

N A M E: OLIVE OGAWA HALL  
B O R N: SANGER, CALIFORNIA, CITIZEN OF USA  
MARRIED TO CHARLES W. HALL  
C H I L D R E N: GORDON AND ELLEN  
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P R O F E S S I O N: REGISTERED NURSE  
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ACTUAL RECORD KEPT DURING THE Years, 1941-1942  
POEM WRITTEN IN SALINAS ASSEMBLY CENTER 1942

THE TWO SIDES OF THE FENCES

By Olive Ogawa Hall

June 1942 In Salinas

On one side on treeless barren land  
Many dirty brown houses stand.  
Close together, ugly and hideous are they  
Straight, same and horrible in every way.

From the many narrow doors  
Emerge black heads by twos and by fours.  
They clutter all over the crowded place  
Typical of their yellow race.

They yell and yelp around  
Never knowing where they're bound.  
Tis a shame they do not know more  
What for them there is in store.

May hap tis much better  
They remain ignorant altogether.  
For who knows not even we  
What our fate is to be.

The men in crowded rooms gather.  
To stay inside they'd rather  
To play chess or match a coin.  
Or in games they'd join.

The women gather hither and yon.  
Wagging their tongues on and on  
About the misery, hatred and shame  
Cast on every Jap's name.

When the hours for meals arrive  
The whole dump is at once alive  
Young and old to the bread line dash.  
To fill their plates with daily hash.

When through, some go for more  
Only to be greeted by the cook's negative roar.  
Always hungry are they  
Growing more ravenous day by day.

What is to become of this innocent race?  
Guilty only because of their face  
They'll only find peace when they die  
When to the cruel world they've said good-bye.

On the other side lies the cool green grass.  
Whose beauty nothing could surpass  
The houses clean and white  
Is indeed an envious sight.

The trees swaying to and fro.  
Gives shade to all who under them go.  
The people there live undisturbed.  
And eat wholesome meals unperturbed.

Their fair white faces  
Disguise them from their races  
Who knows what lie behind the mask  
To reveal them is indeed a task.

Why, Oh why are the people concentrated  
From the world segregated?  
Until the fences have been torn apart  
Can Democracy here play a part?

Well--I'm one of those of Japanese ancestry, a Nisei, who was living and very much alive being twenty years old during the time of evacuation and went through much emotional upheaval and pain at that time and continuously for ten years or so more thereafter constantly being reminded of it by people. In fact at times I was ashamed to be Japanese.

Finally I have managed to silence all the hatred, discord, hurt and bitter nerve endings until now when our beloved Rev. Dick Nishioka and my son and daughter-in-law have awakened again in me this forgotten event--not in the same way but to feel a responsibility to God and to all human beings. So I have dredge up my old old story--the lossof my schooling, money, wages, travel expenses, and most important the loss of the hopes and dreams of the challenges of youth. I have kept writings of this period of my life, not as a record of hate or anger; but I used to cry out to the world in writings. This is exactly as I expressed it in 1941-1942

Dec. 7, 1941 marks the beginning of the end of my school of nursing life or life itself. On Sunday evening at 8 PM I returned to the Nurses' home in Fresno after a good time at home in Sanger. I was astonished to hear that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. Everyone in the Nurses' home told me about this drastic incident and seemed to connect me directly to it. For the first time in my whole life I began to realize the full meaning of racial prejudice and I felt everything crumble inside of me. As the weeks passed I heard many harsh words about the Japanese, any Japanese. I never felt more innocent than at that time and I kept working with more zest and love for all. I could not believe that anyone could hate us for something we had nothing to do with.

I was wrong, for with the month of January came signs on streets, newspapers, yelling and screaming of "Japs" of Japan, Japs of USA, Japs everywhere. I had a pain in my heart, but I tried to keep my mind focussed on nursing and was determined to finish with high honors with my RN and BS degrees.

In February news of orders for evacuation or persecution of Japanese American citizens reached us like a bomb. We were hurt, bewildered and scared. No one seemed to give us any actual aid, but our friends kept saying "Everything will be all right." Nothing was all right, however, because in March there were signs all over posted for us to evacuate by a certain date. We were scared to go outside the hospital area. Also the barracks across the street the Fresno fairgrounds were almost completed for us to enter.

