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THE STORY OF THE  
**NITTAS**

A Touching Human  
Document



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# The Story of The Nittas

Shosuke Nitta crossed the Pacific from Japan so many years ago that memory has lost the picture of his early life.

He came to California because this was the land of opportunity, and here a man could settle and prosper and grow with a new frontier.

Shosuke had an inbred love of the soil, and he knew how to till fields, to produce crops, to keep everlastingly at work. To a barren Southern California, from which the desert winds whipped the loose top soil in blazing "santanas," he went in search of his future.

He found it in the home of the "santanas," on scorched, desert acres where one could build for the benefit of all.

He, and many like him, and their caucasian neighbors, made the rich soil bloom with field crops, rich citrus orchards, fine trees, lawns about the houses, flowers about the lawns. And because they fought through the frontier and covered the land with green crops, and flooded the crops with irrigation waters, the "santanas" disappeared and the people of Southern California spoke of the blazing, killing sandstorms as old and unpleasant memories.

It was not fitting that a man should live his life alone. But there had been agitation against these people in California. The newspapers spoke of the "yellow menace," and exclusion laws were passed. Shosuke could no longer add to his acres for he was an alien who could buy no more land.

He was lonely and he was confused, and he needed someone to share his thoughts and his plans, so from Japan came Taka, young and lovely, to his exile to become his wife.

By this time, Shosuke was 35 years old and Taka was 29. Other young women came with her, but forever there would be a lost generation—an age group which had lapsed between the time Shosuke was 21 and when he married, 16 years later.

Shosuke and Taka did not feel personally the resentment of the caucasians. The exclusion laws and the land laws were a general thing. Among their own caucasian friends the Nittas dwelt in peace. They could help their neighbors, for they knew the soil and the tricks of making it bloom, so their neighbors learned from the Nittas.

And every Sunday morning, they went to the Methodist church in Santa Ana and worshipped God. They sang the hymns, prayed with their friends, shook the hands of the pastor, and told him his sermon was good. They attended

## THE AUTHOR

The writer, Milton Corthel Phinney, has been a newspaperman for 20 years, working exclusively on the Pacific coast. He was graduated from Kern County Union high school, worked for the Bakersfield Morning Echo, Bakersfield Press, Oakland Tribune, San Francisco Call-Bulletin, and the Daily News of Los Angeles.

He has covered old uprisings of the Ku Klux Klan in interior California; the San Francisco general strike; has been political editor and newspaper representative at Sacramento legislative sessions; has reported many famous trials, including the Mooney-Billings hearings before the California supreme court; has been sports writer, feature writer and editor in addition to political reporting.

He has known the Japanese situation in California for 25 years, since introduction to it upon his arrival from New York state at the age of 13.

He spent 16 months in the army air forces, where he served as corporal, and upon his return from the army he took the trip from Poston, Ariz., to Santa Ana with the first returning Japanese family. This is his account of that story.

church suppers, enjoyed children's days, took part in the Christmas programs.

In time came youngsters to bless the home and to make more binding the admiration and respect of their church and ranch friends. There was Hitoshi, then Minoru, then Mitsuo.

### ● 'YOU ARE AMERICANS'

As the children grew, they attended the Santa Ana schools. At home, their parents said:

"You are Americans—you are Nisei. This is your country. You are to remember, always, you are Americans. Do not forget the heritage of your race,

nor the good parts of the culture which we hand down to you. But remember always, you are Americans."

This was the future toward which father Shosuke had looked when he came to America so many years ago. Now he saw his dreams realized through his youngsters. He saw them taking their place not simply as Americans, but as leaders among their American friends.

Now, when Sunday morning came, father Shosuke and mother Taka took three thoroughly scrubbed, shining little Nittas by the hand and together they went to the Methodist church. The three little Nittas sat big-eyed and solemn in the Sunday school classes where their caucasian friends squirmed and fidgeted.

They were thus keeping that best of their cultural heritage while becoming Americans. They were excellently behaved. They revered their parents, and they obeyed them unquestioningly.

To all elders, in the church, in school, their neighbors, they were unfailingly polite. Caucasian friends were telling their children, "Children are to be seen and not heard—why can't you be more like the Nitta boys? You don't see them behaving like that."

And so it went through the years. Hitoshi, the eldest, went to grammar school. Then he went to Santa Ana high school. There were dates, and parties, and dances. There were picture shows and ice cream sodas and meetings of the school clubs.

Yet there were also chores around the ranch, and the constant learning from father Shosuke—those secrets of the soil, and those sage words of thrift, and above all, that advice that Hitoshi must better himself.

Hitoshi, father Shosuke said, would have all those things the other American boys had. He would go to college. There he should have opportunity which only America could offer.

### ● POPULAR AT SCHOOL

In high school, Hitoshi heard his name shouted by a thousand friends as he stepped to the plate and took a cut for good old Santa Ana, and sent the baseball spinning over the fence. When graduation day came, father Shosuke and mother Taka with the two



Acme photo.  
MARY NITTA and her baby

younger Nittas went to the auditorium and saw their first born receive his diploma.

The principal shook their hands and told them what a fine boy they had, and the Nittas bowed and smiled and thanked him for all the school had done. Friends came over to chat with them and congratulate Hitoshi on his fine record.

In 1935 that was, and the next fall, with his big Santa Ana varsity letter on his sweater, Hitoshi attended Santa Ana Jr. College one year, then was off to California Polytechnic Institute for that education which the elder Nittas had sworn he must have.

He studied hard at agriculture and mechanics, and in the summer he would return to the ranch and pitch in to apply his new knowledge.

But he wasn't the only worker now. Minoru and Mitsuo were following Hitoshi's footsteps. They, too, were going to schools in Santa Ana, and one day they, too, would receive their diplomas and watch their elders beam as Caucasian neighbors congratulated them.

