

# THE EXODUS



PART II

# "ON BORROWED TIME"



## AND THE WAR CAME

It seems now that the war came with a dramatic suddenness late on a Sunday morning, as dramatic and sudden as if it were an earthquake or a tidal wave. We feel a helplessness against wars, something akin to the helplessness that we feel toward those natural disasters. War, however, is man-made. Its beginning may be sudden, but it is a long time in building. The slow growth and the ever closer imminence of this war was experienced more directly and deeply in the months before its coming by the Japanese on the Pacific Coast than by any other group in the United States, yet paradoxically enough, we hoped and believed in its impossibility more than any other group.

I suppose that no one can say when the first step toward this war was taken. Some might say that it was the beginning of the Manchurian incident; others, the 1924 Exclusion Law, or the Versailles Treaty, or the Russo-Japanese War, or the Sino-Japanese War—one might pick any train of events and trace its course to today. It is fruitless, however, to trace the cause of an event to a previous event, for such a process is endless. I think that it would be more to the point to talk about the people themselves, the clash of their ideas and ideals, how the people feel about things. So I want to talk, not of tracing of events, but of our feelings and our hopes, how this particular person lived through

the coming of the war and in its opening, leaving the broad view of events and historical significance to the historians, telling the story from the rather limited viewpoint of a rural nisei in the State of Washington who was one of the thousands of nisei who feared, hoped against War, who felt the shock of the war, and who was one of the 100,000 who took part in the "Evacuation" that followed.

For most niseis, I believe that the opening of hostilities begins back in 1931 with the Mukden incident. It was then that many a nisei going to school began to feel assailed over the military actions of an Oriental nation across the Pacific Ocean, assailed and made to feel somehow responsible for the whole affair, although most of us were as puzzled and at loss to explain these things to ourselves, let alone to hostile Americans who had their dander up against the reprehensible Japanese in general. The nisei took several attitudes upon feeling the rising tension against them. Most of us took the attitude that this was America, that we were Americans, and that all this was none of our doing,-- don't blame us for what our cousins are doing over there. It was a logical attitude perhaps, certainly it was typically American, but somewhat lazy. A few withdrew into themselves, and expressed no opinions whatsoever. And there were a few, praiseworthy, but few in number, who began to read and search for the true perspective of events and cultures in an attempt to understand the developments in the Orient. There were a few who became violently anti-Japanese (anti-Imperialist Japanese, that is to say), joining the communist Party and decrying the actions of the Japanese military, few of the "intelligentsia", taking such an attitude; others, taking the opposite tack, became morosely race-conscious, though the opinions of the latter did not find channels of expression in the nisei press. But to Americans, and nisei are Americans, international problems are but a small part of the conscious world. Much more important are the events closer to home; the Lindbergh case, the world series, the Depression, the schools, the football teams, the movies. We got along.

Then in 1937, came the invasion in earnest of Northern China; some time later the sinking of the "Panay", the events deepening the animosities of the two nations, but it seems that somehow toward the end of the decade, that we nisei were becoming hardened toward the ever increasing tensions, and that we no longer felt

the shock of events in the Orient as a personal injury against our peaceable lives in America as we had felt earlier at the time of the Manchurian incident. The belligerence of our Japanese cousins were beginning to be borne with a certain resignation to Fate. More and more, however, things began to change for us. Sometimes lake resorts to which we had used to go swimming would refuse us admittance, saying, "We don't mind you, but other people don't like to have you around". A popular skating rink would have a certain night only for the Japanese. We began to notice that our younger brothers and sisters were more cliquish among themselves at school than we had been. In the economic life, our lives went on at a steadily expanding rate.

