

Ojii ano impressions  
on or lives in the  
Relocation centers

1942 - 1945

What have I learned from the exclusion from California?

Being One of the victims of war and confined behind a barbed wire <sup>fence</sup> for three years, I have learned many things which I never would have learned elsewhere, any time.

1. I have learned that the United States was ~~not~~ <sup>such a</sup> ~~rich~~ <sup>wealthy</sup> country, that she did what we never had expected her to do.

With the declaration of war upon Japan the Japanese nationals expected some kind of restrictions on their daily lives. But we did not expect the United States would evacuate entire Japanese population from the West coast. I had at least three reasons to come to that conclusion:

First, it did not seem to be necessary to move us from the coast, because I believed there wouldn't be a single Japanese in this country who would harm the United States or sabotage.

Second, I thought that the United States was not rich enough to waste such a huge amount of money in evacuating 110,000 Japanese from the Pacific coast and maintain them for years in the inland when there was no danger of any kind to the country or the community.

Third, the United States could not evacuate the Japanese aliens and leave their children behind. She had to evacuate <sup>and intern</sup> the Japanese Nationals together with their children who were the American citizens ~~and intern them together~~ which was definitely unconstitutional.

2. I have learned that militarism is the supreme power in the United States. The President is a commander-in-chief. Whatever army says, it goes and nobody can say any thing about it.

Mass exclusion, almost impossibility, has been accomplished regardless of cost by the military order. <sup>for</sup> the government could not move a single Japanese from the camp without a sanction of the army. The national constitution has been ruthlessly violated by the military power and nobody <sup>could</sup> say any thing about it. Military men are the most powerful and the most important

human beings in American society.  
Militarism of the United States is fighting to  
crush the militarism of other countries.

And yet the United States is an ally of  
Russia which is the strongest and the most  
powerful country of imperialism and  
militarism in the world. Mr. Harry  
Hopkins proposes that the Congress pass  
a law for <sup>one year</sup> compulsory military training  
for the boys of eighteen years of age in all  
the public schools after the war.

3. I have learned how to live in a horse stall or stable. On May 7<sup>th</sup> 1942, I was one of some 800 Japanese evacuated from Oakland into Tanforan Assembly Center with military escort. At Tanforan I was shown to my apartment, which consisted of two stables. These stables had been built to keep race horses during the horse race seasons. These two horse stalls for two horses were given to my family of five. A room is large enough for one horse to turn around with one small window. The wall <sup>is</sup> made of dirty rough board with many nut holes. It must have been white washed years ago and now its dirty brown color. The big cracks on the walls were full of hay and waste of horses. When we cleaned off the walls you could see the horse or a human

being in the next room or you could see the outside world through the cracks. There was no shelf nor table nor chair - Just five army cots were jammed into two stalls with army blankets. We had to make our own mattresses with hay. It took us three whole days for "house cleaning". For the first two or three weeks we were kept busy in ~~putting~~ putting up curtains, making shelves, stools and a table, trying to convert a horse stable into a human "apartment".

When it rained, it was <sup>terrible!</sup> ~~terrific~~. As you step one foot out of the door, you step into a mud ankle deep. Rainwater ran in under the floor. Unbearable

odor from the wet waste under the floor seeps up through the cracks on the floor and almost suffocated us. It is a wonder how our health could have stood that unhealthy condition for five long months.

I have heard a story of a little girl saying "Mama, I don't like this place. Let's go back to America." These American citizens, too young to understand the whole story of war and evacuation, blindly followed their parents. God gave us a taste of the same experience as He gave his own Son, who was born in a stable and lived in a manger nineteen <sup>hundred and</sup> forty five years ago.



4. I have learned many things as a captive or a war prisoner confined behind a barbed wire in the middle of a vast desert. On the eighteenth of September 1942 I arrived at Topaz in Utah with the train load of my countrymen, U. S. citizens and the aliens, who were moved from Tanforan Assembly Center in California. It was about noon when I was taken in a buss at Delta station with the rest of my people and was dumped out in the clouds of dust in the middle of this great high desert land, far away from modern civilization. I was shown to a room in one of the half finished barracks surrounded by barbed wires and watched day and night by M. P. at the point of a gun. My family of five learned how to live in this one room of 20 x 24

which looked more like a barn than any thing  
else with no ceiling nor inside walls. In this  
one room I found five army cots for five of  
us to sleep on, a broom and a bucket. For the  
first few weeks I was kept busy in gathering  
some scrap lumber to build partitions and to  
make some shelves and furnitures. I learned to  
be a carpenter, an electrician and a home builder.  
For the first time in my life of nearly sixty years  
I learned in this desert what a dust storm  
looks like. The ground is not desert sand,  
but its a fine desert dirt. When wind blows  
it turns into a dust storm. It goes into the  
air and covers the whole camp like clouds or  
smoke screen. Women's hair turns white with  
dust. It goes into the house like smoke and seeps  
<sup>every</sup> into <sup>tightly</sup> closed trunks and suitcases. It is  
some times so terrific that it goes into a room thro-  
ugh closed windows and fills the room like

white smoke. When it settles down, every thing is all white with powder like dust. It is one of the most unforgettable things in this desert life.

