

Q2.96

67/14
c

My Experiences and also those of my Friends from Dec. 7, and in the light of those experiences, what part I, an evacuated Japanese-American, can do in winning the war and winning the peace which will make possible a true Democracy.

December 7, 1941, is a day which we Japanese-Americans will never forget ---- a day which changed the course of our life for better or for worse --- that is up to each one of us behind those barbed wire fences. Dec. 7, was just another Sunday to all of us. In the morning we went to Sunday School and to Church as usual. As we were having a late lunch in our Apartment in back of the Church one of the members dashed in and asked us if we had heard the news. Then we were told that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. We couldn't believe him and thought he was joking and regarded it as a very cruel joke. He told us to turn the radio on and so we did and sure enough we heard the bad news. My thought at that time was what's going to happen to the United States and not what was going to happen to myself. I had always considered myself an American and as to my loyalty I didn't even think about it, I just took it for granted that I was one of you and as loyal as you all. I was born and raised in Los Angeles and the United States was the only country that I knew. Later in the afternoon when I went outside I realized with a shock the possible effect that this War might have on me. You see the Los Angeles Union Church where I lived was located in the heart of Japanese town almost under the shadow of the City Hall. The streets which were usually filled with Sunday visitors were deserted and there were motor cops and police cars parked about every half a block along the streets. This I found out was for our protection since they were afraid some over-zealous patriot might come and do some damage. As I got on a Streetcar the conductor looked at me and said, "I feel for you. You know I was in a German Community in the last World War and it was certainly tough and believe me your not going to have an easy time." How prophetic he was. I was deeply touched by his words and then the full significance of my predicament dawned on me. When I came home I found that many of our Caucasian friends had called up wanting to know if we were all right and assuring us of their love and friendship no matter what happened. At that time I was a Senior at the University of California at Los Angeles and the next day being Monday I went to School scared. I wondered how the people would treat me on the Streetcar and how I would be regarded at School. But as I rode on the Street car nothing happened and when I went to my classes my fellow students were just as friendly as usual and I was deeply touched by the remarks made by the teachers. They all warned their classes not to take revenge on us Japanese-Americans as we were not to blame for this War. Our only crime was that we had the wrong set of ancestors. I was especially grateful to Dr. Han, a Chinese Gentleman, and I mean Gentleman, who was my Professor of Oriental History who cautioned the students and put in a good word for us Japanese-Americans. You know most Caucasians think that we Japanese and Chinese in America are not on speaking terms because of the war back in the old country but that is not so. My closest

friends both at U.C.L.A. and at Westmont College where I want to get my religious training were Chinese girls. Where there is understanding there is no hatred but love. At Christmas I got a job working in an Oriental Art Shop. There I learned that all was not well with us Japanese-Americans. Customers would come in asking us if we were Chinese or Japs and if we said Japanese many of them walked out after making some insulting remark. It many of the girls cry because of the cruel things that were said to them. On the other hand many of the customers came into the shop knowing that we were Japanese and left their names saying that any time we were in need they would like to help us. We were indeed grateful to these kind people. In talking over my experiences with my friends we came to the conclusion that cultured, educated Americans understood our situation and tried to help us but that the uncultured, uneducated Americans tried to make things unpleasant for us.

Then came rumors of Evacuation. We couldn't believe that it could happen to us since we were American citizens. Especially when we played such a vital part in the Wholesale and Retail Produce, Wholesale and Retail Flower and in Agriculture of California. We thought surely at this time we would be needed more than ever since the cry was for more production. Then we were subjected to a Curfew law. We had to be in our homes by 8 o'clock at night. Many a night I had my family in an uproar since I would dash in about 5 minutes to 8. Soon after that the 5 mile limit law came into effect and we couldn't go any further than 5 miles from our home. Our movements were quite hampered. Soon evacuation which we thought couldn't happen became a reality and we found ourselves getting all excited about going places, where, we didn't know. The suspense was terrific since we didn't know when we were going. California was divided into Districts and they would never tell us in advance when we had to go so we had to be ready at all times. The Shops in Lil' Tokyo, the Japanese section of town, all had signs out saying Evacuation Sale, sacrifice prices etc. The stores were packed with bargain seekers and where there were once artistically decorated window displays, there was now only a mad jumble of goods. I used to stand at the street corner watching this scene and it used to make me sad and at the same time angry to see these human vultures trying to get the best of a bargain and taking advantage of a people when they were helpless to fight back. Those were scenes of human beings at their lowest level.