Minoru was even more active in athletics than his older brother. People began to refer to him as a BMOC—Big Man on Campus. He played football, and after high school, went to the famous Santa Ana junior college, where football was a major sport, and where Minoru was good enough to land a job as blocking halfback.

But it was in football that he received a knee injury which was to prove bothersome for many years.

Mitsuo also made his parents proud. Everywhere they went people told them, what a wonderful game he had played, and it didn't matter what the game—

football, basketball, baseball and track—he won letters in all at the high school.

#### ● HONORS—THEN PEARL HARBOR

Mits went on to California Agricultural College at Davis, and again it was, "Nitta—Rah! Rah! Rah!" from the bleachers. Three years he starred on the varsity teams, and in 1941 came the proudest moment in the history of the ranch near Santa Ana.

The Cal Aggie football team had named Mitsuo Nitta honorary captain!

It was the first time a Nisei—second generation Japanese-American—had been so honored. Papa Shosuke like to bust his buttons, he was that proud. Everybody told him, "We knew Mits could do it."

Everybody knew the Nittas. It was no surprise to anyone when one of the leading service clubs asked him to become a member.

Now tragedy hovered over the world, and into the history of America was written that chapter headed, "Pearl Harbor."

The Nittas looked from the screaming headlines to their children and their broad acres. The boys, now coming of an age when they must look to their own future, had acquired greater acreage, become more prosperous, taken their places among the adults of the community.

Shocked, incredulous, they saw this war coming from the homeland of their parents.

They heard the approach of a tragedy which was to sweep their people into one of the blackest chronicles of the historians.

Father Shosuke heard it on the street: "Those damned Japs! Those yellow so-and-sos!" Sadly he shook his head. Sadly

on that Sunday the Nittas went to church and bowed to their God.

Mitsuo of Aggie fame went first.

February 23, 1942 he reported to the Newport Beach selective service board.

"America is your country—always remember that," father Shosuke had always told him. Now he was going to the defense of his country. To Fort McArthur—to Camp Robinson, Ark. Basic training, marching, learning things the army way—and becoming so adept that they kept him at Robinson to become an instructor; an instructor showing other American boys how to fight and kill Japanese in the south Pacific in defense of Mitsuo Nitta's homeland.

At home, father and mother Nitta heard of Mitsuo's record, and were proud again. Friends asked about his progress, and Shosuke or Hitoshi could tell them he was "doing just fine—just fine."

#### ● UPROOTED!

Anxiously, the Nittas watched the newspapers. Day after day a general sat up in San Francisco and issued orders. "Japanese are told to move inland." "Japanese are told to clear Terminal Island." "Japanese are excluded from defense areas." "Japanese are asked to leave coast voluntarily."

And then:

"Japs to be excluded!"

That hurt in so many ways. Now their American friends were no longer polite. They were no longer calling the Nittas of California "Japanese," but that short, ugly "Japs."

But most of all, they were telling these American boys that the place where they had led their football teams, where they had enjoyed their choc malts, where they had attended their



Acme photo.

ALL MEALS were served cafeteria style, for elders and youngsters, in public mess hall. Mary Nitta (left), her husband Hitoshi, at their last Poston meal with Hitoshi's father and mother (near end of bench at right).

churches, where they had been the BMOG, was forbidden territory.

They were putting up a "no trespass" sign on the land where Hitoshi and Minoru and Mitsuo were born and raised, and Americans were saying to Americans, "You of Japanese ancestry are not really Americans after all."

Minoru had married now, and anxiously he discussed with Fusaye, his wife, and his brother Hitoshi, what this would mean to them.

May 1, 1942, they found out.

Hurriedly, they made arrangements with their ranch foreman, their worker and friend for 20 years, to take charge of their property. Then with a few personal possessions in boxes, a few clothes and necessities in suitcases, they went to the station.

There were no great friendly groups now, congratulating Shosuke and Taka on their fine boys. There were soldiers in helmets and field equipment, with rifles. And they herded the Nittas aboard a bus, and took them away from the green fields and broad acres which Shosuke had cultivated for 40 years.

Shosuke was an old man now. He was 62 years old, and Taka was 56. This, they, was what they had worked all their lives to achieve.

"But this is still America—this is still our country," they told their sons.

Over the desert went a forlorn caravan of busses, cars, trucks—and army jeeps. Down through Indio, onto the desert floor, through Desert Center, along that bleak, string-straight 87 miles that led to the Colorado River, and Arizona.



WHEN the Nittas left Poston, there were many goodbyes. An older woman bows politely as she bids farewell to Mary Nitta.

At the end of the trail was Poston.

At the end of the world, really.

In the last century, a government which had mercilessly slain, exploited and all but annihilated the original in-

habitants of this land, in a moment of not too great remorse, had assigned to the Indians forever 110,000 acres of land in the most barren, unpleasant, bleak part of the entire nation, along the Colorado in Arizona.

There was nothing there but sand and rock, alkali and weeds, wind and extreme temperatures.

It was here that the government now set up a center for the evacuated Japanese-Americans.

The job was in the hands of the army, and that general who sat up in San Francisco and made decisions.

When the Nittas, and thousands like them, arrived, the heat of summer was just beginning.

There were some barracks up—long, low structures, hot as ovens, bleak and black, set smackdab under the desert sun with no protection. There weren't even enough to house all the refugees. They must pitch in and help the army finish its job.

Around it all stretched a wire fence, and at the gate were armed guards. The army made it plain—this was not a "concentration camp." Nobody was possibly to draw a conclusion. This was a "reception center."

#### ● PIONEERS ONCE MORE

The wind howled, and the dust storms raged. The miserable people fought against the biting gales, tried to keep clean with the harsh, alkaline water which parched and cracked their skin, made open sores.



Acme photos.