For the first nine months, from September to June the next year, I did not see a speck of green vegetation nor did I see even a wild bird around us.

The nearest place where you can see green trees is the edge of the desert some fifty miles away. Between this place and the camp is the <sup>vast</sup> waste land full of gray sage desiccated lifeless desert plants. But even <sup>where even a wild grass wouldn't grow</sup> this dead ground we have learned to turn to a vegetable garden and a flower garden.

5. I have learned to live a communistic way of life. There is no <sup>social</sup> classes in this

Camp life. Any working person, ~~with~~ no difference whether his is young or old, man or woman, regardless of the type of <sup>his</sup> work, is paid either \$16.00 or \$19.00 per month or about sixty seven cents per day of eight hours with room, board and <sup>(per month)</sup> \$3.75 for clothing allowance. A fifteen year old messenger boy gets paid just <sup>as</sup> much as a college graduate <sup>in</sup> office man. A mess hall cook gets as much as a block manager. No matter what kind of work you do or how hard you work, you would not get more than \$19.00 per month. All the people are on the same level. Even a little baby gets just as much as a grown up man. A person, no matter who you are, gets a meal of beef stew, cabbage,

tomato salad, rice, pickle and a pudding <sup>piled up</sup> in one dish (they call it an army style). Those, who were bankers, big bosses of import & exporters, owners of big firms, eat and live the same thing and same way as janitors, gardeners, street sweepers and any other class of people like one large family. Here people learned the spirit of communistic way of life, democratic idea, spirit of serving the others and depending on others. It proves to be a fine school for study of social problems.

6: I have learned the characteristic national habits and ways of the Japanese people. For the first time in the history of the Japanese in the United States they lived in such a

large mass in one place. One third  
of this mass were <sup>Issei,</sup> ~~the~~ original people born  
and raised in Japan. They felt free  
to live in Japanese way. They converted  
the center into a Japanese town, where  
Japanese food is served and ~~the~~ Japanese  
is the publicly spoken every day language - The  
older people spoke dialects and acted in the same  
way as they did fifty years ago in their native  
land. The United States pushed them ~~back~~  
half a century back ward. Before the war  
the Japanese parents tried every thing to teach  
their children Japanese language so that their  
offspring may <sup>be able to</sup> take valuable parts in society  
of these two nations. But the American govern-  
ment did not want the Nisei, the American citizens,

to learn Japanese, because they thought that the children might be influenced by the Japanese ideas and thoughts, and they tried to discourage and suppress the idea of teaching Japanese. And yet the U. S. government has thrown all of these children into a society of nothing but Japanese thoughts dominate. Without tuition paid by their parents, these Japanese Americans made fast progress in speaking Japanese and adapting ways and thoughts of their parents. You see many children go around in Kimonos wearing "geta" on bare feet instead of shoes. You never could have seen this picture anywhere in the United States before the war. Mass exclusion of Japanese Americans behind the barbed wires brought strong resentment to hundreds of Niseis who partly lived

in their parents country. They were so dis-  
gusted with the way their government and the American  
people treat them that they gave up their American  
citizenship which they were once proud of. There  
can be no doubt that the United States, so  
treating, is <sup>responsible for</sup> her young citizens turning to  
enemy.

7 I have learned what Christian religion was  
doing for the United States. This was revealed  
the strength of American religion. I have not  
disappointed in Christianity. But I was utterly  
disappointed in what Christianity was doing, as an  
American national religion. The United States  
of America as I learned in my school some forty years  
ago in Japan was a beautiful picture in a  
dream where Christianity ruled and dominated



to its full capacity to make this country an ideal  
human society. During forty years of my life in  
this country, I have found out that the American  
religion was a mixture of all kinds of religions, in  
the same way as the American nation is the mix-  
ture of all kinds of nationalities. And Christianity  
was just a part of it. I have found Christ-  
ianity in churches and not in human society.  
I have seen in every where magnificent church  
buildings, large membership, beautiful music  
and famous speakers. But I can not find  
Christianity as a strong dominating power in  
American society. And I believe Christian  
religion should be an ~~active~~ power and not a  
speech. Roosevelt and Churchill, both the  
champions of the Christian nations, bowed before non-  
Christian power and signed for the restoration of  
human slavery which was directed against

the principles of Christian doctrine. Here we see ~~the~~ failure of Christianity. This war is a ~~test~~ biggest test the Christianity has ever met in this country ~~for the last~~ since Abraham Lincoln. Christianity has found itself powerless as long as political and social influence is concerned. Christianity has been a teaching in the churches. It kept itself on the ethical side of human life and kept away from politics and social affairs. That is the reason why Christianity has neither power nor influence when it comes to a national and international political problems. Christianity should get leadership in politics if ~~it~~ it is to influence the human society. It should come out of the Church and practice its doctrine in all the branches of human society. It is obvious that the Chief and spokesman of American democracy and Christian principle calls

the meeting of allied nations in San Francisco California on 25<sup>th</sup> of 1945 to discuss how to crush certain nations, how to promote enduring world peace after the present war and how to govern the world in democratic way, while within a radius of fifteen miles of their historic table there are open practices of hatred, race-prejudice, un-democratic writings, un-American speeches and un-Christian acts all around shouting welcome to the delegates of the Allied powers. And Christianity seems to be just standing there looking at them powerless and helpless.

