

A MISSPENT LIFE: The Early Years

When my mother learned that she was pregnant with what would be her fifth child, she remarked, "I thought it was only a gas pain." I was that fifth child and learned of my mother's comment from one or more of my siblings. If they learn this, my detractors will be sure to find some link between this remark and my being a pain in the gass.

The date I appeared was July 23rd, 1919, delivered at home by a midwife, Mrs. Okazaki and named Joseph Bunichi Ishikawa. Although my parents were Christians, I don't think I was baptized. Home was at the southeast corner of Virgil and Melrose on the fringe of a district called Hollywood, then as now a part of Los Angeles. Historians will note that birthdate was just a bit more than eight months after the armistice ending the first World War. I had been in the womb at the end of the war and the giddy but difficult early months of peace. After a good night's sleep on a firm bed when my spine could be expected to be fully stretched, I once measured my maximum height of 5'6.5" (169cm) which puts me on the short side. I attribute my short stature to the spartan diet of my mother while she was carrying me, that along with my growing up after October, 1929, when the stock market crash set off the Great Depression. My father was 5'2" and my mother about 4'11" but I don't think this had anything to do with it since they came from Japan where everybody at that time was short.

I have no memory of the house in which I was born since we moved a few blocks south to 316 Virgil before I was two. My birthplace was torn down for other development, probably by my enemies who didn't want it to become a shrine as my birthplace. As far as I am concerned, I have, as Churchill parried and skewered a critic who had accused him of arrogance, a great deal to be modest about, and I don't care to have a shrine; a simple, restrained plaque in some enduring material will do.

Despite the fact that my mother thought I was a gas pain, and that one or another sibling told me about it with spiteful glee, I was never made to feel unwanted, and I had a happy childhood. There are pictures somewhere that show me being carried around with affection and pride by parents and by Fusae and Chiyo, my sisters, the eldest in the family. I was not a handsome baby like Hank or with

a winsome, shy smile like Johnny had. Photos show that I had big eyes, pouchy cheeks and a sober mien. Hopefully, my good looks are yet to come, but that will depend on the mortician. I seemed to be partial to sailor suits then although I never pursued a nautical career.

Fusae had been born in Formosa (Taiwan) where my father was some kind of government official, at least there is a picture of him in a snappy but not military uniform with a short sword. Chiyo, Henry and John were all born in Southern California in 1909, 1911 and 1915, all short for having grown up in THAT war. We boys were given western first names with Japanese middle names, Henry's was Jinichi and John's was Shuichi. Most nisei of our ages did not have western names but assumed them when they started school. Later my dad who came to be regarded as an expert in western names was often consulted, sometimes with hilarious results. Once he suggested that Samuel Gompers the labor leader was prominent in the news, never mind that he was rabidly anti-Asian, warning incessantly about the "yellow peril." My father had assumed that the biblical name of Samuel would be given, but the boy bore the name of Gompers. For another father, my dad offered Carl. The poor man was familiar with that sound only on syrup so his boy became Karo. But fathers who did not consult my dad also had comical results. One minister christened his boys Hallelujah and Canaan; ironically they were called Hal (hell) and Cain for short.

My father, Rintaro Ishikawa, was the oldest son of an old family in Hiroshima. In a sense he lost his livelihood when he was five. He was born November 2, 1865, to a samurai family, castle builders on his father's side, sword makers on his mother's. Japan's isolation had ended in 1853 with the arrival of a U. S. naval fleet under Commodore Perry. The Meiji restoration was established in 1868, and in the modernization that followed, samurais were abolished. But the family kept the house on land given them. In Hiroshima a few years ago when Olivia asked how long they had had the land, she was told, "Since the time we received our name," sometime in the 13th century as nearly as can be determined. Family and city records were destroyed by the atom bomb. My dad was the oldest male in the family with an older and two younger sisters as well as a younger brother. Since it was not normal for the oldest son to leave home, I deem it a great act of courage for my father to yield the right to the property to his younger brother to leave for the United States at the ripe age of 39 when he had a wife and child and secure employment. Probably my mother had no part in this decision but to accept it must have required courage too. Her maiden name was Shimatani; she was also from Hiroshima. She was 13 years younger than my dad, and I knew her as a woman of spirit. Olivia was only recently told by my sister Chiyo that my father left for the U. S. first and that my mother and Fusae followed five years later when my father had gained a foothold; this suggests confidence, patience and endurance as well.

A few years ago when Stan Starks at Michigan State asked half a dozen nisei in East Lansing who had been in camps to share with his class our experience and feelings, a number expressed their pride in being Japanese. I didn't particularly identify as Japanese and commented that as my race was something I had no part in determining, it was nothing of which to be ashamed or proud any more than in being male. I was proud of my parents for leaving security to emigrate to a new country at their ages with a family, knowing no one at their destination, ignorant of the language and in contradiction to the mores that expected the eldest male to carry on at home.

