

October 18, 1943

Dear Mr. McWilliams,

It is exactly a year ago today, we came to Arkansas. I remember, we were tired but eager to get our first glimpse of our new home. Then, we saw the black rows of regimented, one story barracks surrounded by dust. I felt only tears and inarticulate words choking me.

That first Christmas away from home, I looked at the universe closing in on me and learned at last the meaning of enduring things. Faith, hope, goodwill, freedom, justice, the value of these never change, they were meant for man. We needed to believe in them, and strive to bring them into reality. It depended on us! Even we, who were behind barbed wires looking out, we had a gap to fill; we were a part of the eternal plan.

Then, I remember the cold of our first winter, the fuel shortage! The Arkansas mud! We dug ditches, women and children too, to fix the paths in the blocks so that we no longer waded through impossible mud. There were great lessons to be learned in every block, barracks and apartments. None of us were ever so closely confined. Doctors, scholars, wealthy business men, humble farmers, we were all thrown together, and for the first time, forced to live closely and intimately with each other. Ugly traits forced itself to the fore. We were unhappy. We were bitter. We were afraid, all these intensified our difficulty to make adjustments. Deterioration was rapid, and we were helplessly thrown in the maelstrom.

Then, I remember, the fine Gold in the midst of this rot. The personalities that stood for enduring things; Tried desperately to keep the family together, tried untiringly to make their little corners brighter and clearer. They determined to hold the child in the light of wholesome growth, and they didn't lose fight. They helped with the schools. P.T.A. was born. The churches were more earnest, and seemed to tackle a gigantic task. The YWCA and the ties with America and the outside world brought new meaning, new contacts, new spirit into the camp. Lastly, the USO and all the patriotism and loyalty it symbolizes was fostered.

The darkest days since Pearl Harbor, I remember now, to be those oppressive, stifling days of registration. We were afraid to breathe. There was a tenseness in the air. Bewilderment and confusion was at its height. People walked the roads, tears streaming down their troubled faces, silent and suffering. There were young people stunned and dazed. The little apartments were not big enough for the tremendous battle that waged in practically every room: between parents and children, between America and Japan, between those that were hurt and frustrated, but desperately trying to keep faith in America and those who were tried and old and hurt and disillusioned. Then, there was a strange hush, something was sure to snap. There were rumors, gangs, prowlers. Then a few were attacked. We wanted to run away. The outside world seemed hostile; we were falling apart within, no where to turn!

It is hard to believe, ^{fast} but, we are still living in the same camp. We all feel and look years older. We've had tears to shed every week through the spring and summer. Friends were leaving for freedom. The new friends we grew to admire and love, were leaving and we wept to part in confused hurt: angry to have to endure such sorrow, and bewildered to find ourselves still confined, afraid to face the future and the inevitable struggle back to freedom and acceptance.

Then, the echo that had to follow, the registration-- came, and we found ourselves sorry and troubled. There were over 1000 from our camp leaving for Tule Lake. They were ridiculed, they were cowards and quitters, they were ungrateful to this country. No, not all, only a few out of that great number are disloyal! No, not disloyal, only tired and hurt and bitter, that's all. Many had been here more than 40 years. Many had never been to Japan. They haven't seen the new terrible Japan. Many were going only because there were leaders that swayed their decisions. Many were forfeiting the future of their American children. There were so many fine young people that suffered, more than we will ever know, because they could not break up the family. They sacrificed this time for their parents who had sacrificed all these years for their children. Then, there were a few courageous youths, a shining symbol of true loyalty and love for this country. They endured beatings, but they were determined. There are not a few who are remaining alone, breaking, young, not even of age, but certain that they belong to America, and America alone. So, they parted from their family, to start life alone.

There was the parting, though for understood reasons, such as a tragedy, so many thousands confined for the duration, accused of being disloyal, and I remember and will never forget the children. There was a boy who wept. His heart was broken. He was only 17, the truck came after the family. He refused to get on the truck. He walked behind it to the train. He hugged his favorite high school teacher and would not let her go. Finally, he said, "I'm going to return, I am an American!". The train pulled out, my heart was heavy, I felt the world's weight

on me, so much has happened to our people, so many things crowded into a few months, that has changed the course of our entire life. This is a nightmare, for how long?

My husband and I were chosen to go on a tour through Indiana. It was a glorious discovery for us. We could hardly wait to tell our people in the camps about the real everyday folks of America that we met. We, who were confined in camps were afraid of America and Americans. We have heard and read that they hated the Japs, and couldn't understand why the whole race wasn't destroyed. We read with bitterness, "A Japs a Jap, and will stab you in the back!" But, when we talked to them, met them, we knew their hearts were not so cold, nor could they be so unreasonable as to confuse us with Japanese militarists, our enemies across the Pacific. We were Americans, they were surprised to hear us speak English, tickled that we joked, and used slang expressions and that we too, were concerned about our children, home and our country. I am glad this adventure in understanding took us through Indiana and brought us face to face with real Americans. Somehow, I did not let go my faith in America and Americans and democracy through our evacuation days, and I was so grateful to discover that my blind faith was worth everything. It was real and true. There is hope.

As I write today, I am alone with my six year old daughter. My husband took a positive step. He has gone out from camp to seek a job and a place for his family to live and grow in the grace of American democracy and freedom. I pray earnestly for his success as he endeavors to bring new life to our future and new hope for our people. Thousands are mustering courage to try again. It is our only path, to freedom and self respect.

I wished, I had the words at the tip of my pen. I ache to be articulate as I feel inside all the mixed-up emotions, ideas and thoughts as I live intensely each day. Somehow, with the weight of the responsibility that falls on a few that are tortured by being so aware of life, I find it difficult to organize, write understandably, but I am sending this as a letter to you. I do hope it may help you ^{in your work} ~~in the Pacific Citizen~~. I am not a writer. My letters are humble, but if out of it, you could find something that may help you, I shall be glad. We have been reading with gratitude, your wonderful articles and your untiring efforts to interpret our problems to the public.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Tsukamoto

P. S.

Enclosed is a letter I sent to a soldier.