

July 24, 1945
Topaz, Utah

Narrative Report
by (Mrs.) Minoru Iyeki
Co-ordinator of M & O

Mr. Crane of Engineering has asked me to put down some of my impression and anything I wanted to say, so I will try to give a woman's point of view of the camp life and things in general here.

In Oakland California my former home, I used to help my husband in his floral shop and found that people liked me, and I enjoyed the work immensely.

At Tanforan I was asked to teach English in the Adult Education section and did so till we came to Topaz, Utah.

Our group arrived in Topaz on September 18, 1942 after a frightful (to me) journey, during which I was ill all the way.

On arrival here we were welcomed by my aged father, who although, the supper bell had rung, was still patiently waiting for our bus to arrive. He was the only one left to welcome us and the whole bus full of people into this, then, miserable desert. He was covered from head to foot with the gray powdery dust that was over everything and which made him look like a ghost.

The sight of him waiting for us in all that dust and cold wind, made me burst into tears which I had held back so long.

Much to his shame, father shed tears too. After a superficial medical examination we were admitted into camp, led to an un-

finished dining hall, and after a simple meal lead to an apartment 20"x20" for five people. A week later we moved into a 20" x 26" room after much argument.

We took out three buckets of dust and dirt out of the room before it was ready for occupancy. I was so exhausted by the trip and the following events that when I lay on the cot, coat and all to rest, I fell fast asleep and slept till morning, when I was awaked by the cold. By the second day in camp, hundreds of the people had diarrhea and upset stomach and the doctors were unable to take care of them all.

On the 7th day after my arrival, I became very ill. Doctors said it was dehydration, worry, fatigue and cold. I was ill for over a month.

When I started work at M & O in November of 1942 Mr. Walton De Grande Law was in charge as superintendent of Buildings and grounds, with Mr. Eldon Jensen helping him as senior carpenter foreman. At that time, there were about 511 men registered for work there and I noticed that about four-fifth of them were isseis. Later I took a census of the whole M & O workers name, age, born where, and found that 90% were isseis between the ages of 45 - 60.

Going to work for \$16, a month later I was put into the \$19 category by Mr. Law, with the approval of Mr. Hughes, assistant director of our camp. My title was co-ordinator of M & O.

A week before, I had been asked by the adult education and the high school to come and teach English in both of the sections. I had refused both, for I felt, I could be of more service

to the camp at large if I helped the older people at M & O office. I was amazed to find that so many isseis understood so little English, yet had conducted businesses of their own for years on the outside.

As it became transparent to me that here was work for me to do I began work in earnest and continued to do so until I became ill and resigned in August 7, 1944.

I got along fine with the young and old men and they turned to me for everything from their W.R.A. work to home problems.

So well-liked did I become with all the workers and the W.R.A. Staff that one Japanese became intensely jealous and tried by all sorts of devious ways to get me out of the office. This I did not know nor suspect until later on, people knew about it told me. I am glad I did not know of it sooner for that knowledge might have interfered with my work. The man even tried to shift all work away from me, so that W.R.A. would consider me useless in office.

But the caucasian heads thought otherwise for they kept in on. When I became ill from overwork, Mr. H. Watson asked me to come and work even one half day each which I would have been glad to do, only the doctor forbade it. Mr. Watson in many ways tried to help me get better and even suggested his taking me for an auto ride around the project every morning, because he thought that would help me. I refused his kind offer.

Excepting for that one person mentioned before, to mar my peace all was well between me and the workers and W.R.A. Staff.

All was well between me and the workers and W.R.A. Staff.

It saddened me to think that instead of devoting his whole thoughts for the betterment of the camp conditions for his people, he should be so petty as to be jealous of a woman and to be scheming to get her out of office. It is ironic that all this time I was trying to help him and his section all the time in every way possible., The evacuees and W.R.A. Staff were most kind to me when I became ill and I will never forget it.

Here I would like to tell of some of the troubles we had because of W.R.A. policy as written in the manual. The issuance of coveralls or work clothes was a nightmare (to me at least), for I had to request it for the workers and if the request was denied and not granted by W.R.A. I had to explain to the workman so they would understand. Every time a group got it, all the rest insisted they were entitled to it too. A blunt refusal would make them talk about striking, but a gentle explanation and a sympathetic attitude worked wonders.

