

Good morning, friends. 62 years ago, ~~many of us~~ many of us made a journey together together that was unprecedented in the history of our country. We who sit here share the common bond of memories. Do you remember the day we left Seattle in 1942 half year after Pearl Harbor Day?

The last night in Seattle, our family slept on the floor of our homes because everything was either packed or in storage. In the morning, my parents, my brother, and two sisters, the six of us, lugged our bags to the street corner on 10th and Lane Street where the bus waited. A group of friends were there to see us off. We boarded the bus and I sat beside my Mom. We were all too tired to think or worry. In silence our bus wended its way over familiar streets and out to the countryside until at long last we reached our destination, Area B, one of the four areas of Camp Harmony. It was common knowledge that we would be temporarily housed at the Puyallup Fairgrounds but I was totally unprepared for the sight of the barbed wire fence and the machine gun atop a guarded tower. I realized then that we were considered the enemy.

We were directed to our room which turned out to be bare with a single light bulb hanging down from the ceiling. Tufts of grass stuck out between the floor boards and the partitions dividing us from our neighbors did not go completely to the ceiling. Papa said that we must go after our mattresses. I followed him to a room where a pile of hay filled one corner. Some fellows helped us stuff bags which were to be our mattresses and carried them back to our place. Friends who had preceded us came to show us the way things done in this new community. They warned us that the toilets were not partitioned, that we must expect line up for all our needs. On our first night in this new world, someone knocked on our door at 10 o'clock. "Lights out" he said. Few minutes later, a circle of light lit the ceiling. There were some bachelors in the next room and one of them had had the foresight to bring a bag of potato chips. The sound tickled our funny bone and we couldn't stop giggling. After an exhausting numbing day, our emotions were released, and that's when we started to feel life again. A few weeks later, the bachelors were transferred and a young honeymooning couple became our neighbors. Then the sounds we heard were much more disturbing.

Camp Harmony was where we made our major adjustments to the loss of privacy and freedom. We did this by involving ourselves in a frenzy of busy work. A couple events remain with me because they were so out of place. We had a "I Am An American Day" when an American Legion man was the speaker. He spoke about the work our American forces were doing overseas, fighting overseas for freedom in the world. The other talk that rubbed me the wrong way was the appeal from the Blood Bank. I grumbled that we weren't good enough to be recognized as full fledged citizens but our blood was good enough for everyone's use. One of our neighbors said to me, "I would save the life of a dog if I could, wouldn't you?" That remark struck me to the core and I was ashamed.

Finally when the hot summer weather hit us, there was no escape. We sat down in a long row against the walls of the barracks on the shady side, When the sun moved, we too shifted our positions en masse to the other side and waited for the cool of evening. In August, rumors began flying that we would soon be moving to our permanent homes in Idaho. Then there was a call for volunteers for an advance crew to pioneer our future internment settlement. Many young men answered the call and on the departure date, the Area B residents crowded around the gate to give them a grand send-off.

We were notified that Area B would start moving to Idaho on August 21. Then began a storm of pounding as everyone dismantled their tables and chairs and started making crates for the excess baggage that they had accumulated after coming to Camp Harmony. In the confusion there was a wedding and some people were mad because they weren't invited. On our last night, Mom was on her knees scrubbing the floor.

She claimed that we should leave it as clean as it had been when we moved in. In a holiday mood, some kids were shouting and dancing in the mess hall. I think we didn't care where we were going...we were just happy to move out. The train continued its journey. I scratched my hair and found my nails turned black from the soiled upholstery. Meanwhile, the green disappeared and we were passing through a brown landscape. Finally, we were transferred from the train into buses that took us into the middle of a desolate desert marked with rows of barracks. Then we spotted a small group of people waiting for us, covered with dust. They looked as if they had all been dipped in flour. As we climbed down from the bus, a person handed me a piece of cloth to protect my face from the gritty wind.

A man who looked familiar, handed Papa a barrack assignment and we were told that our baggage would be delivered to us later. We started to walk toward a far-off building that was pointed out to us. As we walked, our shoes kicked up puffs of dust and soon our shoes were white. Finally, we climbed the steps into our barrack with no partitions. Some families had strung up blankets to gain some privacy. Mom went immediately to pay her respects to the three families while we sank down with our backs braced against the wall. Suddenly, there was a moan like a low whistle in the distance. Through the open door, I saw the dust being twirled into a filmy cylinder approaching steadily, rapidly. One man rushed to close the door and others joined him slamming the windows shut. The walls started to shake and the windows were 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 and it was difficult to breathe. We lived in this barack for a month and felt unsettled until we were assigned to our room in Block 12. All totaled, there were 40 blocks, each composed with 12 barracks.

When we truly felt at home was when 4 bath tubs were installed in each shower room. On that first night we sat on benches along the wall and waited. When it was our turn, Mom and I hastily rinsed the tub and turned on the spigot. The hot water came gushing out and Mom stretched out while I sat hugging my knees opposite her. "It's nearly 5 months since the last time we took tub bath," she said. In the adjoining stall a woman chanted, "Namamidabutsu." Though I'm not a Buddhist, I knew exactly how she felt. I looked at Mom and she had her eyes closed, lost in complete bliss. Remembering the ladies waiting their turns, we roused ourselves out of the warm water. In a dreamy state, we wrapped ourselves in our robes and walked back to our room, clip-clopping on our home-made getas.

As we settled down, this unfriendly terrain became our home. "Sumeba miyako. If we stay long enough in a place, it starts to feel like home," as Papa said. One day I saw 2 fellows holding up some signs that said "Unfair". They told me they were fighting for higher wages. Some nights we sat on the stoop and gazed at the stars. All the stars in the universe seemed to be sparkling and the sky was never so clear or immense. The resourceful Issei men soon discovered a canal and they fashioned poles, coming home with carp. They learned to make "sashimi" 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 the rabbit sukiyaki but ^{as} time went on, we all became familiar with the idea.

When the holidays came, a few of us 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 earlier had sent us a jar of orange marmalade, a precious gift, considering the sugar rationing. We spread half of it on toast and decided to save the rest for another party.

On New Year's Eve, 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. While I was

getting ready for bed, whistle blew to greet the New Year. "1943", I thought. The man and woman next door came rushing out, thinking it to be a fire alarm.

While the days passed away, somehow life moved on. I met my husband in Minidoka. When he died in 1985, I visited the site where our relationship had started. There in the desert I found 2 modest plaques designating the site of the Minidoka Relocation Camp. The way we think of camp with all those barracks is gone. Looking at the empty terrain, it was difficult to believe that the evacuation had taken place at all. Signs of that life are gone, vanished, except for what remains in the minds of those of us who gather here this morning.

When I try to visualize camp, I picture our family together in our 20 x by 20 room. Mom is sitting by the pot-bellied stove, knitting away. Papa is sleeping on his cot after a day of looking for greasewood branches. A few friends, my siblings and I are playing cards around a makeshift table. There are icicles hanging outside our windows. 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 not a picnic. We were making important decisions about our futures. Violent arguments were being fought over important issues...like what part our young men should play in the World War II arena. Should the rest of us return to our original homes when the West Coast was opened to Japanese Americans or should we venture to the East. But this morning I wanted to pay homage to our youthful years, that short period when we were all together in the desert with our parents and friends before being scattered to the winds. We were young and brave just as our parents were when they arrived in this country. We are indeed the lucky survivors. God bless each and every one of us.