In the fall of 1939 the European War began. The Draft Law came into effect in 1940, and here and there nisei boys began to be drafted into the army. We still felt quite secure: a few months of training, and they would come back. Then in the spring of 1941, all our parents who were aliens were asked to register at the post office to be numbered and fingerprinted, and asked to tell about investments and reading matters. With the conscription and fingerprinting, the free and easy America that we had known passed away forever. Then one day in July, we found that all the checks written by Japanese bounced back. The commercial treaty between Japan and the United States had been abrogated, and the nisei had to bring their birth certificates to the bank to prove that they were citizens and to have their accounts unfrozen. The Japanese ships suddenly ceased coming to the Pacific Coast ports. Communications became tenuous. Then throughout the summer, the American State Department began to urge Americans to leave the Orient, "This is the last chance--", "Remain at your own risk"--. Many nisei who had gone to study in the Orient began to return again, each bringing back stories of food rationing in Japan, of fuel rationing, of "sufu" clothing that melted in the first washing, of the 50 yen shoes, of the taxis of Tokyo coasting to a stop to save gasoline, of the charcoal-burning trucks. Hearing these stories, we did not dream the possibility of war. There was a talk at that time of basing the United States Navy in Singapore, and as long as the United States kept a blockade of strategic materials we felt that a war could not start. Will the war start today? Of course not. Will the war start tomorrow? No, not likely. The future was a series of tomorrows. We pinned our hope on faith that somehow things will muddle



through, as it had done in the past.

There was something in the air as the diplomatic negotiations went on in Washington in the November of 1941. During the Thanksgiving holidays the Japanese Young People's Christian Conference was held in Seattle. At the officers' meeting a suggestion was made that we send a telegram to Washington of our hopes and prayers of the conference that their conversations might lead to a peaceful conclusion. The gesture now seems so ineffectual and naive, but the incident reminds us how futilely we hoped against hope that the war might be averted, and how deeply concerned were the young people those sunny autumn days.

## A SACK OF RICE

In the first week of December rumors began to go around that now since all shipping commerce was stopped, between Japan and the United States, the Japanese consulate office in Seattle was going to be closed. My mother recalled that when sister was born, her birth had been reported to the village in Japan from which father and mother had come, and in which the grandparents still lived. Of late, there had been a strong demand among the American citizens, both Japanese and Caucasians, that such dual citizenship should not be continued for it placed the child in a position of being a citizen of two countries. Hearing that the consulate might close its doors in the near future, mother decided to cancel the registration in Japan of my sister's birth immediately. On Friday of the first week in December, we went on our farm truck to Seattle, found our way to the big office building downtown and took the elevator to the office. We opened the door with the chrysanthemum seal of Japan, and entered the gloomy office. It was a gloomy place that day, gloomy not only from the gray clouds over Elliot Bay, but from the gloom of silence, the gloom of men with nothing to do but sit and smoke.

"What is your business?", the chief clerk asked. It was a typical consulate reception, for somehow the clerks and office staff of the consulate seemed to think themselves superior to the rest of the immigrant residents in America, and they communicated this attitude even in their forlorn dejection. The consul himself was a sensible and courteous man, but the sad staff seemed to be an office fixture, even with the coming of the charming and able Consul Sato. After finishing our business, we went out of

building quickly, breathing a sigh of relief at having disposed of something hanging over our heads, and escaping from a gloomy place.

Though we did not know it then, it was the "last chance". Two days later was Sunday, December 7. Sister and I came home from the church, and I made a bee-line for the radio. Church would always make us late for the first numbers of the New York Philharmonic, but I always looked forward to Deems Taylor. The familiar Sunday afternoon music filled the kitchen, when strangely all of a sudden a voice cut into the music to say, "All members of Squadron 3 report to Sand Point immediately--all members of the Squadron 3 report to Sand Point immediately---" repeating several more times. Sand Point was the naval air station. My heart skipped a beat, but the returning flood of music drowned out my thoughts, although a vague apprehension remained. Few minutes later again the music faded, and a voice cut in to say: "Bulletin: Word has been received that the unidentified black ships that have bombed the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor are believed to be of Japanese origin. Columbia will issue further bulletins as news of further developments are received." As the voice stopped, the music of the symphony came on again. I looked out of the window at the sunlit pasture. I could hear my mother at the sink getting ready the Sunday dinner. Father was oblivious to everything but the newspaper. I sat and listened to the music for a little while. Then I said slowly, "Japan has come to bomb Hawaii. Looks like the war has started." My mother turned white. Father put down his paper. "I guess Japan has become desperate and struck."