My father's name was Rintaro ("rin" with the "shika-hen" instead of the character for "hayashi" as more usual) and my mother's name was Mura, but we called them Tohchan and Kahchan which in fact are children's words for "otoh-san" and "okah-san" (honorable father and mother). Our friends referred to them in the same way, but called their own parents something else. My mother's celebrated her birthday on March 15, but I don't know whether it was because it was Fusae's birthday or actually Kahchan's too.

My sister Chiyo when I mentioned it to her didn't share the premise, but my theory is that Tohchan decided to emigrate after Fusae was born because he did not feel that a girl in Japan could get a decent education. I believe this for many reasons: 1. He had a strong sense of duty and would not lightly have yielded his responsibilities as the head of his Hiroshima family. Many Japanese at that time (1904) came with the idea of making their fortunes in the U. S. and returning with a lot of money, but my parents intended to establish a home. They tried to persuade nephews to emigrate but never considered returning to live there. 2. Tohchan apparently had no more than the usual required education short of university, but he loved, even revered learning and took for granted that all of the children would go to college. He was a frustrated scholar and took more pride than warranted when I first began working at the University of Nebraska even though my pay was a fraction of that of my brothers in the world of commerce. It is too bad that he didn't live to see the day that I would become a full professor at Michigan State, never mind that I had only a bachelor's degree, probably the only full professor at MSU other than President John Hannah so limited. 3. Supporting the theory that education was a determinant, the family lived on a farm until Tohchan realized that rural schools were not very good and moved the family into Los Angeles where schools were better. Others who stayed on the farm went on to get farms of their own, and many became quite prosperous. As a footnote, their children did not seem handicapped by rural education.

In the city Tohchan took a modest job at Hyland's Standard Homeopathic Pharmacy. I've seen their products in health stores and at the East Lansing Co-op in recent years. The most money he made by the time he retired in

the late 1930s was \$35 per week, but he was never laid off during the depression. Mr. and Mrs. George Hyland occasionally invited the whole family to their fine house in Beverly Hills--not a company affair--just our family, and we were each remembered by them at Christmas. Even though in the 35 years he was with the Company he was the only Japanese, Tohchan was so shy that his conversational skills were largely restricted to "yes" and "no" although he could read English and understood everything said to him. At work he was called "John" perhaps because he had a son by that name or because he flushed easily. He packed shipments for mailing (which accounts for my skill in making boxes and wrapping packages) and took them to the postoffice. I recall the treat of going to the postoffice with him and being wheeled back on the empty dolly. His work also had surprising responsibilities such as mixing ingredients for several medicines and operating many Rube Goldberg-like machines to make pills. He was well-liked there and when Fusae was studying pharmacy at the University of Southern California, she worked there as did Chiyo later when she was studying pharmacy. When we kids visited there, we were always made over. There was a big blowsy blonde, Sue, who made a pet of me and cracked up each time I asked, "Shue, could I shit on your shtool?" I thought it was because she was sweet on me.

My mother told me that when they moved to Los Angeles Tohchan almost every night would leave the house after dinner and return late. After weeks of this he came home one night to find her crying, and when he asked what the trouble was, she complained that he left every night without telling her where he was going or what he was up to. So he told her that he had been going to night school and trying to learn something. Olivia is convinced that I inherited Tohchan's communication traits. But ever after Tohchan quit treating her like a Japanese wife and would discuss things with her. Olivia thinks that I am not such a good learner as Tohchan was.

By the time I came along Kahchan was a partner in the marriage; she did the household accounts on a little bamboo abacus, budgeted the money and participated in decisions. She was naturally more outgoing and gregarious than Tohchan and was not embarrassed to talk to the milkman, breadman, iceman, greengrocer all who sold their wares from trucks. Nor was she afraid to talk to merchants. She organized several more timid Japanese women for shopping trips downtown via streetcar and became the natural leader to organize a Japanese booth for school carnivals. She could mimic almost anyone, but her natural English speech was accented. She did not read English like Tohchan, but she got so she could write notes like "one pound of butter, two quarts of milk" or "one loaf of white bread" without assistance.

Returning to my earlier childhood, when I began to walk, I am told that I went through a kind of family ritual. Tohchan took me to Fourth Street which had a gentle

incline west of Hill street before steepening up to Bunker Hill approximately where the Museum of Contemporary Art now is. Evidently he got a kick of watching each child at this stage try to negotiate the incline and then plop down on his/her diapered rump. Of course he was behind us to prevent bumping the head or rolling into traffic. I helped participate in this ritual with at least one of his grandchildren.

