

HIATUS

by

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I ARRIVED at the Dearborn Street Station aboard the Santa Fe. The sights and sound of the city were strange and the illuminated Coca Cola sign along Michigan Avenue somehow left an indelible impression through all these years. I was driven up Michigan Avenue, northward along Sheridan Road, a route flanked by mansions and expensive looking homes — Our Lincoln Zephyr then turned into one of the driveways and stopped. I had arrived at my new home.

In the morning I discovered that my room was on the second floor of a lakeside mansion facing a court yard, a two-car garage and a small victory garden. After I spent the morning getting acquainted with my employer, it seemed only natural that he would place me in charge of his victory garden, requesting that I improve the size of his radishes. The only suit in my wardrobe was dark blue. My employer, however, would have preferred

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black to match my cap, he said, as we drove into town to obtain my chauffeur's license.

The next few days were spent studying the Chicago street map, and cleaning and polishing a Lincoln Zephyr convertible and a Packard limousine. I made several test runs around town on errands to acquaint myself with the vehicles and with the streets. My ultimate challenge arrived one morning when I was told to spend the day chauffeuring the lady of the house, the widowed mother of my employer. Our morning schedule of visits to various places went quite well. I must admit that although my chauffeuring etiquette may not have been professional, the lack thereof may have been compensated for by my servile comportment. Then it happened — directly in front of Marshall Field and Company's downtown store — misfortune in the form of a volcanic radiator proclaimed a hissing end to my career as a professional chauffeur. Placing my aged, distraught and trembling passenger into a tax-cab, I engaged the services of a tow truck for my less than triumphant exodus through the streets of Chicago.

In the ensuing days, demand for my chauffeuring services diminished and more of my time was required in housekeeping chores. The tedious work of hand cleaning venetian blinds, I found, was difficult to approach with zest. The radishes in the victory garden never did grow very large. Even-

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tually my employer and I mutually concluded that perhaps my multifaceted talents would better be appreciated by a more enlightened employer. Thus ended my short career as chauffeur, houseboy and gardener.

An unemployed nineteen year old youth in a strange city two thousand miles from home; a nation at war. The incongruity of this situation is no stranger than that which was experienced in other ways by over 70,000 other American citizens in the days following December 7, 1941.

I was watching a film in a theater in Los Angeles, when the public address system announced the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Driving the thirty miles home, and listening to the news commentary on the car radio, I became concerned about the impact this event would have on our family. Although my sisters and I were born in the United States, and therefore U.S. citizens, our foreign born mother was not. (Our father had died four years earlier.)

Thus not only was my mother an alien, but also on this day, December 7, 1941, she had become an enemy alien. In a setting of racial prejudice and discrimination already existing on the West coast, this thought spurred me homeward at more than usual speed.

This concern for our parents was shared by many of my fellow Japanese Americans on that day.

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In the days that followed, our apprehension grew as certain elements of the press and media became increasingly vituperative against all Japanese. As the rising tide of public opinion against us gained momentum, incidents of knee-jerk patriotism, such as the throwing of bricks through windows of Japanese businesses and other acts of vandalism, were indulged in by numerous self-anointed "patriotic" Americans.

The decision to evacuate persons of Japanese ancestry from the West coast was not made coincidentally with the outbreak of the war, but emerged through steps and intermediate decisions along the way. On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which gave the Secretary of War the authority to designate any region as a military area and to exclude any or all persons from it. Subsequently, hearings were held to inquire further into the interstate migration of citizens. A notable proponent of the evacuation and incarceration of persons of Japanese ancestry was the then Attorney General of California who later became Governor of California, and finally the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court — Earl Warren.

The question of the constitutionality of the law and the civil rights of individuals did not emerge in sharp focus in the minds of many of us at that stage. Perhaps we were conditioned too long in our ancestral culture to accept authority without question.

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Perhaps the passion of the nation at war was so overwhelming as to block out from our minds any thought of questioning the rights of the authority.

In any event, the days until our departure were spent complying with military orders, such as the curfew, travel restrictions and prohibition against possessing contraband.