When the symphony was finished, my father said to me, "Shuji, when war comes, we do not know what will happen; but as long as we have food, we can get along for some time. I think that you had better go buy another sack of rice, right now." It seemed preposterous to me, but somehow his serious face made me say "All right." I took the truck out of the barn and went to Frank Mayeda's gas station and grocery down the road. He was reading the Sunday paper and his radio was turned off. I told him about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. We did not talk much. I asked for the sack of rice, and didn't buy anything else, so full was my mind with turmoil. How right was my father's instinct from his peasant boyhood for the primary consideration for food in a crisis was brought out 6 hours later when the "Trading with the Enemy

Act" was proclaimed, prohibiting all transactions with enemy aliens. He was right. There was a fundamental security in a sack of rice.

## ON BORROWED TIME

Let me say that the situation in my family was peculiar in that I, the nisei member was technically classified as an enemy alien in that I had been born in Japan, although I had been raised in this country. Immediately after the war started, the birth certificate as a proof of American citizenship had to be carried about by the nisei as a pass to the most common activity: getting a ride on a bus, "Here's my birth certificate; I'm a citizen", buying gasoline: "Here's my birth certificate: I'm a citizen;" cashing a check: "Here's my birth certificate; I'm a citizen." I, of course, did not possess this magic paper, so that the best that I could do was walk instead of drive, and not buy anything.

That evening our nisei Christian Fellowship's Sunday night meeting was held as usual in the Salvation Army Hall. We all sat close together that night. "I felt so funny--the people on the street stared at me so this afternoon." said a girl.

"Gosh, I sure hate to go to school tomorrow" said a high school boy.

"I wonder what's going to happen to us?"

"We were so scared--but the boys laughed at us when we looked so scared."

So the conversation went. I felt rather piqued that these nisei who were citizens should in any way feel ashamed of themselves now that the war had started. I pointed out to the boys and girls gathered about the circle that they had nothing to be ashamed about in their being Japanese. The future, of course, was unpredictable, but no one ever knew the future anyway. We knew, however, that somehow ways were opened no matter what we lost, and that we could always live on; that war changes nothing, that right still remains right, only more so; that wrong still remains wrong, only more so; that our true friends remain friends no matter what happens; that the only way in which we could keep on treating others and being treated is that we act sincerely. I believed those things then. I still believe them now. Still I know how those youngsters felt, how full of trepidations they

were as they faced a new world at school on Monday, and somehow, I was glad that I was not in their shoes, though I had spoken to them in such brave fashion.

Immediately on the night of the 7th, a new word came into our world: FBI. On Monday morning we heard that during the night, the FBI men had arrested the former president of the Japanese Association and the treasurer. It was whispered how the men with guns had come at night to take them away, not allowing them to say a word to the family, watching them even while they changed clothes. That the two should be arrested was weird and terrible. Fear came to the house of every family in which the father had served in the Japanese Association. The worst thing was that there was no particular thing that they had done so that each felt as vulnerable as the next man. The only thing was that they were leaders.

Another thing that was striking to us as the war started was the sudden appearance of the word "Japs". Now that the war has been going on for nearly a year and half, the word "Japs" is so familiar that it means nothing in particular, but prior to the war, the best journals did not use the word "Jap", classifying it in the same category as "Wop", and "Dago", not used in the best society. Now over the radio and in the newspapers, "Japs" was the only word used. Somehow it seemed as if a mask of good manners had dropped from the face of America. Together with the high-pitched and tensed speech of the radio commentators, the effect was rather overwhelming.

As the year turned, however, gradually our economic position brought back a semblance of normal life again. The Trading with the Enemy Act was modified to allow us to run our business, although almost all the larger houses closed by the war failed to reopen. The small people, however, were generally allowed to get on somehow. We began to plan our spring planting, we began to haul fertilizers for our acres again, for seasons will not wait. We helped with the work on the farms from which fathers had been interned. Being on the land is a source of strength in times of insecurity. We could not conceive of life on the farm which would be different because of the war. To plow, to plant seed,

to weed--we felt as if they were an inexorable process of life which we could not change. As we worked in our fields, a man came in and talked to us. "I hear that the government is going to take all you Japs away from here and send you to the sugar beet country. Yes, sir, that's what I heard at the Rail."

"Oh Yeah?", I said, and would pay no attention to him. Beer parlor talk.

Then one day an item appeared in our local paper about the Farm Security Administration arranging to rent a large office space in our town. Our valley was a rich valley, and there was little need for large scale efforts of the FSA for the farmers here. I thought it strange, and I asked the managing editor of the local paper, who was my friend, why the government agency was setting up such a large office here. His answer was evasive, and he quickly changed the subject. A suspicion crossed my mind, that it might mean something. I said nothing about it to my parents, but the thing kept worrying me in the back of the head.