Of the home I first remember at 316 Virgil, I have many disjointed recollections. The house faced west and had a front porch the width of the house. The driveway was on the right as you faced the house. In front between house and driveway was an English walnut tree and toward the back was a large apricot tree that was great to climb and bore wonderfully sweet Royal apricots instead of the watery, tasteless Tiltons sold in stores. The backyard had a scrawny peach tree (that in its best year produced six large peaches) as well as a fig tree. The best fig tree was next door in the Lang's yard which bore sweet green Kadota figs, and we would eat those that were on branches hanging over into our yard. Bernie and Winnie Lang were friends of Chiyo and Hank and didn't mind. In our yard were guava bushes as well. I didn't like the perfumy taste of the fruit, but Johnny loved them.

There was a wonderful swamp across the street behind some trees. It apparently had a current and was not stagnant since it was a source for watercress which we ate. It also supplied pollywogs that would hatch into frogs before our eyes when collected in a jar and once a big turtle came out of the swamp and waddled into our yard. There were willows and bamboos for making whistles. It is hard to believe now with the swamp filled and the area all built up with a freeway over the house which may now be gone, but our neighborhood was fairly rural. Each morning a man would pass the house leading a cow to pasture somewhere. There was a smaller house behind us occupied first by Italians and then the Shimazu family whose second son, Yoshio, was a little younger than I. We were greatly concerned when their house was quarantined because he came down with scarlet fever. The quarantine did not prevent Kahchan from going over to try to help. Eventually an older brother, Tadao, joined them from Japan where he had been with relatives. Mr. Shimazu was a gardner with a model T pick-up for his work and a model T sedan for the family. Mrs. Shimazu referred to their cars rather grandly as "the roadster" and "the box-car."

Our house was also quarantined once for something I must have had. I remember the wonderful luxury of lying in bed with a mosquito net stretched over the cast-iron head frame over my body, being fed soup and otherwise pampered but not hurting physically. The netting was to keep flies away; despite the proximity of the swamp, we seemed to be free of mosquitoes which I first encountered camping.

Once my mother made me flannel pajamas with long pants on

her treadle Singer sewing machine, and I was so proud of my first pair of "long pants" that I wore them all day in and out of the house calling everyone's attention to them. About this time I got my first lesson in economics when Tohchan took me downtown one Saturday to buy me shoes. He made the error of letting me choose, and we returned home with a pair of \$4 shoes which brought Kahchan's wrath down on Tohchan's head. A few years later I understood Kahchan's wisdom when I caught my normal cheap shoes in a softball backstop I had climbed. Jumping down, I found the shoes stuck, fell head first twisting to take the fall forward on my hands instead of my head. Both shoes ripped at the instep freeing my feet. A good pair of shoes would have held, and I would have broken my ankles and fractured my skull.

While this childhood was idyllic in the Penrod and Sam tradition, there were bad moments and a major tragedy. One day Hank was fooling around at the curb (we weren't all that rural), slipped hitting his head and was unconscious; it was an anxious 15 minutes before he came to. Then one Fourth of July, I was on the front porch looking in the screen door while holding a lit firecracker behind me which predictably went off. Fortunately it was of the black powder variety and didn't blow off my hand, and I was able to relieve the burn with baking soda paste.

The tragedy was the death of Fusae from a miscarriage. I had only snapshots to show that she was a loving sister who carried me around, but my earliest memory of her was as a married woman. In her photos she always has a bright, attractive smile, and there were lyrical, happy photos of her and my brother-in-law on their honeymoon in Yellowstone National Park. Kahchan never got over the loss of her oldest daughter who had also been her whole family while waiting for Tohchan to call them over. Years later she still could not talk about Fusae without tears.

Kahchan and Tohchan were members of the Japanese Union Church in the Little Tokyo section near the Los Angeles city hall and would take the streetcar there. It was a union of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches with another which I don't remember. The children walked to the Evangelical Church on Melrose or perhaps a block south. We were the only Japanese family there; from pictures it is evident that Fusae was very active in the Berean Society, a group of older young people. I remember muffing a word ("emenies" instead of "enemies") before the whole congregation, and I can still hear the resonant voice of Mr. Bach, a layman, getting up every Sunday to announce out of the corner of his mouth, "Next Wednesday night there will be a pra-a-ayer meeting. We envied Hank whose Sunday School Teacher, a policeman, took his class to visit a jail but were then disillusioned to learn a few weeks later that the teacher was arrested for theft.

