

SECTION II

INTRODUCTION TO MINIDOKA

MINIDOKA CAMP

Tama Tokuda

The train chugged along on our way to Minidoka.

The green disappeared and crossed into a brown landscape. We arrived at Twin Falls, Idaho, and transferred from the train into buses, taking us into the middle of nowhere marked with rows of barracks. A small group was waiting for us; covered with dust. They looked as if they had all been dipped in flour.

Dad received our barrack's assignment and told our baggage would be delivered later. We started to walk toward a far off building. Our shoes kicked up puffs of dust and soon our shoes were white. Finally, we climbed the steps into our new home, a long open barrack with no partitions. Some families had strung up blankets to gain some privacy.

Mom went immediately to pay her respects to the three other families while we sank down with our backs braced against the wall. Suddenly there was a moan like a low whistle in the distance, like a warning. One of the men rushed to close the door and others joined in slamming the windows shut. The walls shook and the windows completely blocked by a thick fog. The dust seeped inside through the door and window cracks in little puffs until finally the room was clouded. It was difficult to breath.

We lived in this barrack for a month and felt unsettled until we were finally given our own room in Block 12. As we settled, this unfriendly terrain became our home. As Dad said, "Sumeba miyako" – If we live in a place long enough, it starts to feel like home. Our family: my parents, my brother, and two sisters; the six of us together in our 20 by 20 room. My Mom sitting by the pot-bellied stove, knitting away; Dad is sleeping on his cot after a day of looking



for greasewood sticks. A few friends, my siblings and I are playing cards around a makeshift table.

In the winter icicles hanging outside our windows replaced the dust.

Some nights we sat on the stoop and gazed at the stars. All the stars in the universe were sparkling. The sky was never so clear or immense. Resourceful Issei men discovered a canal and they fashioned poles, coming home with carp. They made sashimi from the carp to add to our mess hall fare. Our neighbor went hiking out into the desert and trapped a rabbit. He said it would make good sukiyaki but his children refused to have anything to do with it. We turned our backs on rabbit sukiyaki, but as time went on, we all became familiar with the idea and rabbit became generally accepted.

New Year's Eve "1943", Mom swept the floor, the only semblance to our custom of cleaning house for New Year's. I went to the shower room quite late. The whistle blew to greet the New Year. The man and woman next door came rushing out, thinking it to be a fire alarm.

Holidays came and went, friends got together because one of us was leaving for an outside job in Denver. Another had become engaged. Departures were becoming more and more frequent. One dear friend who had left for the outside earlier had sent us a jar of orange marmalade, a precious gift considering the sugar rationing. We shared half of it on toast and decided to save the rest for another party.

EPILOGUE: Perhaps you find my emphasis on memories somewhat romantic. Time and age have a way of casting a rosy light. Make no mistake. This was no picnic. We were making important decisions about our futures. Violent arguments were being fought over important issues. We were young and brave just as our parents were when they arrived in this country.