THE NITTAS confer with their banker, L. S. Mortensen, vice president of the First National Bank in Santa Ana, California.

But they pitched in and fought the first battle of the pioneers—making a home in the wilderness.

Father Shosuke and many of his generation knew this job for they had done it once before, 40 years ago. They had never thought they must be uprooted to do it again.

Now they taught the young people what they had learned, and Hitoshi and the boys of his generation, with their college background and agricultural and mechanical training, quickly adapted themselves.

The barracks were finished. Apartments were made, several to each barracks, one room affairs, with flimsy partitions between. There was no such thing as privacy; little of family life. They must eat in mess halls. There were no facilities for cooking in the barracks. They must use common latrines, common laundries, common showers. None of these were provided for individual families.

How great was the ache of loneliness for their scrupulously clean Santa Ana home that first night as the Nittas entered their cheerless "apartment." They had been a clean, average American family, not wealthy—not poor—but of a class of American life which has nice beds, nice bedrooms, cheerful living quarters.

Here, in the first night, they were given iron army cots. There was little else in the "apartment." They must stand in line and receive a bedding tick from the quartermaster. They must fill the tick with straw from a common strawpile, dumped on the ground. This was their mattress.

Outside the wind howled, and through the cracks of the window, the dust swirled, landing on everything.

And around the wire fence, the sentries patrolled with rifles on shoulder.

Life in Poston would make or break an American. This was their test.

#### ● KEPT FAITH IN DEMOCRACY

In the months to come, many would break. Some embittered, would be sent away to the Tule Lake camp up in Northern California. They would be an infinitesimally small number of the whole. They would be labeled "disloyal."

Yet, where would the government find out about them? How could it be determined they were disloyal?

The other people in the camp reported them. The other loyal American citizens, and Americans-by-choice, would report them. In no other way could they be discovered. This was proving their loyalty the hard way.

Came the heat of summer in this cheerless waste. Through it, the Japanese-Americans labored and produced Poston, Arizona.

They finished the barracks, they built others as mess halls, they constructed laundries, they erected church-

es, they went to work on a hospital, they set up cooperatives.

The dust heap that served as a road from Parker, 17 miles away, gave way to a wide, fine highway, of gravel, surveyed, leveled and built by the evacuees.

Poston became not one village, but three. They were known as "units," and numbered from one to three. Each was about three miles apart down the highway from the original camp.

A chicken ranch was established, a hog ranch was underway, a slaughter house was built, vegetable gardens were set up, field crops were put in, grain was planted.

Through temperatures which reached 125 degrees, through sandstorms which ripped the tops from buildings, through conditions which most people would find unbearable, these Americans of Japanese ancestry, and these Japanese who were Americans by choice, put up with conditions as they were and the fathers and mothers, like Shosuke and Taka, counseled:

**"Our plight will be recognized; our government will act; our story will be heard. We are Americans. Do not forget it."**

The cooperatives staffed and stocked stores. They put in beauty salons. They staffed barber shops. The cooperatives paid their own workers, the prevailing government wage, but they took the burden of that wage off the government by paying out of their own funds.

#### ● ORGANIZE CHURCH

Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops were formed. YMCA and YWCA became active, important groups within the community. Each camp set up its USO—for by now, Americans were visiting their friends and relatives at Poston when they had leave from the armed services. In the camp, the selective service office functioned to ship the young men off to war.

Father Nitta interested himself in the formation of the church in the community. There were two—Christian and Buddhist. Shosuke was interested in bringing the Christians together, regardless of denomination. So the Christian church was formed and he became a member of the official board.

When the plans for the 2500 acres of planting were worked out, Shosuke again volunteered. Now he became a member of the executive board of the agricultural unit in the center.

One day the army would practically disappear from Poston, and then the evacuees would feel a great relief. The center would, in fact, become a "relocation center," from which evacuees could hope to achieve freedom by moving to jobs inland.

Yet, jobs inland would not appeal to a great many people such as father and mother Nitta, whose home was in California, whose life was behind them, whose future—if any—was back home once more in Santa Ana.

Poston had been designed for 20,000



GOODBYE to Poston (L to R) Mrs. Shosuki Nitta, Mrs. Mary Nitta, Shosuki Nitta holding grandson Hitoshi Alan, Duncan Mills, director Poston relocation center, and Hitoshi Nitta.

Acma Photo

people. It never reached that number, but it came close.

#### ● HELP WAR EFFORT

Through that first summer, before relocation started, the people concentrated on beautifying their homes, and that process has gone on constantly since.

Thousands have been relocated inland. Some are on farms, some in war plants, some in defense industries. In addition to those, the armed services have claimed many from Poston.

In August, 1942, Mary Yamagata came to Poston.

Mary's family had practically the same history of early settlement in California as the Nittas. They had chosen to establish themselves in Reedley, Fresno County, where Mary was born.

Until she went to school, Mary spoke no English, because her parents didn't. There were seven children in Mary's family, and she was the eldest.

When she went to school, Mary acquired not only perfect English and perfect Americanism, but she acquired a very independent attitude. Nobody could push Mary around. She had a mind of her own.

She grew into a perfectly beautiful girl, who was just as good as she looked. She, too, had a background of parental-church teaching. And she was told repeatedly:

"This is America, and we are Americans. Choose from the ancient culture of Japan those things which are worthwhile, and add them to your American teaching."

She had grown up in Reedley, gone through school there, and developed a great ambition to be a nurse. So nurse she must be, and she went to University of California for three years and then to Fresno to take her training in the excellent Fresno General hospital.

Evacuation hit her perhaps harder than the Nittas. She was resentful that a thing like this could occur to Americans. It was the end of her world (she thought) when in the terrific heat of August, she, her family, hundreds of their friends, were herded under army guns aboard outdated, hot unsanitary train coaches and started for the desert.