This brings to mind an incident which happened to me during this period. At some point during my high school years, I had become fascinated with the workings of the radio and had stored in my home a quantity of dismantled radio parts, such as tubes, condensers, resistors and speakers, all accumulated from taking apart broken radios. By the expansion of powers under Executive Order 9066, the military had placed under prohibition the possession of all short-wave radios and components by persons of Japanese ancestry. Concerned over what may be defined as a short-wave radio component, not wishing to argue the point under the circumstances and mindful of the omnipotent power of search and seizure proclaimed by General DeWitt of the Western Theater of Operation, I decided to surrender these items to the Sheriff of Orange County in Santa Ana, California. Accordingly, early one Sunday morning, with my car trunk loaded with the dangerous contraband, I embarked on my mission. Midway through my journey a tire suffered a puncture. A service station was nearby, and I

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sought permission from the attendant to use an area in which to change the tire. I opened the trunk to remove the spare tire and made the change in short order. Thanking the man, I resumed my journey. Within minutes, however, I was met by two units of the sheriff's police who motioned me to pull over to the shoulder and then ordered me to open the trunk of the car. Apparently the sheriff's office had received news of a suspicious Japanese with lots of mysterious electronic parts in the trunk of his car. The rest of my trip was made in grand style escorted between two patrol cars with screaming sirens and flashing lights enroute to the sheriff's station. I never did find out what happened to my property.

I do not recall the time intervals between the notification of Executive Order 9066 and the date set for the actual evacuation from our home. The period was spent busily sorting out our belongings and packing them in cartons in accordance with Army regulations. There was no need to advertise for the sale of furniture, automobile and other personal belongings because, of course, the public had heard the news and came ready to pick up items at bargain quick-sale prices.

On evacuation day, my mother, two sisters and I were picked up and taken to a point of assembly where we boarded a train for our trip to an unknown destination. After several hours of travel through mostly unfamiliar and remote territory, we arrived

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in the town of Parker, Arizona at about dusk. We were immediately transferred on to army vehicles which transported us about 15 miles further into the desert to what we later realized was part of an Indian reservation.

It is difficult now to describe the feelings of young people who, although realizing the seriousness of the evacuation felt a sense of new adventure and anticipation during much of the trip. The grimness of the occasion suddenly hit us, however, as we passed through the barbed wire entry gate manned by soldiers armed with rifles and bayonets.

We stepped down from the truck in the darkness onto inches of fine powdery dust. Since we were one of the earliest groups to arrive in this particular camp, it was apparent that they were not entirely prepared for our arrival. After our registration, we each were given a bag of ticking and told to stuff it with straw. This was to be our mattress. We were then led to a room about 20 feet square. This room was one of five units contained in a single army type barrack. The barracks were constructed of sheeting boards and covered on the exterior by tar paper. One drop light was provided for each room which was shared by the entire family.

A typical housing block contained twelve barracks, one combination latrine and laundry room, one common mess hall and a recreational hall. The name of our camp was Poston or the Colorado River

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Relocation camp. This was one of the ten relocation centers located throughout the United States to accommodate about 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry, both resident aliens and American citizens. Poston was subdivided into three separate camps and contained about 18,000 people. We were in camp number one.

Medical care and sanitation, which was the direct responsibility of the U.S. Public Health Service, was provided by recruiting Japanese doctors and nurses and assigning them to various centers. Eventually, hospitals were built and staffed to the extent possible by evacuee doctors and nurses.

No formal educational system had been contemplated in the original planning and no budget had been provided by the government. However, effective programs were developed in cooperation with those evacuees who had previous experience and training in education. In Poston, a brick factory eventually was built by the evacuees. These bricks were used to construct various school buildings which still stand today and are being used by the Indians in the Colorado River Indian Reservation.

Religious activities were permitted. The three main faiths, Protestant, Catholic, and Buddhist, were allowed to promote their respective services. The Easter sunrise service of 1943 was celebrated with a mass choir of 300 — an impressive sight as we greeted the sunrise over the desert and mountain.