At this time I would like to tell of some of the experiences of my friends. One of them is of a Doctor who is now in his middle thirties. He spent his undergraduate days at U.C.L.A. and then studied Medicine at Loma Linda. After his graduation he interned at the Los Angeles General Hospital and then later worked there and at the White Memorial and at the Japanese Hospital. Two years ago he thought the time was at hand to open his own office. He equipped his place with all the latest and expensive medical equipment. He was just getting himself established and was getting quite a few patients both Caucasian and Japanese when evacuation came along and he had to dispose of all of his equipment and lose his slowly nourished practice. He is now working hard as the Head of the Public Health Service at Poston, Arizona. Another friend that I have started to

work as a Truck Driver at \$18.00 a week for one of the largest Grocery Chains in Southern California. This Company had 16 Super Markets and 4 big Ranch Markets. Within 6 years time this youth of 27 worked his way up to be Manager of the Produce Warehouse. His division also handled some of the Groceries. His salary was \$40.00 a week plus free gas and a bonus every 6 months. If war hadn't broken out he was to have gotten \$50.00 a week. With his savings he bought a home not for himself but for his Mother and Father. Even though they are now considered Alien Japanese they had no wish to return to Japan but had hoped to spend their declining years where in America with their children and grandchildren. What the future holds for them now they do not know for we are only sure of one thing and that is the uncertainty of the future. Two older brothers of this youth are now serving in the U.S. Army. The reason he is not in the Army is that he had to stay home to help out his parents and 6 younger brothers and sisters. I would like to state here that there about 5000 Japanese-Americans now serving in the U.S. Army fighting side by side with their fellow Caucasian Americans because America is the only Country that they know and love. I have another friend who started a Typewriter Shop with her Brother about 5 years ago. Just before the war she ^{was} telling me that they thought they would be making so me money the coming year. Instead of making money she suffered a big loss.

Then came actual evacuation. There was much excitement and also many headaches since we were told that we could take only what we could carry and that included our bedding. After a sleepless night of last minute packing we found ourselves the next morning at the Santa Anita Assemble Center which was formerly a Racetrack. Our homes were the stables where once Seabiscuit and Whirlaway and such well-known horses lived. As we entered our rooms the awful smell which is peculiar to a Stable greeted us warmly and I should say strongly. The only furniture in there were cotbeds and one blanket a piece. For furniture we had to use our imagination and if we didn't have any imagination we just didn't have any furniture. What got me the most of all was the doorless latrines----no privacy whatsoever. Our showers were public affairs also where once the horses cleaned themselves. The Mess Hall where I ate fed 5000 people at meal time. So we had to wait in line, a long line with many curves. When we finally got in the food was nothing like what we were used to eat at home. It was quite sad. But despite all these inconveniences the Visitor's House at the entrance to the Center always gave me courage and new hope to go on. There in the Visitor's House would be seen Americans of all races ---- Chinese, Koreans, Mexicans, and Caucasians. Everyday this house would be crowded to capacity with people who came to bring us encouragement and things that we needed for we needed plenty. The faithfulness of my Caucasian Christian friends touched me deeply. One of these friends laughingly said that in one of the stores she had been asked if she were a professional buyer since she always bought so much. To those friends I shall be ever grateful.

Then came Relocation. When we heard we were coming to Arkansas I'm afraid we felt rather dispirited. To me Arkansas denoted Ozark Mts. and "Hillybillys". Rumors went around about mosquitos as large as sparrows. Thus we were not too anxious to get here. But when we arrived we were pleasantly surprised to see the beautiful green trees and abundant vegetation. We also found that the mosquitos were the

same size as those back home and so we were not too sad to be here. The one factor that impressed me most was the high calibre of the Caucasian Officials of the Camp. They actually treated us like human beings and tried to give us a fair break. Most of these Officials were Christians who practiced what they preached. I was very much interested and gratified to know how one man obtained his position here. He said that one evening he and his wife had a quiet hour together asking the Lord for guidance in working somewhere where they would do the most good. After the quiet hour he was sitting in the living room reading the paper when a small article in the paper concerning Rohwer Relocation Camp caught his eye. He immediately called Little Rock to see how he could get a job there. After signing a lot of papers he had a final interview with Dr. Hunter who is the Head of the Community Welfare division at Rohwer. He said that Dr. Hunter didn't ask him what his professional qualifications were. He said that was up to the Department Head for whom he would work. But he was interested in knowing what this man did outside of working hours. As this person was very active in Church work, Red Cross, and other activities concerned with the welfare of the people he was hired.