...The army passed out box lunches, including dry, unpalatable cold beef sandwiches. Across the desert the trail rolled, and to get a breath of moving air, all the windows were opened. Still, it was stifling. The evacuees looked at the army lunches. Then they dug out the excellent lunches they had prepared for themselves—roast chicken, salads, fresh sandwiches, cold drinks.

In disdain, derision and anger, they flung the cold beef sandwiches the army had provided at passing telegraph poles.

When the dusty, hot train pulled into the little station at Parker, the evacuees were met by other evacuees, who had



MARY NITTA and Alan pause for lunch during packing at Poston before departure. Story page 8. (Acme Photo.)

been there some time, and were driving trucks. These people begged for the army sandwiches that might be left. Mary and the others stood around and laughed as the old timers ravenously ate what had not been thrown away.

Mary stopped laughing within a couple of days, when she found that the sandwiches were good compared to the food served in the "center."

Mary went to work in the camp hospital. She'd been there about two days when Hitoshi Nitta saw her. Hitoshi was calling on a doctor, a friend of his, when Mary went by in her crisply starched white uniform.

"Introduce me to that girl," Hitoshi demanded.

"Well, I would if I could, but she's only been here two days, and I can't remember her name," said the doctor.

Hitoshi wouldn't be put off. He was going to meet her. Eventually he did meet her.

"He fell in love with the uniform," says Mary. "There's something about a nurse's uniform, you know. He just fell for the uniform." Anyone who has seen Mary, however, can tell you she could dress in burlap, and the boys would still fall for her.)

Hitoshi set siege to Mary's heart. There were places to stroll, even if you couldn't get any privacy in a parental "apartment." There was no movie where a couple could go and hold hands. There was no corner drug store where they could talk over a couple of malts. There was no privacy for lovers.

Mary didn't know. She couldn't make up her mind. Hitoshi was a handsome

guy, anybody would agree. But she just didn't know.

But Hitoshi was insistent. So finally Mary said "Maybe." That satisfied Hitoshi. Now all he had to do was get his parents' permission.

The caucasian may think that peculiar, but old customs had to be followed. And Hitoshi must ask his father.

Father Shosuke was traditionally cold. He would have to be convinced.

Mary Yamagata became the wife of Hitoshi Nitta eight months after they met. It was a very quiet, dignified, Christian ceremony, in Poston camp. Just a few friends and relatives were present. Some were the elders, born in Japan; some the youngsters, who had never seen Japan.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Hitoshi kissed Mary. There were giggles—giggles from the elders, and giggles from the youngsters. For this was an American show of affection. Japanese do not kiss in public. It was very shocking to see those modern, Americanized descendants kiss in front of others.

#### ● ORGANIZING THE CAMP

The wedding meal, like all others, was eaten in the mess hall. By now there was a form of government in camp, and a form of community life. Fourteen barracks made up a block. Each block had its own mess hall, its own wash house. Block leaders were elected, and over them was a unit supervisor. Through these leaders and supervisors was contact maintained with the director of Poston, the big man in charge.

While mother Taka spent the days in routine housework, like so many of her neighbors, the menfolk continued their agricultural or road building pursuits. Neither Taka nor Mary could prepare the meals for their menfolk for which they are famous. They must eat in the community houses.

"I shall never eat pork again," Mary avows. "Pork—pork—nothing but pork. Because we raised it there, you see." Occasionally it was varied by beef, which was raised in some other relocation center, and came in exchange for Poston pork.)

The hospital where Mary worked was growing, but it was always crowded. Eventually, 250 persons could be accommodated there, but it was never large enough. The linen had to be sent nearly 200 miles away to be laundered. Sometimes patients went for two weeks without a change of linen on their beds. One day a camp laundry would solve this problem.

Life was monotonous and dull. There was little to do, and nobody had money from their \$12 to \$19 a month to spend for luxuries. Little by little this need was met.

#### ● BASEBALL LEAGUES FORMED

Baseball diamonds were set up all over the camps. Leagues were formed.



IN ADVANCE of army order permitting Japanese Americans to return to west Coast, Shosuke Nitta and his son, Hitoshi, walked through business section of Santa Ana, Calif., for the first time in two and a half years. Despite threats by some officials, the Nittas walked unmolested through Santa Ana streets.

Hitoshi was catcher on the Orange county team. His brother was pitcher, and when the brother left, Hitoshi showed his versatility by becoming pitcher.

Then each camp built a swimming pool. Irrigation ditches ran through the project, and it was just a matter of widening them in spots and making a pool. The sides were lined with mesquite logs. By each pool, a shaded pavilion was erected. Diving boards were installed. But signs had to be added admonishing that this was for swimming—no fishing allowed.

Now the ban on fishing on the Colorado was lifted, so many of the people fished for recreation. They must stand on the bank; they were not allowed to have boats. Sixteen game wardens were eventually appointed.

The cooperatives, from whatever profits they might make, or from camp entertainments for which a small charge was made, began to show motion pictures in each of the units. At first, they were simply shown in any vacant lot.

Then each camp started an outdoor theatre. There was Cottonwood bowl in Unit Two, and Madison Square Garden in Unit Three. These were simply sloped off patches of ground, running down to a stage. Each person had to bring his own chair. Madison Square was quite elaborate. It had an artistic adobe wall all the way around.

Schools were conducted in regular barracks buildings. But finally permission was granted for the only permanent buildings erected—the schoolhouses, which will eventually be used to house the Indian school now located in Phoenix.

The schools were built in each unit, and they were a community affair. The women pitched in and made the adobe bricks. The men constructed them into the very attractive, one-story structures which are the classrooms, and the big roomy auditoriums seating 1100 people each.

#### ● MADE DESERT BLOOM

Members of the block committees vied with each other in making the desert bloom. Each of the three units laid out a community park, but in addition to the big park, row after row of smaller parks sprang up between the barracks.