The next event in the consciousness of the hectic days of the spring of 1942 was the series of the Tolan Committee hearings at Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle. This was another straw in the wind, and the wind was decidedly stronger. We had heard that the Tolan Committee was going to conduct hearings on the questions of whether or not to evacuate the Japanese aliens from the Pacific Coast, and we hoped that we could have a chance to express our wish to stay and to add to the agricultural production of this area. However, when the nisei who had gone to the hearings came back, they had a different story entirely. "We went with the idea that we might fight to prevent the evacuation of the old folks," they said, "but the question seems to be not whether or not the aliens should be moved. It's the question of whether or not all Japanese, aliens and citizens alike should be moved!" I had a funny feeling in the pit of the stomach.

## PROCLAMATION NO. 5

Then the newspapers began to publicize these hearings, however, we doubted again. The facts presented smacked so much of the old anti-Japanese propoganda: the low living standards, the spies, the saboteurs, the strategic-lying farms near aircraft plants, near naval bases, and all the old hocus which we knew were false or meaningless, that we thought it another publicity stunt. Why should anyone want to move us out of here? We



were producing far more than anyone else--we knew the land--we knew the crops--it would be foolish for the country--and who could take over? Where would they build houses to put us? What of our equipment and crops? They wouldn't confiscate it, would they? All these questions added up to the "impossible". "Why didn't those city papers lay off the cheap sensationalism?" I thought contemptuously. Looking back now I realize how superficial had been my attitude toward the Americans in general, and conversely how essentially superficial the attitude of the Americans is toward the Japanese also.

Essentially my viewpoint was that of the rural or small town nisei all of whose American friends spoke to him by first name, whose houses were open to him, whose parents knew him, and among whom there was no fear. Do those Americans whom he knew so intimately want him evacuated away from this valley into the hinterlands of the Idaho beet fields? No, not one. Therefore the people who were clamoring for his removal were foolish and ignorant people to whom one need not pay any attention. What I knew, but did not really understand in my heart, was the fact that for each American who knew the nisei well, there were 10,000 who knew him only as a member of an Oriental race who lived in dilapidated houses, raised vegetables at a fearsome rate, or who sold fruit and vegetables, or who lived in the more squalid sections of the town and cities and engaged in unknown activities and customs.

Then there was the military mind to whom war was the supreme activity of mankind, while to most of us, war is catastrophe to be avoided and fought--the military mind to whom a vegetable ranch next to an aircraft factory was a supreme opportunity for sabotage--while to most of us an aircraft factory next to our farms is a noisy annoyance and an encroachment on our acreage. Then there were the thousands more of Americans who had never even seen any Japanese, and whose only source of information or opinion were the radio or the newspaper, both eager to be the "fastest with the mostest". If it is true that it is knowledge that brings strength, and that it is the unknown that brings fear, it is not surprising that there was hysteria in those insecure days.

The period of doubtful rumor ended sharply however, when in March, President Roosevelt by a proclamation gave to General DeWitt the power to remove all persons, non-citizens and citizens alike as he saw fit from his area of Western Defense Command.





Few days later a map came out in the newspaper showing the areas to be evacuated. All the heavy centers of populations were included. We were included in there all right. Now what? Work had been started. But it was really official this time.

Even with the official proclamation, however, we still clung to the thread of hope that no definite period had been set. Perhaps we could stay till July and harvest the crop that we had already started at least. In April the county agent asked me to make a survey of the Japanese farms in our vicinity. The purpose of the survey, he told me, was twofold: First to know the extent of Japanese investment and acreage, and second, to aid the new tenants in farming the land in the crops planted. The survey took in the crops, the acreage planted or intended to be planted, the fertilizers used, the equipment on hand, and suggestions to be used by the people taking over. I was told to assure the farmers that the government would see to it that they received a fair return for any labor expended on the crops, though just how he could not say. So I went from farm to farm.