On the September following my fifth birthday, I started kindergarten at Dayton Heights School. Johnny was a won-

derful big brother even enlisting friends to help look after me. Jimmy Armour from across the street would come over to walk to school with us. I had some velvet "Little Lord Fauntleroy" type short pants with velvet suspenders with big buttons at the waist. One day I had them on backwards, but Johnny noticed and took me to the boys bathroom to get me straightened out before school began. About this time Chiyo who was 15 began to cut my hair in bangs with the sides hanging straight down to frame my face. When I protested she would produce a picture of Jackie Coogan who was a big movie star in "The Kid" and later "The Champ." In graduate school I was shocked to see a picture of Jackie Coogan grown up and bald. I sent it to Chiyo so she could see what a close call it would have been for me had she persisted. Between the hair-cut and the velvet pants it's a wonder that I was not beat up regularly on the way to or from school. Maybe Johnny and his friends protected me.

It was in kindergarten that I finally learned the words of circle games that Tohchan, bless his heart, would sing having learned them from Hank or Johnny. "Beriberitoh beriberismoh" was not a Buddhist sutra but "Very very tall; very very small" while "Yessah, yessah obohndan" was "Ashes, ashes all fall down."

Aside from the embarrassment of loading my pants which one of the teachers had to clean up, I remember with some chagrin two incidents regarding race. One day after I had done something wrong, one of the teachers took me aside and said more dispairing than scolding, "Why can't you be good like the other Japanese boys?" (Gee, Teach, I didn't know I was a Japanese boy.) The other was at the end of the term after which we were going to move to another school district, and a teacher asked, "Are you excited about going to Rosemont?" "I don't want to go," I replied. "Why not?" I blush to recall that my reply was, "Because there are niggers there." Of course I didn't know what a "nigger" was but helpful classmates had told me that they were glad they weren't going to Rosemont because, etc. The teacher didn't rebuke me or lecture the future crusader for civil rights. She said gently, "They are people just like us."

Verona, 10 April 1994

NEW NEIGHBORHOOD

Looking back, Rosemont School must have been a sample of the melting pot whose ideal was once the hope of the nation. There was a preponderance of children of English, Irish, Scotch, Scandinavians, but there were also many children of Jews, Japanese, and Colored People (the non-pejorative word for African Americans at the time). A few children of Mexicans and of Eastern and Southern European were also enrolled. I say "looking back" because at that time I don't think any of us were self-conscious of our origins except possibly some Blacks because less was expected of them by the school and therefore less opportunity given, but as far as the children were concerned differences didn't exist.

We had moved just before I was six to a little brown house on Occidental, a mile east toward the center of the city to an area called the West End in spite of the fact that the western boundary of the city is 20 or 25 miles west at the border with Santa Monica. It was a kind of house which I now recognize as (southern) Californian as it and its mirror image faced each other across a paved driveway rather like a court. A double garage at the back of the pavement almost joined the two houses. Even though we didn't have a car, Los Angeles already had linked itself to the automobile. Our garage, empty except for some tools and packing boxes had a grease pit which I thought should be filled with water and used as a swimming pool. Now they have pools of that dimension with a controllable current against which one may swim remaining in one place. Had that device then been available, my dream could have been practical. All that would have been required would have been to get rid of the black widow spiders and waterproof the pit. The double garage had one interesting bit of industry. Our neighbor, Mr. Saiki, did have a car. One evening he came home from work, pushed the gas pedal instead of the brake and went through the back. I heard a lot of sounds but not enough words to improve my vocabulary.

The house seemed smaller than our previous one, but the rooms must have been big since there were two double beds in one bedroom, Tohchan and Johnny sharing one, Kahchan and I the other. Hank and Chiyo had their own rooms. Tochan's and Johnny's bed was against the window to the backyard which was a miserable narrow plot with an avo-

cado tree that bore no fruit. The lot was too narrow to play in but did provide access for a burglar who climbed across the bed without disturbing Tohchan or John. Next morning Chiyo's empty purse was found behind the door but apparently we didn't have enough to burgle. Tohchan's pocket watch, a nice Elgin given him at work, remained on the ironing board which doubled as dresser apparently devalued in the burglar's eyes because Tohchan used a shoestring instead of chain to attach it to his vest. The watch, now an historical artifact despite its loss of gold plating, was passed on by Johnny to Jesse as its curator. One summer, the Honda family stayed with us for a few days and at least on one of the beds, five children slept cross-wise. The Hondas had a big farm in Brawley in the Imperial Valley near the Mexican border. There were five girls and a boy in the family, some with exotic names: Viola, Ruth, Mathilda, Oliver, Mary and the youngest whose name I forget. Although the parents were younger than ours they were friends from immigration days. They spent summers in Los Angeles to escape the heat until they discovered the wonderful San Diego climate much closer to home. Having cousins only in Japan, Chiyo and Viola decided that the children of the two families should be cousins.