Yet Christianity is not altogether dead in this country. At such a time of world crisis as it is, now, Christians' followers find themselves unsatisfied with their activities within the Church circles only. They are now wide

awake to find many opportunities to serve their God in larger circles. Through our evacuation we found many friends whom we never knew before. Through their activities we have found genuine Christian spirit and principle are working in our human society like an under-current.

For twenty days and nights ~~before~~ just before the Easter, the combined fleets of the United States and ~~Great Britain~~ <sup>British</sup> navies bombarded and dropped thousands of tons of bombs on 600,000 men, women and children of small island of Okinawa. At seven o'clock in the morning of April 1<sup>st</sup> 1945, the Holy Easter Sunday morning, 200,000 American marines made a forced landing on that island under the cover of terrific gun fire. All that Easter Sunday was a scene of hell on earth. Tens of thousands of young men were killed on both sides.

Thousands of Christians in the American Marine  
slaughtered thousands of Christian brothers on the  
enemy lines. At this same time, far back  
in the home land, I was singing an Easter song and  
was listening to the Easter sermon in the Easter  
service. At one moment I felt my mind leaving  
our earthly thoughts and wandered in the heavenly  
thoughts. At another moment my mind flew far  
away to the other side of the globe where our army  
and navy of <sup>this</sup> Christian nation were butchering thousands  
of fellow humans.

At home, a private war is raging -  
In Europe or in the Pacific, an American  
soldier fights for his country and the principles  
of so called Democracy, liberty and Christian principle.  
He comes home to find himself denied of living  
in his own home. He is denied of earning his  
living on his own farm land. He is even  
attacked by <sup>the</sup> gangs with guns and dynamite.  
The attackers with deadly weapons are caught

and tried. But they are freed only because the victim happened to be born of Japanese parents. Many American soldiers of his kind have lost and are losing their lives for their own country the United States of America. The survivors come home and <sup>get</sup> kicked around and even threatened by their country men and fellow soldiers. The same thing does not occur to an American citizen of German parents nor of Italian descent. The victims are only the American citizens of Japanese parents. It is because the color of the former happened to be white and the latter accidentally yellow. This color discrimination has been proven by the open declaration by the California court, "This is a white man's land," in the Doi case, which freed the dynamiters. In the last five months, 18 incidents of this lawlessness occurred in this country. Only three persons in eighteen cases were arrested and none convicted. This can not be possible for a country which

loudly declares to the world to be a champion  
of freedom, liberty and justice unless she is  
a hypocrite. This is what the United States  
and Great Britain, supposed to be champions  
of Christian countries and the doctrine of democ-  
racy, freedom, liberty and justice, are  
doing in broad day light.

Therefore, I have learned the truth  
that the United States, with England is fighting  
the present war for the domination of the world  
by the white people. I have learned also  
that Christianity is not genuine doctrine  
and she is sadly powerless to be a national  
religion.

I have learned that the evacuation spoiled our children in many ways - For three and one half years the children lived in an abnormal peculiar society where they were deprived of home life. The school children were quartered in the class rooms in the barrack buildings where they did not get impressions of being in school. Because the whole program was on temporary bases, not only the school buildings, but also the school facilities were poor and the teachers not quite qualified. The whole picture could not draw the respect from the children. The children got wild and uncontrollable. When a child comes "home", he finds his home just one room where his whole family live together. This one room home, being a bed room, a sitting room, a kitchen, a closet and a barn, does not give him a privacy for his study. His mother does not buy and cook food for him. His father does not pay for light, water, coal and rent. Every thing is



provided free by the government. He does not feel any obligation to his parents. He loses respect for his parents. Food is free, Water is free, Coal is free. Toilet paper is free. If he waste anything, no body would say anything about it. He can not feel a sense of wasting. He has no sense of respect and responsibility to his community. This sense of every thing free makes him think that his action is free. He wants to act in his own will. He does not mind any body, not even his parents. This is not the case of small children only but grown up ones the same. Therefore, any kind of warning signs, laws and regulations do not mean anything to young Niseis. The Japanese people are admittedly known as law abiding people. And it is our pride. But these young Niseis are irresponsible and definitely not law abiding. Undoubtedly, this long abnormal camp life is respon-

sible for the whole thing.

Before the war, I learned many American towns and cities had been named after the capital cities of foreign countries like Rome, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Tokyo, London etc. and many cities adopted foreign trees and methods to benefit themselves.

I admired the greatness of this country and its spirit of cosmopolitan and democracy shown in taking and adapting the whole world into her own bosom. But I was greatly disappointed when I saw, as soon as war broke out, the name of Berlin and Tokyo disappear and American vandalism even cut down harmless beautiful trees. At the same time the greatness of American as I thought I saw faded out in my mind.