceptance, about what lay immediately ahead and especially how they would fit into the economy. Some minor waves of terrorism occurred in parts of rural California and Oregon when the first of the former evacuees reestablished themselves. These soon disappeared and, with favorable reports to friends and relatives elsewhere, larger and larger contingents returned to the Western states. Many who had established themselves successfully in Chicago, Milwaukee, Minneapolis and other areas outside the West chose to remain there.

Some who returned were able to resume their businesses or reestablish themselves on farms they owned or rented. The return of large number of Japanese-Americans to the West Coast, however, did

not result in the re-establishment of the communities as they had existed before the war. Many who returned found it necessary in the first years to accept whatever jobs were available or found it easier to go into careers than were different from those for which they were trained. Many Issei and Nisei who before the war had marketed specialized agricultural crops or who were wholesalers found it difficult in the first post-war years to re-establish themselves; some found that the economic networks, based to an important extent on ethnic relationships, which had been so vital to them earlier could not now be re-created.¹ On the other hand new areas of opportunity that had not been important to them before the evacuation now became increasingly significant; this was true, for example, with contract gardening.

The evacuation in interrupting the economic activities particularly of the Issei, and also the long interval of internment, had served to accelerate and make more drastic a process of change that would have occurred with time in any case. Especially many older Issei did not return to their farms or businesses or at least diminished the level of their activities; if the enterprises remained in the family, their Nisei children assumed major responsibility.

It became increasingly clear that significant changes had occurred which were of great moment to the Japanese-Americans. The war record of the Nisei had contributed much to the changing position of Japanese-Americans in the Pacific Coast. While discrimination in employment has not altogether disappeared even now, their access to

¹ Kiefer, op. cit., 197.

housing, education, and jobs has been greatly extended. Occupational interests and expectations expanded in response to the increasing awareness of career possibilities and the broader availability of employment. The actual upward social mobility of the Japanese-Americans has been among the most rapid in American minority group experience. They now have a far wider choice of where they live, what they do for a living, how they live and with whom they associate than ever before. The Japanese-Americans on the West Coast retain some persistent impulses for community life; yet they have increasingly tended to disperse geographically rather than to ensure their own physical proximity.

The greater opportunities for social mobility have meant a growing differentiation among them in their circumstances, interests, and outlooks. Broader and more intensive contacts at work and in the community have meant a greater sharing of social outlooks with non-Japanese, for example, with people in the same occupations and professions.¹

Almost universally the Japanese-Americans divide their historical experience in the continental United States into three distinct periods: the years before the Second World War; the time of the evacuation, relocation, and resettlement; and the post-war years. The up-rooting of the Japanese-Americans and their internment may be seen as both culmination of the long tradition of anti-oriental agitation in the Western states; those years also marked a break in the on-going processes of accommodation and

¹ Ibid., 32.

acculturation in American society for most of the Issei and Nisei. In each of these perspectives, the evacuation and internment created grave hardships and sometimes even tragic consequences for the Japanese-Americans. Both perspectives also raised in the minds of many other Americans some agonizing concerns about the position of minorities in American society.

Despite all the actual hardships and dangers of that period, the grimmest prospects and the worst fears were not transformed into reality. For the teachers and administrators who taught the Nisei youths at Tule Lake and elsewhere the stark prospects and terrifying fears for the future of the Nisei in America were seen and felt in terms of the Tomikos and Kenjis they had in their classes. If they admired the resilience, energy, and intelligence which so many of their Nisei students displayed in class and in the community, it only deepened the dimensions of their concern: "what will happen to these, our students?" Changes in the circumstances of the national social milieu were reflected in changing circumstances in the relocation centers. Alterations in policies relating to internment and the administration of relocation centers quickly and directly affected the nature of the impact of center life upon the evacuated population, individually and collectively. The balance of a number of social factors was such that the consequences of the evacuation turned out in the end to have both negative and positive sides. That is the perspective that history affords; for many who worked with Nisei children in those years the future seemed grim; professional pride, compassion, social conscience, and respect for the Nisei impelled people to continue to work against what often seemed (except for the talents of the Nisei themselves) to be a desperate situation.

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The changing circumstances even during the war years and certainly in the decades since the end of the conflict have altered perspectives on period of the evacuation. "The postwar period," Kiefer notes, "is viewed by the issei as a vast improvement over the prewar era in almost every respect. They tend to feel that their children have done well, that discrimination has all but disappeared, and that they themselves can be thankful for such things as social security. The one big regret that remains widespread among the issei has little to do with the toil and suffering of their lives: They know that their native culture is in fact passing from the face of the earth."¹ For the Nisei the judgment upon the long-term consequences acknowledge both the travail and danger of the evacuation but also the growth in their independence and autonomy that has had so much effect upon their social achievement.

The compositions, essays, and letters published in this volume cannot mirror the whole reality of life as perceived by Nisei junior and senior high school students who wrote them during this first year at the Tule Lake Relocation Center. They do nevertheless give insights into Nisei perspectives at that time that no other materials can provide.

¹See ibid., 60-62.