When we first moved to the neighborhood, we were sitting on someone's porch around the corner, and there was a cute Black child who was a skinny five. Johnny who had my mother's outgoing nature asked his name. "Willy Billy Smith," he announced brightly. We didn't keep in touch with him in the intervening years, but the year I was graduated from Belmont High, William Smith who had grown considerably taller but no fatter had the best national high school marks in the 100, 220, high jump and broad (now long) jump. Los Angeles schools permitted only two track and one field events or two field and one track events, but Smith alternated the jumps.

My best friend during the two years or so that we lived there was Horace Clark who lived across the street. He generally attended Catholic school but after school we were inseparable. We spent a lot of time scratching magic signs in the dirt confident despite repeated failures that by morning they would materialize into powerful totems in some exotic and precious material. The apartment complex the Clarks lived in was owned by a Black (forget correct anachronisms of the time) family, but although I'd eaten with the Clarks a number of times, it was not until I saw him in a movie where he had a bit part that I realized that Horace was Black. Since I was aware that Willy Smith was Black this seems unbelievable but Jesse when he was at Wright School mentioned his best friend and when Olivia asked for a description, Jesse replied, "He has a round head and is about as tall as I am." A couple of days later, Liv saw this friend who and noticed that he was Black.

It was while living on Occidental that I became aware

that Kahchan to help ends meet would go out to clean houses once or twice a week. On occasion I would accompany her, helping with the dusting. I enjoyed the bus or streetcar ride and the lunches she took along. They must have been substantial houses, but I don't recall seeing them as fancier than our modest home.

When I started school I began in the first grade, but after a couple of weeks without any fanfare I was taken into another room and moved up half a grade, Los Angeles schools advancing by semesters rather than years. Each of the 20 or 25 pupils clamored to have me sit with them which was far better behavior than I demonstrated a year later when half a dozen kids from a lower grade joined us because of overcrowding and then were promoted along with the rest of us putting my nose out of joint. In retrospect skipping was not a good idea for me. Aside from unwarranted pride, the business of moving in semesters meant starting new situations in february rather than in the fall, and I always felt ambiguous about where I was. Hank skipped three times. but since he started in February it came out even for him; Chiyo skipped also, but she evened things out with a postgraduate semester at Belmont which let her start U. S. C. in the fall. The other reason I don't think it was a good idea is that when I got to junior high and high school and began sports, I had to compete against kids older and more mature physically. On the brighter side, it is a handy excuse for having been a mediocre performer.

When we moved to 2830 Council Street, I was seven. It was only a couple of blocks away, but Horace and I seldom saw each other. Once while I was walking to school, his mother who was riding a cab had the driver stop to give me a lift, but Horace was in Chicago where his dad spent a lot of time in his work. We didn't really connect again until high school where we often ate our sack lunches together in the bleachers. We didn't have any classes together, but he was a brilliant student.

That first Christmas on Council Street, we had hung our stockings on our bed steads having no fireplace. I had not let on that I didn't believe in Santa Claus since I thought the flow of gifts from Santa Claus would dry up. I had figured that Hank wouldn't give me a gift so I wrapped up an old pen and made a card from him to me which puzzled him. At any rate, Kahchan had made a nightgown for me from cotton flannel which I wore after Christmas eve bath. The sleeping arrangement was different at this house, and Johnny and I shared a double bed. Early Christmas morning I got up to see what loot I had from "Santa Claus." There was no point in Johnny getting up but he did as well, and we lit the gas space heater. I was opening a package with my backside toward the heater when I heard a roar and realized that the fleece on my nightgown had caught fire so I stood up and hollered, "Johnny!" He looked at me and his eyes got as big as those of mine in my baby pictures and then got up

to knock me to the floor and rolled out the fire. Luckily only the fleece was burnt off, and my hair was not even singed nor any part of me burnt. It was also fortunate that I didn't turn toward the tree or roll in wrapping paper. That's the only Christmas of my childhood that I remember with any clarity although I can't tell you what loot "S. Claus" left me. I did get a used pen from Hank.

I was growing up enough so that Hank and Johnny would include me in their play, and I got so I could throw and catch a football or an indoor ball (a ball with thick outer seams which evolved into the softball). Later when we got gloves, we played baseball in the bumpy empty lot on the corner. Most of the kids between my age and Hank's in the neighborhood were nisei, and the pickup games we had were largely but not entirely of nisei, sometimes augmented by one or more of our friends from school who would drop by.