The men in M & C, especially laborers, would become very hungry with the meager breakfast served them during the first part of camp life. The men asked for sandwiches or "onigiris" (rice balls) between meals to assuage their hunger, but it was turned down. "It was not in the manuals to serve such" W.R.A. said. At such times I went to the sandwich kitchen and personally got them a part of the rice balls which were being made ready for the farm workers lunch. It does not take much rice to make about three doz. rice balls, and the sandwich

people gladly gave them to me so I took it to the men with the help of the foremen. After perhaps a rice ball a piece or so, the men went to work again with renewed vigor, and I used to think how terribly in-elastic W.R.A. policy was. If every one had tried to follow W.R.A. manual strictly to its wording all the time, nothing could have been accomplished in this camp.

Recording of time worked was another subject which did not seem satisfactory to me. For instance, Mr. Iga, the plumber foreman, who worked during the hardest times, worked overtime day and night; for, I don't know how long but the time keeper had failed to put down his over time so Mr. Iga had no over time to his credit, W.R.A. Staff concerned knew about it but did not get any compensation for him, and to me that seemed unfair and unwise on their part. It meant that they did not recognize faithful and efficient workers in camp. All workers heard about it. There were many loafers who it seemed, reported for work went home, came again at closing time and was given full credit. But W.R.A. made no plan nor effort to reward its conscientious workers nor to punish or fine its loafers. If some plan had been worked out, there would have been more efficient and good workers. W.R.A. by its indifference defeated its own purpose of getting a lot of work out of the evacuees in camp. As in the case of Mr. Taylor, and the greaseman who made him take up grease from the grease-trap, it caused Mr. Taylor to "lose face" among those who heard the story, and at the same time to get him intensely disliked.

He should have never tried to reduce the crew without first finding out how the crew operated. Instead, he tried to cut down on the most disagreeable job without even knowing well what they did, although we in office had told and warned him that it was impossible to reduce that crew. Mr. Taylor was overheard by me to say to his fellow worker, "Are we or the Japs running the camp." Anyone with this kind of an attitude will not get result that is 100% from the group under his supervision. In all my dealings with the different departments I always tried to talk with the head man then, if that was impossible to talk to the foreman under him. For example: if any complaint was to be made to the kitchens we never said it directly, but always through the Steward's office. Until my time complaints were made to individual workers direct, to kitchen crew sometimes, and seldom to the Stewards office. I thought this made for confusion so we changed.

As for requisitions for M & C work, coming in, they used to come in from five sources

1. Block Managers
2. Block People
3. Janitors
4. Kitchen People
5. Groundsmen

This meant a duplication of all sorts of repair requests and led only to confusion and waste of time for us, so I suggested to Mr. Jensen, that we request the Engineering section to issue a letter to the blocks managers headquarters and to the Steward's office that hereafter we would consider

requests for repairs and needs of

1. Evacuee barracks only from Block Managers
2. Public Bldgs such as
latrine laundry and
shower rooms only from Janitor Foremen
3. Kitchen and D.H. " " Stewards' office

This was put into practice at once.

Beginning of January 8, 1943 I began to keep record of all requests that came in for everything

1. When requested - by whom
2. When repaired or filled - by whom

This book I kept open for anyone to see. So there was no complaint. Until then, no record had been kept although Mr. W.L.Law used to write in his narrative reports how much work M & O was asked to do. I will try to tell some of the things that happened during each supervisors stay.

Mr. W.L.Law was the superintendent of Building and Grounds. He had just been promoted to it when I began work. He is to be credited for having put things in shape at M & O. It was a pleasure for us to work for him for his fair attitude pleased all workers. He got much work from the evacuees. In March of 1943 many Hawaiian internees with their families came to live in block 1. and we at M & O were rushed to get every thing ready for them. The internees had been given a choice in Hawaii of either staying in a concentration camp there away from their families, or coming to Topaz with their families to live. Many were bachelors. Many of them came to work at M & O and said to me that when they found the apartments so clean and everything in readiness for them, they were so grateful, they felt like crying. They had no idea of what to expect

when they reached here and of course had feared and expected the worst.