I felt a pain in my heart as the farmers carefully listed the pea poles on hand, the sacks of fertilizer, the hay for the horse, the cultivator that they must sell or leave behind. There was a gulf, I knew, between the two viewpoints: the evacuee's primarily wanting to know what will become of my crops, what will become of my pea poles and my horse?, while the viewpoint of the Americans

were primarily: "Given these equipment and crops, how can we continue the process of growing these crops with these people gone?" The Japanese had led a highly specialized life in the valley, so that almost all the shipping vegetables were produced by the Japanese, and the dairymen and the berrygrowers among the white farmers had no interest in engaging in growing lettuce, peas, cauliflower that they had no experience in growing. In the hysterical fears aroused in the cities and in the official circles, there was the fear that the Japanese farmers would cease to care for their crops or that they would plow under the crops. It was somewhat disgusting to those who had so courageously plowed and planted in spite of freezing and lack of credit.

At the time of the survey early in April, approximately 80% of the people had as yet no arrangement to have their equipment and crops turned over to a receiving farmer. Now the Farm Security Administration swung into action, and we were asked to register our acreage and our crops and our equipment values with the office. To the office would come white farmers and Filipino farmers to look over the farms. The FSA would act as an intermediary in arranging fair prices. If the credit investigation of the prospective buyer was satisfactory, an application for a FSA loan would be sent to San Francisco for approval, and the buyer would be able to pay for the farm and its equipment. Of course not all the farmers made such arrangements. Many owned their own farms. They leased to others. Others made private deals with neighbors to take over. The majority of the cases were tenant farmers, however, so that many outright sales were made through the FSA. There were tragic cases of people who were buying their land through the Federal Land Bank of Spokane who were forced to lose their land through forfeiture because they could not make arrangements to finish the payments.

Soon after the opening of the FSA offices throughout the valley, the orders came that the people in the northern part of the King County were to evacuate to Pinedale in California within two weeks. Still many had not made arrangements. How the majority of the people who evacuated first in the County disposed of their affairs is still a mystery to me, but there were a few abandoned places. I know of a few greenhouses abandoned, and in which there are weeds growing.

Now the selling of personal household goods began in earnest. "Refrigerator for sale"---"Dining Room Furniture for sale"---signs

appeared in the windows, ads appeared in the newspapers. Mother sold some of the furniture through the farmer's Auction Pavillion. "Have you sold your furniture yet?" was a common greeting. Cars began to appear in the streets with "Evacuating--car for sale" "Good tires" painted on their wind shields. Naturally in a limited market with so much for sale at once, many things were sold cheaply. Furniture for \$5.00, refrigerator for \$40.00 were rumored. "Don't sell at a loss," the government pleaded.

## THE EXODUS

The metropolitan Japanese were being evacuated earlier than the rural Japanese. The people in Seattle were being moved to Puyallup as all this was going on. They would pass about ten in the morning in front of our house, rumbling lines of huge chartered buses loaded black with people, and waving as they passed our house. Sometimes I would be working, but I would not want to look up. I wanted to hide from them--perhaps because while they were being sent away, I was yet free, or perhaps because I wanted to flee from the thought of being sent away like them. Months later I was to understand the instant feeling of comradeship that one evacuee feels for another. Going from Pinedale to the Tule Lake Relocation Center, our train passed by the Turlock Reception Center. The children poured from their barracks to wave at us, and all of us on the train waved back frantically.

As soon as the Puyallup Center was occupied, the people from the surrounding valley went to see them. There came back rumors of haggard faces--of lack of food--exaggerated, no doubt--but hearing these stories we would send food to Puyallup--and preparing for our own evacuation we bought concentrates such as powdered milk, raisins, cheese, vitamin pills, bouillon cubes, chocolates--all in anticipation of starvation--and all of which were, as far as we were concerned, absolutely unnecessary. "What kind of clothing shall we take?", What kind of luggage is the best? They say you can't take knives or flashlights. How much can you get into the duffle bags? All these questions kept the women folks busy and jumping.