Being included in the games had a bonus since when we started team sports at Rosemont I knew the rules for most of the games, and the teachers in charge of playground came to depend of me to help with the rules even in those games I hadn't played with the big kids like basketball and speedball (a version of soccer). Perhaps because of this I was made a squad leader by fourth grade. But I didn't spend all my time on the playground; I won a book as first prize for a complicated geography contest that took several days to complete. The teacher must have had fun for among the serious stuff she would insert puns based on Nantucket and Pawtucket to name a couple. She didn't have the nerve to do anything with Weehawken Spit. In the sixth grade I was excused from much of my classwork so that I could make a frieze around the walls above the blackboard based on events in world history as well as some lantern slides on glazed paper which were then projected. One of the perks was that I could choose subject to approval someone to help me each day, and this made me popular as kids vied for the job and the chance to skip classwork. I blame being excused for becoming the goof-off I was throughout my academic life into grad school. I was excused from the classwork less for the art than for having done well on standardized tests.

But the real star of the class from the beginning was George Milne, the smallest kid in the first grade who never grew much beyond 40". He was a wonderful story teller who could spin yarns apparently off the top of his head without repeating himself. There were other luminaries as well, the most exotic being Robert Koff who had played the violin before important people when he was five. Not only was he a master who occasionally played for the class, but he was very knowledgeable about a lot of things. When we were in the fifth grade, before we made an excursion downtown (by streetcar; no chartered buses) for a matinee concert of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, Robert told us what to look for in the music and among the orchestra personnel. That made the

event much richer. Although an authentic prodigy, Robert wanted to be a regular kid and, although he wore thick glasses, he would play football and other games with enthusiasm, and I would be scared to death that he would wreck his hands. He went to the conservatory at Oberlin College and then became a founding member of the Julliard Quartet. When Carol Puckett came to Nebraska to teach and to play, I asked if she had known Robert at Oberlin. "I was only a freshman," she replied, "but Bob (who through ten grades was Robert) was the big man on campus, tall and handsome, chased by all the girls." Robert had been chubby through high school, but I could see him grow into Carol's description. When the Julliard became artists-in-residence at Michigan State, I asked Bobby Mann the first violinist who had organized the group and was the only original member what had happened to Bob. He said, "He married my sister and is teaching at Brandeis."

Being one of teacher's pets as I was in the second grade is a burden. One day the teacher left the room which immediately erupted into bedlam with things flying through the air and people yelling. Trying to restore order, I got on my desk and shouted, "SHUT UP!" at the top of my voice. Shortly after the teacher stormed in demanding, "Who shouted, 'shut up'?" Since no one else noticed, and I was too terrified and cowardly to own up, she picked a likely culprit based on past performance and sent him to the principal to receive a swat with his paddle. She would have made an excuse for me had I confessed. Years later I started a story about a guy on death row whose life of crime began when he was unjustly accused of and punished for something he hadn't done. I even made up a name for him, Jimmy "Monk" Davis.

I became good friends with Robert Koff after we moved again, closer to his place and walked to junior high school and then high school together most mornings, but at that time, my closest friend was Eddie Larson who with his sister had gotten city wide recognition for their tap and acrobatic dancing. Eddie was able to walk on his hands as well as I could walk on my feet and did all kinds of gymnastics while the best I could do was a lopsided somersault. Another I chummed around with was Stan Smith. We used to make guns out of orange crates and would shoot rubber bands. playing "cops and robbers" which ended when I shot him in the eye and gave him a black eye. His mother was not appreciative, but she must have forgiven me because she gave me a shilling note when they returned from a trip to England. There were other kids with whom I would visit back and forth. They liked coming over because although we were poor, Kahchan always had us stocked with a two pound box of Hershey kisses, a case of chewing gum, and a case of pop: Nehi and Delaware Punch. We also had arare but that didn't make such a hit except with nisei kids. Once three kids I don't otherwise remember were picking on me for some reason until a bigger kid named Ed Alexander came over, and sided with me and dispersed the three. I don't know

the cause of the conflict nor the reason for Ed's intervention since I knew him only slightly and saw him very little after. There is a sad postscript about Eddie Larson. Shortly after we had started junior high school, Eddie hadn't come to school, and his body was found hanging from a rafter in the garage. I don't know what happened, but he liked to play Tarzan and swing from ropes;

Earlier, about the time I began second grade, Johnny had made a number of friends at Rosemont, Wilson Springer whose father did cartoons for the Los Angeles Herald sports section, Otto Steinen whose father owned the best cutlery shop in Los Angeles, Arnold Jaffee about whose family I know nothing. They all tolerated me whether they came to see Johnny or whether I tagged along when he visited them. Wilson and Otto who were neighbors would generally come by together and would announce themselves by forcing their tongues against the roofs of their mouths and then suddenly release them with loud cracks that could be heard half a block away. I used to be able to do it but now can produce only a small cluck. Arnold came over every morning to walk us the half mile to school even though he lived even farther from the school in the opposite direction. He was very thoughtful and would take my hand when we crossed Temple street. the busy main thoroughfare with trolley tracks.