A friend asked me what I thought of living in Camp. He said that so many people were turning bitter, getting bored, and wanted to get out as soon as possible. My answer was naturally I don't like to stay here. It certainly is not my idea of Heaven. You know, no matter how kindly we are treated freedom is very precious especially when you don't have it and more so when we are living in a country founded on freedom for all people. But then there is no use getting bitter for I have found that bitterness does not hurt anyone but yourself. A friend of mine called my attention to a column in the Editorial section of the Gazette. You see my reading of the newspaper consists of reading the first page and then the funnies and then the Letters to the Editor section to see if we Japanese-Americans are considered as traitorous skunks that ought to be dumped in the Ocean or loyal Americans just as you all. I was very grateful to her for calling my attention to this article for I received a great deal of inspiration. It was a column by Elsie Robinson and I would like to read a portion of it to you at this time. She writes, "You're edging on, somewhere between 30 and 40. (In our case it would be 18 to 60.) And you're disgusted. Where've you gotten in life? What have you accomplished? ----- You're not actually hungry or shabby or friendless. Yet you're sick of everything. You don't get the old thrill out of life any more. Other folks seem to enjoy themselves. The kids you went to school with have surged ahead. They're interested, ambitious -- full of plans. But you're off the beam. ----- Some are cynical, some are sore, some don't care any more. But they're all sure that someone or something has done them dirt. Everything would have been just dandy if only ---- If only what? Just what is this invisible menace which has them down? Is it barely possible that it's themselves? I have been thinking of a line I read lately. Sounds simple at first glance but I've a hunch it holds the secret of most of our human misery. We can't do anything until we know what we want. Nothing very complicated about that is there? If there's one thing we're sure of it's that we know what we want. Why, we've always known what we wanted. Or have we? ----- For wanting means more than wishing. Wanting means more than indulging in personal, private dreams. Wanting means a ruthless searching of your own spirit until you find the one thing in life you can't do without. -----

And then hold on to that one thing through hell and high water." *How*
 According to Elsie Robinson whether we be outside or inside of the fence we can accomplish whatever we desire if we are willing to work hard enough. What a challenge!!!! Thus even though we be behind the barbed wire fences we can't sit down for the duration and wait for the war to be over. There is much work to be done.

Therefore the question is what can I do to help win the war and win the peace which will make possible a true democracy. First and most important of all I must show my loyalty by giving 100% ~~to~~ cooperation to what the Government asks me to do. We who are in Camp must work twice as hard as you outside in order to prove our loyalty since we are behind the fence because there was some doubt of our loyalty. Our task is to remove all ~~trace~~ of that doubt. In Camp my work is with the children. I feel that my duty is to make the children happy, give them a feeling of security, and make them realize that United States is their home and a country to love. When we think of readjustment we usually think only of adults but it's the small children from 4 to 8 who really need to be helped to adjust themselves to this new life because they do not understand. When ever the F.B.I. sees fit to release me I would like to go outside and do whatever work which will help to end this awful war. In my spiritual life I would like to practice activated Christianity, which is another term for the phrase, "Action speaks louder than words". Since being evacuated I have been spiritually strengthened. I also know that many others have been strengthened since there has been a great increase in Church attendance as compared to the time when we lived outside. Why? Because we now realize that those on the outside who have tried to help us the most and are out there putting in a good word for us are Caucasian Christians who practice what they preach. In Camp those Officials who try to give us a fair break are also those Caucasian Christians who practice what they preach. To them we are ever grateful. Yes, there is no use talking about Christianity if you are only a Sunday Christian. In our life in Camp where we constantly rub elbows especially in our own Blocks there is a wonderful opportunity to lead nonbelievers to Christ by activated Christianity. We have absolutely no privacy since a thin piece of gypsum board separates us from our neighbor and we eat in the same Mess Hall and use the same Laundry, Bath, and Latrine facilities. Our actions and deeds are noticed by everyone. If we do something that is wrong we are severely condemned because we go under the banner of Christianity and if we do anything that is good we are praised because we are Christians. It is much easier to lead nonbelievers to Christ by good deeds than by words *just as our Caucasian Christian friends on the outside & inside are doing.*

Thus I would like to say that I believe lasting peace and true democracy in this world can only be established when we follow the teachings of Jesus Christ.

In closing I would like to read a poem written by the Principal of our Elementary Schools, Mr. Meñtil H. Ziegler, who expresses our Philosophy of life down in Rohwer. -----

OUR ROHWER HOME

Our Rohwer home we must confess
 Could be a place of much distress

If we look only on the lack
Our piece of mind is bound to crack
And bring us woes we scarce could guess.

You see the thing we have to stress
Is God's abiding helpfulness.
With loving thoughts we all must pack
Our Rohwer home.

Let's have a home where we express
A maximum of happiness.
In life there is no turning back
So here among the barracks black
Let's buckle down to work, and bless
Our Rohwer Home.