Castor beans were planted, quickly produced rows of trees. Shrubs were set out everywhere, and by the end of the first summer, the desert was literally transformed to a flower garden.

Some of the more elaborate gardens had long, winding streams and lakes, fed from the irrigation canals. Islands dotted the lakes, and mesquite log bridges were built along traditional Japanese lines. Miniature villages of foot-high houses appeared on the islands, surrounded by grass and tiny

trees. Fish, caught in the Colorado swam in these lakes.

The community parks were beautiful acres of running water, lakes, hills of desert rocks, cactus gardens, bridges, bamboo forests, grassy slopes and benches.

Shade houses popped up all over the camp—flimsy structures of mesquite and desert shrubs, which kept the sun from baking the inhabitants as they sat outdoors of an afternoon. Sand boxes were built for the children.

During the day, there were many jobs to be done. The doctors and nurses were assigned to the hospital. Lawyers and other professional men assumed office jobs. Stenographers worked in the administration building. Engineers went to work on the roads. Three fire departments were set up in the units, and had to be manned. Police forces were established.

For a time, Hitoshi Nitta worked as a policeman, but soon went into the school to become head of the agricultural department. Because of his education, however, he eventually went to the engineering department to survey the roads, lay out the canal and irrigation systems, a job he held until the end of 1944.

Father Shosuke's love for the land brought him a position on the executive board of the agricultural unit of the center.

Minoru and his wife decided to take advantage of the relocation offer, and so in September, 1943, they went to Cleveland where he went to work first in a garage, then in the Cleveland Steel Products company defense plant.

Minoru was only 23, but he could not serve in the army, like his brother, Mitsuo, because of the old knee injury he had received playing football. He was classified 4-F.

The folks in camp heard from Mitsuo. In November, 1943, he was married to Toki Kumai, at Parkville, Mo.

#### ● PRESENTMENT FORGOTTEN

Toki had not gone through a relocation center. From Santa Anita, she had gone directly to Parkville to become a secretary to the dean of Park college, a position she still holds. She had known Mitsuo in Los Angeles, had accepted his proposal by mail.

In the army, Mits had gone from Camp Robinson to Camp Fannin in Texas as an instructor. Then he had been transferred to Camp Shelby, Miss., and in September, 1944, passed his examinations and went to officers' candidate school at Ft. Benning, Ga., where he was to receive his commission as a lieutenant the very day his parents were to return to Santa Ana.

Both Hitoshi and Mary made short trips away from the camp, which were big events in their lives. Mary was allowed to return to Los Angeles to complete her examinations and become a registered nurse. Hitoshi received spe-



cial war department permission to go to California in September, 1944, to attend the Methodist youth institute sessions.

Mary worked out a philosophy which carried her through the long, hard months, and overcame an early resentment she might have felt.

"I shall remember only the nice things that happen," she said. "I am fortunate, and my people are fortunate. At least we will have something to return to. We have made many fine friends. We have had little privileges, and others have not been so fortunate. And above all, I shall work, and keep so busy that I cannot dwell on the unpleasant things."

Both she and Hitoshi taught Sunday school classes, and not only busied themselves in spare hours preparing the lessons, but planning little meetings of their groups. Mary became particularly active in the YWCA, and eventually she was president of the advisory board.

#### ● NEWS FROM OUTSIDE

Everybody in camp read the newspapers carefully, and heard from caucasian friends on the outside. They could have radios, though the short wave equipment was carefully removed. So they knew what was doing in California.

Gossip flew fast over any reports of antagonism that came from the outside. The camp people, of course, heard of the Parker barber who had thrown a wounded Nisei soldier out of his shop and then pointed to the sign on the door, "Japs keep out—you rats."

A girl from Los Angeles, who had entrusted the rental of her house to an attorney, received only two months' rent during the years, and then heard that the people who rented her house had separated, and had divided up her furniture between them!

Another family learned their house had been burned down. Nobody knew how the fire had started.

They read the statements of the officials, heard of the action of certain American Legion posts in striking the names of Nisei soldiers from their honor rolls.

But they heard, too, of other actions, by church groups, Legion groups, civic organizations, which were working in their behalf.

The Nittas were particularly interested in the defense of their rights by the Orange county American Legion, and read with satisfaction the editorials on tolerance which were printed in their own Santa Ana newspaper.

#### ● BACKED WAR LOANS

Meanwhile, in camp, the war loan drives were oversubscribed. Families from that camp alone sent more than 900 young men into the armed forces.

One day caucasian workers in the administration building noticed an usual thing. How long it had been going on,

they had no idea, because it was performed without ostentation.

The Isel—first generation Japanese—janitors, all elderly men, at 5:30 in the afternoon trooped quietly out of the administration building, single file, up to the base of the flag pole. Turning, they very quietly and ceremoniously bowed to the flag. Then two of them stepped forward, lowered the flag, carefully folded it, and all marched back into the building, single file.

It was their own little ceremony, repeated daily.

In front of the postoffice, a long, glass enclosed plaque was put up, topped by a huge gold American eagle. Behind the glass were the names of the boys in service.

On the wall in the administration building a new plaque went up. "In Memoriam" it said, and the names of nine boys went up there.

The family life of the Nittas centered around a new star member of the family group, for Mary had become a mother.

Little Hitoshi Alan Jr. had made 1944 a banner year for the young Nittas. Junior was like something out of a story book. He looked like a real, live Japanese doll.

Mary dreaded bringing him up in the center, because she had seen the effects upon other children around her. She had witnessed the breaking down of family discipline under the close living conditions and the restraints of movement. But she nevertheless set about caring for her child and remembering that it would be a long time, anyway, before he would be old enough to mingle with the others.