In July of 1943, young Mr. Eldon Jensen replaced Mr. Law. We had Mr. Jensen made supervisor instead of having Mr. Sutton who was Mr. H. Watson's choice as Mr. Law's successor. All foreman turned down Mr. Sutton as supervisor as he was disliked by the M & O men for reason mentioned before. I told Mr. H. Watson it was no use to put some one whom the men disliked in a supervisory position, for he would get no co-operation from the workers. I told him Mr. Jensen would be acceptable to everyone for he was well liked. Although he seemed to know only a little about M & O work except cabinet making, carpentry, painting, and sign painting.

Mr. H. Watson agreed and Mr. Jensen became M & O supervisor in July 1943. He was so young, the old men looked on him as one of their own son, and helped him all they could, for he was never officious nor overbearing. He had many ideas, good ones, which he would phone to Mr. Taylor who would invariably turn it down, and in a few minutes time call back about a wonderful idea he wanted put in practice. He griped Mr. Jensen many a time on this account.

Mr. Jensen was in office when the Tule transfer took place. M & O had the big job of supplying boxes, rope and paper to the 14,000⁰⁰ transferees, get the apartments ready for the incoming transferees of about the same number. It was no small job and kept us busy and tired for a long time.

The Hawaiian-Japanese in Block 1 caused the W.R.A. to have many anxious moments during the last few days before the Tule, Transfer. Many of them were getting restless, and resentful of being sent there. They disfigured and destroyed many of the apartment interiors. Even when they got to Tule, they caused trouble there. Their thinking had become distorted by the treatment they received in Hawaii by concentration camp.

Mr. Jensen was given the thankless task of getting them peacefully on the bus and their onto the train awaiting them in Delta. We never breathed freely till they went, Eighty four M & O workers left for Tulelake at that time. Of them 27 were janitors.

In January of 1944 Mr. Jensen left W.R.A. employee, and Mr. H. Watson had no one in mind to take his place. M & O men wanted either Mr. Greaves or Mr. Hopkins of construction, but Mr. Watson said he couldn't spare them. He called me to his office and asked me to take charge of M & O until July 1944 when he would find someone else to take charge. I refused because I knew it would be too much for me. The M & O workers were all for it and urged me to do so, but I couldn't.

Another reason: the issei men for the most part, object to having a woman dictate to them, They have been brought up to consider themselves above women so it cannot be helped. Although I experienced no unpleasantness as I gave out orders to the older men. I felt that their attitude would change were I to assume the role of supervisor of M & O. Rather than cause ill-feeling I refused, for the men, while I worked, understood why

I was there, and even came to our apartment to thank my husband for letting me work there! Upon my refusal, and during Mr. Taylor's vacation to California. Mr. E. Gardner was selected by Mr. Watson as Mr. Jensen's successor, and has worked conscientiously since that time. When he first came to M & O, I found later that many of the workers had been told he was a "slave-driver" and everything else which was displeasing to the workers.

It was very unwise of a certain person to give out such opinions of a new man coming in. It was sure to hamper his work.

On top of this Mr. Gardner did not understand the psychology of the evacuated Japanese at the time he took over, so had to overcome many obstacles, but in a few months, time his men came to understand him. Mr. Gardner and I could not see eye to eye at first but as time went on we found we were both working towards the same end.

At times like these, men in charge should be those who understand human psychology are firm in all things, yet direct with a sympathetic understanding of the groups under their charge. It makes for a happier relationship all around.

As we go forth to relocate after nearly 3½ years of camp life we all go out with different impressions of the life in camp, and go forth either unbittered or with a pioneering spirit.

Then in the farmer group are to be pitied, not censured; and those in the latter, cheered, for still having the courage and the will to face a world from which they were hidden for so long.

This work in camp has revealed to me that I am capable of

I want to take this opportunity to thank all those of the administrative staff who have been so kind to me and mine during my three years stay here.

It has been only through their understanding and co-operation that I have been able to do whatever I was able to in this camp, and if I have argued too much with them at various times, please remember it was not for myself I argued, but for a smoother understanding between the evacuee workers and W.R.A.