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Recreational programs were also a cooperative effort between the camp administration and the evacuees. Team plays and tournaments were organized in a variety of sport events. A theater and a swimming pool were also built by the evacuees in Poston. On occasion some of us would trek to the nearby Colorado River for a picnic and swim. Handicraft groups were formed for various crafts. My mother became quite proficient in carving birds from scraps of wood. Some of the more ambitious individuals would hike to the mountains to find iron wood which they shaped and polished into fine art pieces.

Until the evacuees had time to settle down and improve the surroundings, much of the land around camp was dry powdery soil. Several times a year we had severe dust storms forcing us to seek shelter indoors since breathing was next to impossible due to the force of the wind and powdery sand. In the wake of these storms, dust covered everyone from head to toe as well as everything inside the barracks.

The administration and the operation of the relocation camps was the responsibility of the War Relocation Authority, whose function was to coordinate the works of the various Federal agencies involved. To the extent practicable, the evacuees were enlisted to staff personnel positions within the administrative offices as well as various operational functions (such as food warehousing and distribu-

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tion, medical care, education, recreation, police and fire departments, among others).

No one was required to work, but once a person accepted a job, he or she was expected to carry it out. Compensation was set at either \$16 or \$19 per month, depending on the nature of the job. All evacuees were also given a clothing allowance of \$3.50 per month.

My first job was that of a typist clerk in the field office of a contractor erecting power lines to camps No. 2 and No. 3 (which were still under construction at that time). I think my owning a portable typewriter had more to do with my obtaining the job than my ability as a typist. After this work was finished, I contemplated working in the camouflage net factory, but was dissuaded because of the presence of fiber dust which I was told could cause tuberculosis or cancer.

Seeking the maximum pay, I found a position as foreman of several food warehouses. My responsibility was to see that the daily food requirement was delivered to the various mess halls throughout the three camps. This position had its reward in the form of tempting offers of steaks and other favors from the mess hall chiefs vying to be treated fairly in their food allocation.

Encounters with scorpions and Gila monsters was a common daily occurrence. Rattlesnakes were also frequently seen even around the barracks in the

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early days, but particularly in the remote areas around our food warehouses. A man in our block hunted rattlers and skins from his bounty could be seen hanging outside his barrack. I never did find out what he did with the snake meat, but I never accepted an invitation for dinner in his home.

Later when the position of assistant block manager was offered to me, I accepted (the presence of scorpions, snakes and Gila monsters in the warehouse having nothing to do with my decision, of course). This prestigious title of assistant block manager carried with it, among other duties, the responsibility to see that the latrines were adequately supplied with toilet paper and to file periodic nonsensical reports. I was also required to attend weekly block managers' meeting when my boss was inclined not to go, which frequently became the case as time progressed.

To overcome the many obstacles and adversities, many evacuees were forced to use their ingenuity. For example, with an assist from the Sears Roebuck catalogue some of us were able to fabricate crude but effective window air conditioners designed to draw air into the room through layers of moist excelsior. Within a month or two almost all the rooms in our block were equipped with this device, each having been put together piece by piece by individual dwellers. Sears mail order business in

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fans, motors and plastic tubings did quite well that year.

One day, toward the end of the first year in camp, some of us initiated a plan to build within our block a Japanese rock garden, complete with huge rocks, a waterfall and a pond stocked with carp. This idea was accepted with enthusiasm by other members of the block. Plans were drawn and the backbreaking job of digging was started in full force by crews of men working in shifts. Huge rocks were brought in from the nearby mountain and set in place; water lines were laid to provide the waterfall and to fill the pond. The garden had started to take shape.

However, world events could not help but intrude into our sequestered life within the "barbed wire" enclosures, and in Poston, Camp 1, Block 27, it interrupted the work on our garden project. As the war against the Axis powers intensified, the U.S. Army found the need for additional fighting men and thought that some eligible inmates of the relocation camps could be drafted for military service.

The rationale for evacuation of all person of Japanese ancestry from the West coast was that they presented potential danger from sabotage and that it was impracticable to segregate the loyal from the disloyal individuals under the state of wartime emergency (though it should be noted that during the

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entire period, not one act of sabotage by this group was recorded).