Junior was the center of attraction for the entire block. He was completely healthy, never sick, always cheerful. Even when teething came along, he wasn't cranky. He was just off his feed for a time.

Every day, Mary took his play pen out to the yard and let him bask under the hot Arizona sun. He tanned a golden brown.

December, 1944, came the news—the army would permit the return to California, and the supreme court had ruled favorably in test cases.

This news, though, was received in a peculiar way in Poston. Instead of the widespread jubilation which might be expected, there came confusion. These people had expected to remain in Poston for the duration, so many of them were found without future plans. Poston had become their only home, and now they learned that the orders were to close the relocation center within a year.

Instead of the rush of applications, which many had anticipated, only a handful of people asked to be relocated on the coast.

The Nittas were among the fortunate who had a place to go, and a run-

ning business to which to return. Their foreman had kept the ranch in operation. However, they had recently signed a year's lease on their second, and larger property.

So they held a family council, and out of the council reached their decision. Father Nitta and Hitoshi should request permission to return and prepare the way for the family, then come back to Poston for the others.

#### ● WARMLY WELCOMED

One day during the first part of 1945, Hitoshi and his father climbed aboard the milk truck when it started its daily run to the coast. Hours later they were back in their home—the first of the Nittas to return.

There were conferences with the foreman, hasty surveys of the crops, hurried consultations with friends, talks about how the house must be painted and prepared for the family.

Yet they found time to meet their friends. Dr. John N. Ashley of the First Methodist Church greeted them warmly, pitched in and helped them with their problems.

Shosuke took Hitoshi with him, and they called on Sheriff Jess Elliot. Hitoshi took his father to meet his friend, the editor of the newspaper.

"Everybody was most friendly," said Shosuke. "They gave us a warm welcome. We are very happy."

Back in Poston, Mary and mother



AT POSTON, Ariz., war relocation center, loyalty to American war effort is indicated by "going over the top" in war loan drive. Acme photo

Taka waited anxiously for the return of their men. Somehow, a rumor got started. Nobody knows how such things happen, but the rumor went the rounds that the Nittas had been received in an unfriendly fashion in Santa Ana; there had even been violence.

Soon Shosuke and Hitoshi returned. They spikd the rumors at once.

"We were treated very well," they both said. "Everybody was kind to us."

So now the date had been set. The Nittas were returning home on Saturday.

This last week would be one of frenzied activity. The original plan had been to bring the family truck from Santa Ana to carry back all their belongings. But father and son, after talking it over, decided they might incur criticism if they asked the ration board for the extra gasoline which would be necessary. No—it would be better to pack all their things and ship them by train.

That meant their goods would not reach Santa Ana for a week after their arrival. They would need at least clothes and certain tools which the men had with them, not to mention Junior's playpen, high chair, and things of that kind. Decisions must be made as to what would be taken and what would be shipped.

News photographers were coming to return with them, so the Nittas had a ride, and a way to take some of their goods. They set to work making packing cases, finding materials close at hand to arrange the shipments.

#### ● FAREWELLS AT CAMP

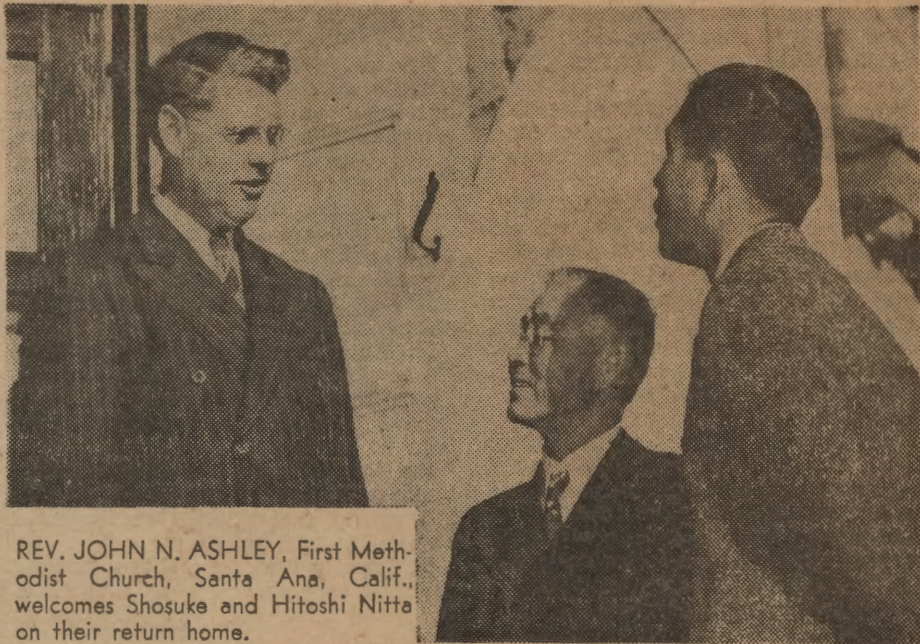
The neighbors all pitched in. They were not wanting for help. Sometimes, while the neighbors worked, the Nittas went off to carry out their final duties at the camp.

Mary, of course, must go up to Unit Three and bid her parents goodbye. This was a sad parting, but it was made lighter when her mother told her the wonderful news they had from Reedley. The man who had employed them on a ranch there wanted them back. As soon as Mary was located in Santa Ana, the man would come down and see her and work out the details. Some time later, the Yamagatas would be returning to Fresno county.

Mary must go see the doctors with whom she had worked in the hospital, and say goodbye to the other nurses. Mother and father Nitta must bid adieu to their scores of elder friends in the community. Hitoshi must say farewell to the men in the engineering department, to the teachers in the school, to the students he had taught there.

The YWCA advisory board gave a tea for Mary. The ladies praised the work Mary had done for the girls of the camps.