This escort disappeared when they matriculated to various junior high schools, but by that time I could navigate by myself and would join the stream of students that became larger as we approached the school. Occasionally I roller skated, but the best surface was Temple Street, and it was forbidden territory. One disastrous morning several blocks before school, I crossed Temple Street without incident. I was summoned from class by Mr. Marbut, the principal whose name was a source of great humor. He had been informed by some snitch that I had crossed Temple at an unauthorized spot. I was made to grab my ankles while Mr. Marbut took a big paddle and gave me a gentle pat with no follow through. The humiliation not the blow was the punishment, and it must have worked since it never happened again.

Things were quite different then than they now are. Shop keepers would be very patient and tolerant about hordes of little creatures agonizing which penny candy to buy, nor would soda fountain clerks begrudge dirtying a glass to give a free drink of water requested by children trudging home from school.

We had nisei friends as well, especially Toshio (Johnny's age) and Keiji (my age) Tsukahira whose parents were friends of mine as well. They may have been a month or two younger respectively than we were but were bigger. They had a big house which they leased while we rented which seemed to give them a special status. They also had a big yard with a large tree great for climbing which overhung their garage from which vantage point we could

plague their sister. whom we didn't realize was unwell and would die in a few years. We even ruined umbrellas trying to float down from the garage roof, crashing heavily instead. They had a neighbor, Al Rosen. Once for a joke we told him that his mother was calling him and began digging a pitfall trap which we were going to fill with water. He had gone, but suspicious because he hadn't heard his mother, he watched us over the fence and came over with great glee to help us dig the pit which we filled with water and then laid branches and leaves over. But then came the problem of finding a victim who showed up in the person of Barry Kashiwagi which was perfect since he was a bully a year older than I. We got in a line with hands on the person in front of us and marched around, the cognoscenti stepping over the pit, and Barry following suit until Al who was behind Barry kind of picked him up and stuffed him in the third time around.

Hank was 16 when we got our first car, a 1928 Chevrolet sedan purchased when they first came out in late '27. He had been working Saturdays since he was 14 and it was probably because he had been contributing to the family kitty that the purchase was possible. In any case at that age he drove us to San Francisco on one trip and on another to Sequoia National Park, doing all the driving by himself. He could do all kinds of things. In the empty lot where we played ball, a Cole 8 cylinder car had been abandoned; after several months when it was obvious that no one was going to reclaim it, Hank removed the magneto and got it to work; he could revitalize dry cell batteries and was one of the first to make a crystal radio set which could be tuned in; when we got the car, he learned how to adjust the brakes, grind the valves and otherwise maintain it. I think Bruce and Kimi got a lot of this kind of interest from him although Olivia's brother, Carl, has similar abilities. Hank taught Johnny and me how to play pinochle and bridge even though Tohchan seeing the cards would cluck disapprovingly, muttering, "goburin," (gambling) and Hank would say, "There are no goblins here." There was a dark side to Hank though. When I started to give him his birthday spansks while he was bent over brushing his teeth on his 16th birthday, he shouted at me earning a well deserved rebuke from my mother.

Kahchan who never got over Fusae's death nevertheless found another daughter. My brother-in-law, Frank M. Zaima, Fusae's husband, with whom we kept in close touch found a Japanese woman from Florida to marry with my parents consent. I don't know how they met, but with her mother living in Florida, it was easy for her to accept Kahchan as her mother, and Kahchan in her turn regarded her fully as a daughter and not as a usurper of Fusae's position. We all accepted her as "neisen" (big sister). Kahchan was present at the birth of each of their children and would stay at their house for a week or ten days. Frank, whom we addressed as "Brother" had a big house which he had for Fusae on the hill of Micheltorena

with a nice view. At the top of the hill there was a view of the Los Feliz area and a long flight of steps down to Santa Monica boulevard. Brother owned one of the coveted stalls in Grand Central Market and was quite prosperous. It was there that Hank got his Saturday job and Johnny also when he turned 14.

But our house on Council Street, while not as fancy was an interesting place in itself. We were two doors from a big shed which housed Pathe film studios and across the street were its offices. Often "Our Gang" comedy episodes would be shot on the street. Inspired by the Tsukahiras who raised chickens, my mother started raising chickens in a coop in the back yard until the Japanese family next door reported the infringement to authorities who said it was not permitted there. I don't remember their name, but my mother thereafter referred to them as the "Reporters." They did try to make overtures to us, however; the father was an amateur photographer and once gave Johnny and me mirrors backed with pictures of us looking like proper ragamuffins in overalls and barefeet. On the other side was another Japanese family who ran a boarding house until one of the boarders ran away with the wife. Up the street were other Japanese families, the only ones I can remember were the Oniki family whose two boys Shoji and Joe had been born in Council Bluffs, Iowa. I never learned what they were doing there. And there was another Japanese family who lived a block away whose kid plagued me so much that I chased him until he cut between two cars to get home and was hit by a car with a sickening thud. I ran home and wouldn't come out from under the bed for several hours. He was months recovering, and when I saw him again he looked at me so piteously I could not bring myself to tell him that I was sorry.