One afternoon we saw an army truck go by the house and stop at a power line pole. We ran out to see. There it was: Proclamation to all persons of Japanese ancestry residing in King County north from the Pierce County line--and so on--and ending: General John L. DeWitt, Western Defense Command, the Presidio,

San Francisco, California. The inevitable had come. Our farm had still not been disposed of, and here was the notice to evacuate in 14 days. We had difficulty because the farm was on an estate with several other farms, and the lawyer for the estate would not release the lessor from the lease. Finally we made arrangements to sub-lease to the new tenant, being still responsible for the payment of the rent. There was still a tremendous amount of packing our goods for storage. There were the difficult decisions of what to leave and what to take. A week before the date set for the departure, all the families went to the high school gym to register. The ladies registered us, gave us a family number, 16848, the number to be written on all our baggage; they gave us tags to put on our baggage, and tags to put on ourselves with our family number on it so that we would not get lost. The doctor looked at our temperature and looked into our throat, asked us if we had had our three typhoid shots. Next we went to the FSA desk and told them about the arrangement that we had made for the farm. "Have you any debts?" they asked. Next to the Federal Reserve desk. We asked if we could store some of our things with the government, and he said, "Haven't you friends with whom you could store your things? We will not take responsibility for the things we take. However, if you do not have friends with whom to store things, you may bring them to the Western Producers' Exchange, and we will take it away." It was not very encouraging, and it hurt our pride to ask them to do something for us which they did not seem eager to do. We decided to store all our things with our friends.

What to store, and what to throw away? An old collection of high school papers would come out of the attic. I could not bear to burn it. Sisters did not want to throw away the rocks that she had brought home from the beach; in the barn, old preserve jars, old harness, old kerosene lamps. It was a tremendous job to even throw them away. The junk man bought our papers and metals. But still we had to burn big piles of things. I gave my pictures to the camera club friends, the piano I put into the church parlor, the washing machine and dishes went into the basement of one friend, the books into the basement of another friend. Here and there, our boxes were scattered all over the town. The furniture we put into a barn of another evacuee. The beds and a few cooking utensils we kept until the last day, and then put them in the barn with the furniture and nailed the door. Now it

was noon, and we did the last minute chores. Father fed the horse an extra gallon of barley. Then we loaded our truck with our and a neighbor's luggage, and started for the train.

## TO A NEW WORLD

The 18 car train was drawn up on the siding along the packing house from which we used to ship our peas and lettuce, and the place was full of people. There was a tremendous lineup of trucks loaded with baggage. Along in the middle of the afternoon, it began to rain. We wondered how everyone could get all the baggage, duffle bags, and blankets into the two baggage cars but it was easily done. Many friends had come to see us off. We sat in the red plush seat of the coach. "How's chance of getting a free trip with you?" "Tell us what they feed you." "Don't forget to write."

We didn't feel so bad about leaving with all the excitement of leaving. But soon when six p.m. came and the train began to move, and we saw old Mr. Ballard waving his hat at us, his coat collar turned up against the rain, mother began to cry. I couldn't see through my tears either. I saw the Main Street Crossing--there were more people waving. The train began to go faster and the berry rows, the rhubarb, the lettuce fields, the pea fields began to slip past our window like a panorama. My throat hurt, but I couldn't take my eyes from the familiar fields and pastures slipping so quickly away.

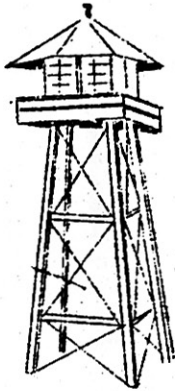
An hour later, toward sunset, the sun came out again. We saw it shining over the Puget Sound. The country was no longer the familiar scenes of our valley, and we did not feel so badly. It felt good to relax and close my eyes. I felt at peace as the train rolled steadily southward. So ended the world I had known since boyhood and a new world of the evacuee began for me.

--Shuji Kimura

I am a citizen--  
 Let no slander  
 Slur my status.

In the other war,  
 I stood with countless others  
 Side by side  
 To fight the foe.  
 My arm was just as strong  
 My blood fell  
 As bright as theirs  
 In the defense of a new world  
 More precious far  
 Than any tie of land or race.

If in this holocaust  
 It be decreed  
 My loyalty be tested  
 By submission,  
 What is the difference  
 If the end be same?



# LOYALTY

My reason may be tested--  
 Not my heart.

O, what is loyalty  
 If it be something  
 That can bend  
 With every wind?

Steadfast I stand,  
 Staunchly I plant  
 The Stars and Stripes  
 Before my barracks door,  
 Crying defiance  
 To all wavering hearts.

I am a citizen--  
 I can take  
 The bad with good.

--Sada Murayama