In April Los Angeles got their orders, the the other cities got theirs. Day in and day out we were living in fear and dread. We expected people to hate us; so they did. We were such nervous wrecks, My room mate and I volunteered to help as a nurse in one of the camps not knowing much what it was all about.

In the month of May we were almost prepared to leave our beloved school and friends as the events became inevitable and impossible. One morning we were ordered to leave; so we went to Sanger to go with our families. Two days later my friend and I received orders to go to the Salinas Assembly Center to nurse the sick.

I was sad to go away from home but at that time I was glad to be of some use.

All the pregnant ladies, newborn babies and the very sick were going first to travel on the train to Salinas camp; so we were to go with them and be their nurses. The long long journey with all the vomiting, fevers, feedings with no sleep time, made us appreciate even our horrible empty dreary barracks when we reached Salinas. The barb-wire fences and the guards gave me a bad feeling of the end of our freedom.

Many unheard of scenes, acts, deeds, lies were witnessed by us and we experienced a cruel hard life taking care of the deathly ill, Tuberculosis, communicable diseases, and many other cases. The two of us and a Doctor set up a Hospital in one of the barracks.

On July 5th the Salinas evacuees after days of getting ready, boarded buses to Poston, Arizona our future home and permanent place in the concentration camp.

The ride was suffocating with dust blowing through the windows and the hot sun streaming in. Many babies, pregnant women, the sick, mentally ill were all coughing and choking and the muffled cries smothered the congested air. Finally we reached our destination where our weaker brothers collapsed with heat prostration and sun stroke.

We registered, took some oath, signed something without reading it and went through the dust trying to find our barrack 211-11-13.

Brown, dirty, dusty shacks made of tar paper full of knot holes met our tired eyes. So dead tired were that we sank into the nearest cot, and we flopped on it without a care about the heat, present, future or past. Soon, however, we were drenched in perspiration. Globules of sweat ran down our skin and made pools on the cot which was made of crude canvas. We looked outside for signs of water but the threatening burning heat made us retreat into the hot barracks again. Finally, so parched and dehydrated were we that we ran out to find a faucet, but only in vain. We found one but only drips of hot water dribbled from it. We drank and drank and perspired all over again.

8 PM arrived--still Poston knew no relief from heat. Still the air was sizzling. If only there were trees or anything to give us shade, but more dust, dust, dust. Dust came through the knot holes, dust collected in our nostrils, eyes, clothes, anything and everything. We almost gave up.

Finally the sun set and we went into the barracks to sleep, but the stifling hot air made us run out again into the shadows of the night. At 12 midnight finally it was bearable and we fell into our cots, and went to sleep too fatigued to even wipe the perspiration. At six AM the hot sun began its work again and we too had to get up to begin our work in the Hospital clinic where people just streamed in every second of the 24 hours.

As time burned on, we worked in many departments where we had had no experience, but most of the doctors and graduate nurses were very nice and taught us many things. I spent time in Surgery, Obstetrics, Medical and Surgical wards. The Isseis really loved us as they lay helpless in the hospital as we knew some Japanese.

My face broke in a severe heat rash which developed into ugly scars, and my leg was injured; but other than that I plugged along going to work at the hospital every day working 10 to 14 hours a day without many days off.

Life for most was lazy, inert. People stopped caring about everything including their moral standards. They responded only to food, water and sleep. To some sleep came first and they never awakened. Being nurses we always put on a pretty good front-- cheerful smile. This time it was we who kept saying to all "Things will be better tomorrow. That tomorrow seemed never to come and inwardly our hearts too began to sag with the heat.

At first food was barely tolerable; but as time dragged on starch and the cheapest foods predominated in our menus. Due to poor choice <sup>of</sup> foods, no one had energy and their health was poor. Even minds began to deteriorate and no one seemed to be bothered about right or wrong. Manners were nil. Children ran around hungry and looking for amusements which weren't there.

This is the end of my writing and the writer will conclude as follows: "Life in Poston is uncalled for, brings about unnecessary misery to mankind, future failure of youths, delay of all education, robbery of happiness which we once knew, and a loss even to the government. Besides all that our faith, our pride, our hopes, our dreams our energies, and all that matter are crumbling and melting away in this awful heat and awful existence. These wrongs of this war may be forgotten, but very hard to heal.