Friday night Mary went after dinner to pay her respects to the doctor who



REV. JOHN N. ASHLEY, First Methodist Church, Santa Ana, Calif., welcomes Shosuke and Hitoshi Nitta on their return home.

had delivered Junior. At home, Hitoshi went on with the packing until the last minute. Finally, lights were strung out to the lawn, and neighbors helped with the packing, while the Nittas hurriedly donned their best clothes and rushed over to the big church meeting which was being held in their honor. They were late.

In the mess hall, seated on the long benches around the tables, were hundreds of Nittas' friends. They faced a table at which sat father and mother Nitta, Hitoshi and Mary. Mary was wearing a simple black dress with white, starched, dutch collar that made her look like a school girl, and a cherubic one, at that.

The early part of the evening was very formal, very solemn. One speaker after another went to the front, beside the table, and in flowery, flawless Japanese extolled the virtues of the Nittas. Their lives were reviewed, their good works recounted, their family complimented. There was much bowing. The speaker would compliment the family, and bow deeply. In return the Nittas would bow graciously.

This was the community's farewell, and all the leaders spoke. This was the Japanese part of the ceremony. Then came the thoroughly American part—cake, cookies and coffee, laughter and jokes and games and fun for the youngsters. The Nittas went home very, very tired, and very, very happy.

This was the last night on the iron cots in the cheerless apartments.

Saturday morning dawned cold but bright and clear. The Nittas were out before dawn spread its rainbow of colors over the desert, flecking the rugged distant hills and the blue sage with reds and golds.

The neighbors started arriving early. Everybody was busy with last minute preparations. There was the usual final packing to be done. A dozen girls, in their teens, arrived to take care of Junior. They were Mary's Sunday school class.

Scores of persons gathered around the barracks. Little kids got under foot with their home made carts, wheelbarrows and kiddie cars. The people next door frantically packed odds and ends. Friends in the free library next door stopped to chat.

The cars were packed, and the zero hour was near. The old people grasped the hands of the departing and wished them farewell in the age-old phrases of the Japanese. There was great bowing, the finest formalities to be observed. Dutifully, the younger Nittas bowed in return, accepted the sentiments of their older friends with all the politeness which they had been taught.

The younger Japanese came up, grasped their hands, said, "Well; take care of yourselves. Hope to see you soon." Or, "Hope you have a nice trip. We're going to miss you."

Mary asked a photographer if he'd take a picture of her Sunday school girls. With Mary and Junior, they grouped for the picture. Then they each took Mary's hand. They didn't know just what to say—they were a little shy. But each managed some nice thing, and Mary handed the baby to an older woman.

From the outskirts of the group a little girl about 11 edged forward and stood for a moment with Mary, apart. She was a slim little thing, awkward, ill at ease. She was dressed in a pink print dress and wore a little white turban around her hair. She took Mary's

hand, murmured something that bystanders couldn't hear, then abruptly turned and ran behind the barracks. There, had anybody followed her, they would have found her quite alone, rubbing the hot tears from her eyes.

At last the moment for departure came. The Nittas got into the cars. Friends pushed in toward them. There were shouts of farewell. Mary glanced around for Junior. The elderly woman put him in her lap. The minister leaned through the window and said a final goodbye. Then the cars pulled slowly away from the barracks.

In her corner of the back seat, Mary grasped Junior very close to her. The tears rolled down her cheeks. She started to sob. Everybody else in the car was very quiet. Only the sound of the engine, and Mary sobbing. After a couple of blocks Mary spoke, controlling her emotions.

"Living so close together," she said, "it's not just leaving friends . . . it's leaving brothers and sisters."

The cars went the few blocks to the relocation office, where forms must be filled out, final passes issued, more goodbyes said to people like Duncan Mills, director of the Poston center. Here it was more gay. These were not as close friends as back at the barracks. Somebody thrust Junior into Duncan Mill's arms for a picture. Everybody laughed. Obviously Mills was not accustomed to holding babies.

Hitoshi and his father took care of the signing out details, and once more amid shouts of "good luck" and "good-bye," the cars were loaded, and driven out onto the broad highway.

At the entrance, a couple of miles down the road, the Nittas stopped in the camp for the last time. They delivered their passes to the military police.

As the machines drew away from the sentry post, Mary looked back through the window. Then she bent over Junior, lying on the seat beside her.

Fervently, in a low voice, she said:

**"I thank God he will never remember this. My baby is too young to remember this."**

Nobody spoke for a long time. Then Mary proudly began to tell how her husband had surveyed and helped build this very road over which she was traveling. She contrasted it with that dust heap over which she had been brought to camp. She asked how far it was to California, how long before she'd cross the river. Was Parker really so unfriendly? Did all the people there feel like that barber did?

The caravan arrived in Parker and passed the barber shop. Mary looked at the unAmerican anti-Nisei sign on the barber's door.

"Isn't that terrible?" was her only comment.

#### ● BACK IN CALIFORNIA

A few minutes later the cars rolled across the Colorado River bridge and

the Nittas, the first Japanese-American family to go home from Poston, were back in California.

Down the long, monotonous 87 miles of desert highway to Desert Center, Mary sat back first to get Junior to sleep. Soon the doll-like baby was dozing beside her, and then she devoted herself to conversation.

She told how she had never been very patient with children until she had her own Junior. She told what a lively youngster he was and how he had learned already to wave his arm and say, "Hi!" She spoke of the people back in Poston, and how friendly they were, and what fine neighbors they had made.

She recalled that though there have been as many as 17,000 and are now 11,300 in the camp; there was never, to her knowledge, any quarrelling, any bickering, or any violence. She talked of the little kind things that the caucasian personnel had done for her. She spoke of father Nitta, and how she loved him, and mother Nitta, and how wonderful she was.

The car passed an abandoned army camp where desert maneuvers had been held.