For some reason I got mad at Joe Oniki once and told him to go home which he did so slowly that I followed him giving invectives until he turned and hit me giving me a bloody nose sending me home blubbering.

I think the reason that we had fewer nisei friends was, I am ashamed to say, because we felt superior although we were not in any way, least of all economically. But there was one kid Billy Takahashi, Johnny's age, who when he had to go to the toilet at our house would ask if he could go to the boys basement (toilets at school were downstairs and referred to as the boys' basement and girls' basement) and Chiyo would make fun of that. Later when we moved to a house which un characteristically for California did have a basement, she always wanted to send him down there with the spiders. And then the nisei kids would play "outlaws" and "inlaws" instead of cops and robbers or cowboys and Indians as everybody else did. Then too, the other families except for a few like the Tsukahiras and the Yanari's didn't have the kind of parents we did; their fathers were usually despotic. Typically, Barry was very proud of the fact that his

father would punish him by burning his arm with a smoldering punk and would show off his scars.

This chapter which takes me through grade school ends with a spectacular conflagration, not at school or at our house but in the big shed of Pathe studios which gave a spectacular blaze containing so much flammable material and and big open spaces that supplied a lot of oxygen to the fire. We could see firemen climbing around a rickety scaffolding inside fighting in vain to stem the fire. It is a miracle that people were not killed. We trained our garden hose on the Reporters house, making a pathetic spray, but their house was spared in any case. Not so their garage in back which unfortunately contained a car usually left outside but that had been driven in shortly before the fire broke out. Our car normally driven into the garage had been out which was lucky since our garage was damaged some as well. The fire made a great bonfire blaze, but I think most of the valuable equipment was across the street; so I doubt that in dollar terms it was such a loss.

Verona, 21 April 1994

This account of Rosemont Grammar School makes it sound like an exclusive boys school, but the fact is that there were girls there as well. The limited encounters I had with girls made for one short paragraph which ~~was~~ lost because I seem to have wiped out one disk that had it, and the new disk which I had rearranged, losing the paragraph in the process, was also not saved because the disk had not been formatted properly. This is the restitution of what should have been the inserted at the top of page 13:

There were girls in the class too, most of them very bright, a few giddy. From the second grade ~~kon~~ I had a big crush on Marthalea MacIntosh, but I don't think I spoke more than half a dozen words with her. My courtship technique was very oblique: when it was my turn to select someone for a team or to pass on a question, I always chose Nancy Brown, a flashy blonde whom everyone thought good-looking, but I thought she was gawky with big teeth. I chose her because she was Marthmalea's best friend. This approach was too subtle to bear fruit before Marthalea and her family went to Ireland for our fifth ~~kl~~grade year. I did note whenever Mrs. MacIntosh came to school that she was nice looking and that Marthalea would probably remain pretty. When I first met Olivia's mother I was reassured by the same scrutiny. The other thing I perfected was my tongue-tied technique which probably saved me from much sinning during adolescence.

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While we still lived on Council Street I turned 12 and was given a party with several friends invited. The only gifts I remember getting were a box camera and a golf putter and some golf balls, both, I think, from Hank. Hank was in college at UCLA, Chiyo was graduating from USC, Johnny was getting ready to enter Belmont High, and I was getting ready for Virgil Junior High. Chiyo also was about to get married. She and a classmate, Misako, were great friends and would often double-date; on one of these occasions while watching the Venus, the "morning star," which was visible in daylight for a given period, there was an accident and Misako who was beautiful suffered cuts on her face from the windshield glass. Chiyo was devastated, but despite scars, Misako remained beautiful and cheerful; she has remained a bright, sweet friend of Chiyo's to this day. Chiyo had a lot of suitors among her classmates, but she married Jitsuo Nakahama, who was older and an established interior decorator who had a clientele of Hollywood people. He also did subtitles for the silent movies, and once appeared as an eskimo in Charlie Chaplin's "The Gold Rush." He and his brother, Noboru, rode motorcycles and were dashing, romantic figures. While he was courting Chiyo, he would bring chocolate covered cherries which I liked and wanted to buy me a bicycle which my mother prevented as being too dangerous. Hank was not too happy about the marriage, and years later I found out that it was because he belittled Tochan's background although I don't recall that his own father was ever gainfully employed.