

Shigeko Kitamoto

From Bainbridge Island, we were the first group to be taken to Manzanar. I didn't want my children, who were 7, 4, 2, and 9 months old, to have bad feelings, so I told my oldest daughter that we were going on a vacation. But on the boat, train and bus, there was always a soldier with us with a gun on his shoulder.

When we got to Manzanar, we found that the barracks were not yet finished - just bare wood with no tar paper around them. Within 2 or 3 days, the lumber started to dry and there were gaping spaces of from  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 inch on the floor and siding. On windy days, there was sand all over our room. Some mornings when we woke up there was sand all over our faces and in our mouths. We looked at each other and saw how dirty our faces were. Where our heads lay on the pillow, there were dirty marks - sand all over everything.

The food was mostly canned vegetables and dried food. We had hardly ever eaten these things on Bainbridge Island because we were mostly farmers, so almost all the islanders got sick, with diarrhea.

There were not enough toilets so we had to wait in long lines. Older people talked to each other and said that we were all going to die slowly, that they were poisoning us.

I was carrying my son back to our room after a meal. We walked along the kitchen's back side. The garbage can was open and my boy saw a fresh, tiny red radish. He wanted that little radish so bad. I picked it up and gave it to him. I felt so bad at home, this would have been nothing, we would have thrown it away. We didn't have fresh radishes or any other fresh vegetables served to us. I wondered if people's gossip that high officers or other workers got different, good food is true.

The real estate man and the person taking care of our property always wrote to me to sell our land, that we would never come back to Bainbridge Island, but I kept saying no. I wanted to save our property to come home to after the war. I didn't care if I lost everything in the house, I wanted to go back to where I was born and raised. At least I saved my home and land, and met up with old friends on our return. Our doctor and lawyer were the first persons to come and see us when they heard that we were back. Of course, our yard and house were ruined but they were still there. Some had put goats and animals in my precious rhodies and other garden shrubs, and 23 acres of land was pretty wild, but I am thankful I had that to return to.



I had to take care of 4 children, so I could not become sick. Only for 1 day, luckily I had a hot water bottle to put under me. My baby was the youngest child so I had to wash diapers. Other women helped me by minding the baby.

The mess hall in our block was not completed so we had to walk a long distance to block 9 to eat. Sometimes the wind blew so hard we couldn't even see the people walking beside us. My oldest said, "What a vacation we're having. I don't want to go to the mess hall. I am not hungry. I will watch the baby so you go eat, mama." She made me cry. There was not enough milk for the baby, so I used to buy cartons of cigarettes from the canteen and trade them for milk from the mess hall worker between meals.

Sometimes snakes would crawl under the barracks so I had to watch the children all the time. When I was washing diapers in the laundry room, my 2 year old son found a scorpion and almost picked it up. I screamed and picked him up and ran to the mess hall. A man caught it and put it in a jar. It was displayed in our mess hall for a long time.

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