"Millions of men were trained here on the desert for the North African campaign," she was told.

"It's terrible," said Mary. "Think of those millions—and think what brotherly love could do."

At Desert Center, the cars stopped for gasoline. A 13-year-old boy filled one of the cars. To the driver, he said:

"Are these Chinese people you're carrying?"

"No," he was told, "they're Americans of Japanese ancestry."

"Oh, is the government letting them loose?"

"Yes."

"Gosh," said the 13-year-old, "I'll bet they're glad to get home."

Junior was awake now, and try as she might, Mary couldn't get him to sleep again. "Ouch," she shouted occasionally, as the active 10-month-old grabbed a handful of hair.

#### ● THINKS OF G.P.'S

"You know what I want to do above everything else?" asked Mary. "I want to go to Hollywood Bowl. I've heard so much about it. It must be wonderful."

Then:

"You know one of the first things I'm going to do when we get settled is have some soldiers home with us for Sunday dinner. Our church bulletins ask us to do it. I'm going to have some home every Sunday. I'm not just going to pick up anybody, but I'm going to take some home from church. Some of these boys, you know, don't know anything about my people. I think it would be nice for them to meet us."

Mary said she often got car sick, but today she couldn't because Junior was



THE NITTAS are home again in Santa Ana, Calif.—Acme photos

keeping her too busy. The arrival in Indio was to be an hour after Junior's regular feeding time.

"He's never missed a meal on the dot before," said Mary. "I hope he isn't too bad."

About a half mile out of Indio, Junior let the world know that he was hungry, and he kept it up all the way in, despite Mary's repeated attempts to draw his attention to the "go-goes" on the highway.

#### ● GUEST OF MINISTER

Rev. Paul Biesemeyer of the Community Methodist Church in Indio had invited the Nittas to be his guests at lunch. As the car drew into the little desert town, Mary watched the traffic, looked at the bright stores, noticed the signs, the activity, the people on the streets.

"My!" she exclaimed. "It looks just like San Francisco to me."

It was the first town of any size she had seen in months.

Rev. Biesemeyer was attending a funeral when the Nittas arrived, but the womenfolk made them welcome. They had lavished ration points on the lunch-

eon. There were cheese sandwiches, meat sandwiches, a pineapple salad, a rice pudding.

One of the women took charge of Junior. He finally had his lunch. Rev. Biesemeyer returned from the funeral and welcomed his guests, apologizing for being late. He wished them God speed, and the caravan was on its way once more.

Mary held Junior up, his face close to hers.

"Look, Junior—look at the pretty big house. We're going to have a pretty big house like that some day. Yes, we are. All white, and big."

Through the desert towns and on to Riverside the cars sped.

"There are so many soldiers and sailors!" said Mary. "Everywhere you go you see them."

Darkness fell as the cars were halfway between Riverside and Santa Ana. Daddy Hitoshi was holding Junior now. He'd worn Mary out. Someone asked mother Nitta if the trip was tiring her.

"Not tiring," she said, smiling happily. "Not tiring. Much too happy to be tiring." And father Nitta beamed and nodded. Soon, they said, they might re-

ceive a telegram that Minoru was a father this day, and that Mitsuo was a lieutenant in the US army.

The cars turned into First Street, Santa Ana, and down into the neon lighted business district. Mary sat back and gazed in wonder. This was her new home, the first time she had ever seen it. She had heard so much about it.

Daddy Hitoshi held Junior up in the lights.

"This," he said slowly and impressively to the uncomprehending Junior, "is Santa Ana, Junior. This is where Daddy lived."

Down Main Street the cars went, and turned off toward the ranch.

"Look, Junior," said Hitoshi. "That's where Daddy went to school. Look Junior."

#### ● "WELCOME HOME"

Out beyond the city the cars hit the dirt road that led to the ranch. As they approached the ranch, the headlights stabbed through the darkness and picked out a string of automobiles parked in front of the old, red Nitta home. The caravan came to a stop.

From out of the darkness came a group of caucasian people. They sur-



THE NITTA family attends service at First Methodist Church of Santa Ana, Calif., the morning after their return. Rev. John Ashley welcomed them home during his sermon.

Acme photos

rounded the cars. They peered into the darkness. Hitoshi got out with Junior in his arms.

"Hello! Hello! Welcome home! came voices from all sides.

There were men and women, neighbors, old friends, old school teachers who knew the Nitta boys. Dr. Ashley was there, with his wife, and Harold Johnson, minister of youth of the Methodist church. Father and mother Nitta bowed and smiled and greeted their friends, and everybody crowded around to see Junior and "oh" and "ah" over him. Mary met her new friends and neighbors for the first time.

Mrs. Roy Corry, their nearest neigh-

bor, was there. She took charge of Junior.

Her son, Lieut. Roy Corry, Jr., has been missing in action for two years. He has not been heard from since the invasion of Guadalcanal.

"It is the least I can do," said Mrs. Corry. "We are not fighting people—we are fighting against bigger things. Oh, if people only realized that!"

Dr. Ashley and others came forward with baskets of food, enough for the evening meal and for the weekend.

"We are so happy to have you here," said the Nittas. "We are sincerely happy."

Father Nitta turned on the lights in the house.

Hitoshi carried his wife across the threshold of their new home.

The Nittas had come back to Santa Ana.

Next day, father and mother and the young Nittas went back again to the Methodist church.

It was jammed to the very doors.

When the Nittas came in, every last man, woman and child in the church rose to his feet.

Dr. Ashley spoke on "Tolerance."

(The End.)



HITOSHI NITTA carries his wife, Mary, across the threshold of their ranch home. See story page 14.



ON THE STEPS of their ranch house, Santa Ana, Calif. (L to R) Hitoshi and Mary Nitta, Shosuke holding baby Hitoshi, Jr., and Mrs. Shosuke Nitta.