Accordingly, the government felt that the time had arrived to face the task of separating the allegedly disloyal from the loyal. To implement this plan, the Army had prepared a questionnaire to be completed by all Niseis of draft age to determine eligibility for enlistment in military service and for defense industry work.

The two key questions on the questionnaire read as follows: Question (27) — "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?"; Question (28) — "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack from foreign or domestic forces, and foreswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor, or to any other foreign government power or organization?" There was no room for conditional response. The ambiguity of the second question was puzzling to most of us since Niseis were U.S. citizens and had never sworn allegiance to the Japanese Emperor. To compound the problem, a mistake was made in giving the same questionnaire to the Isseis (Japanese citizens). A "yes" answer to question 28 left the Isseis stateless since they were never allowed to become U.S. citizens through naturalization due to the fact that the Constitution of the United States restricted

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naturalization rights only to aliens who were "free white" persons.

Eventually, the questionnaire was modified and the difference between Isseis and Niseis was recognized by the government.

However, it was too late to avoid confusion and resentment toward the entire process which had by now caused dissent among the evacuees.

There were some who felt that a "yes" answer to question (27) could not be given without a concomitant restoration of full citizenship rights by the government, and they felt betrayed by those who answered with an unconditional "yes." The "no no boys" (those who responded in the negative to both questions 27 and 28, not out of disloyalty, but rather out of resentment against the way they were treated by their government) were transferred to a separate camp in Tule Lake, California.

Though it was highlighted by these events, dissension among the evacuees had existed throughout the internment period as varying degrees of resentment towards the government was shared by many. Several incidents of beatings resulted from clashes between extreme elements. On one occasion, a man was badly beaten by a gang in one of the quarters on the same night in which a dance party was being held in our block recreation hall. Being part of the social committee which had remained to clean up the hall, we were picked up by the police on sus-

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picion of being part of a plot to divert public attention while the beating took place. We were cleared of involvement by midmorning after spending the night in custody at the police headquarters.

Notwithstanding incidents such as these, camp life was generally peaceful and with the passage of time, grew to be wearisome to many of us. Thus when the government began its relocation program (relocating eligible persons to the interior), I applied for the first suitable job available and was accepted.

Eager for the freedom and yet plagued with fear of non-acceptance by a hostile society on the outside, I left my family in June, 1943 and headed by bus and train for faraway Chicago.

There are countless stories which can be told by other evacuees. Many families were herded into assembly centers, such as the Santa Anita Race Track where they lived in temporary quarters (horse stables) prior to being transferred a second time to relocation centers elsewhere in Wyoming, Arkansas, Utah, Colorado or Idaho, among others. The distinguished 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the "Go for Broke" battalion, composed solely of Japanese Americans, many of whom fought and died to show their loyalty. Others with bilingual ability and training entered the Army Military Intelligence Service and served in the Pacific as linguist, often behind enemy lines.

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What did it all mean?

Throughout the period since the Executive Order 9066 was issued, different legal and constitutional issues were raised and fought, but the practical result was the acceptance of the notion that in a state of wartime emergency, the Chief Executive has the authority to invoke his power indiscriminately, with secondary consideration to individual human rights.

In 1979, some thirty-two years after the last evacuee had left camp, two identical bills (S 1647 and HR 5499) were introduced in the U.S. Senate and in the House of Representative. The bills are entitled the "Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians Act." They will seek to establish a fact finding commission to determine whether a wrong was committed against a group of American citizens and permanent resident aliens relocated and interned as result of Executive Order No. 9066, and other associated acts of the Federal government.

For the young Niseis, the evacuation and internment was a violation of American citizenship rights and an injustice from which most have recovered and found a new beginning.

However, for the older Isseis, our parents who had migrated from Japan to settle on the West Coast in the early quarter of the Twentieth Century, the evacuation was a far greater tragedy. The sudden

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uprooting of their families from long established businesses, farms and fishing villages resulted in unrecoverable losses. For many of them the evacuation was a major disruption in their lives and the internment a hiatus from which they could not expect to return.

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