

46:11 "Japay, City of Dust": typescripts

1979-80

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Topaz, City of Dust

BY YOSHIKO UCHIDA

It was decidedly not by choice that I happened to spend eight months during World War II living in a cluster of dusty barracks located in the middle of Utah's bleak Sevier Desert. This unhappy circumstance occurred because I was one of several thousand Japanese-Americans incarcerated by our government in Topaz, Utah, one of ten wartime concentration camps established to house the Japanese uprooted from the West Coast of the United States. This mass evacuation, without trial, was the result of Executive Order 9066 that was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in February 1942 and placed 110,000 Japanese, two-thirds of whom were American citizens, under guard and behind barbed wire. Deprived of our constitutional rights as well as our privacy and our dignity as human beings, we were guilty of nothing more than that we resembled the enemy in Japan.

Until the war, my parents, <sup>older</sup> sister, and I lived in Berkeley, California, where I grew up and went to school. My father was an executive of Mitsui and Company, a Japanese business firm in San Francisco. Only hours after the Pearl Harbor attack, the FBI came to apprehend my father, and for three days we had no word where they had taken him. When he was finally able to contact us, we learned that he and hundreds of other Japanese businessmen and community leaders were to be sent to a prisoner of war camp in Missoula, Montana.

My mother, sister, and I were left behind in Berkeley to cope with the mounting anti-Japanese feelings (fed by long years of anti-Asian sentiment

in California) and to face mounting rumors of a mass evacuation of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast. The nightmare of evacuation became a reality in April 1942, and the U.S. Army gave us ten days' notice to get out of the home in which we had lived for fifteen years.

Allowed to take only what we could carry, we were shipped along with 8,000 Japanese of the San Francisco Bay Area to the Tanforan race track. There, for six months, we lived in a horse stall formerly occupied by a single horse. <sup>Shortly before we left,</sup> My father was ~~eventually~~ released "on parole" from Montana <sup>was able to join us in camp.</sup> and ~~joined us.~~

<sup>September</sup> In ~~May~~ of 1942 we were shipped by train to a concentration camp which we knew to be somewhere in Utah and was called Topaz. We had no idea how long we would be there. As the train approached our destination we watched the landscape closely, hoping it would give some indication of what Topaz would be like. We felt cautiously optimistic as we reached the town of Delta, for the land did not look too unfriendly or barren.

We were counted as we got off the train and then transferred to buses for the final leg of our journey to Topaz. As we rode along, we felt fairly hopeful, for we were passing pleasant little farms, green fields and clusters of trees. After a half-hour, however, there was an abrupt change. All vegetation stopped. There were no trees or growth of any kind except for clumps of dry greasewood. We were entering the edge of the Sevier Desert some fifteen miles east of Delta, and the surroundings were now as bleak as a bleached bone. Beyond the desert there were mountains rising above the valley with great majesty, but they were many miles away. The bus made a turn into the heart of the sun-drenched desert and there in the midst of nowhere were rows and rows of squat, tar-papered barracks sitting sullenly in the white, chalky sand. This was Topaz, <sup>Utah.</sup>

As the bus drew up to one of the barracks, we heard the unlikely sound of band music. Marching toward us down the dusty road was a group of young Boy Scouts who had come with the advance contingent, playing bugles, trumpets, and drums and carrying signs that read, "Welcome to Topaz--Your Camp." It was a touching sight to see them standing in the burning sun, covered with dust and making such a determined effort to lessen the shock of our arrival at this bleak desert camp. A few of our friends who had arrived earlier were also there to greet us. They tried hard to look cheerful, but their pathetic dust-covered appearance told us a great deal more than their brave words.

We went through the usual arrival procedure which consisted of registering, having a brief medical examination, and being assigned living quarters. Our family was to occupy Apartment C of Barracks 2 in Block 7. Henceforth our address would be 7 - 2 - C , Topaz, Utah.

*Insert # →*

As we plodded through the powdery sand toward Block 7, I began to understand why everyone looked like pieces of flour-dusted pastry. In the frantic and hasty construction of this barracks city, every growing thing had been removed, and what had once been a peaceful lake bed was churned up into one great mass of loose flourlike sand. With each step we sank two or three inches, sending up swirls of dust that crept into our eyes and mouths, noses and lungs. After two long sleepless nights sitting up on the train, this sudden encounter with the sun, the glaring white dust, and the altitude, made me feel weak and lightheaded. Just as I was on the verge of collapsing, we finally reached Block 7.

Each barracks, one hundred feet in length, was divided into six rooms for families of varying size, and we were assigned to a room in the center,

about eighteen-by-twenty feet in dimension, designed for occupancy by four people. We found that our room contained nothing but four army cots without mattresses. The inner sheetrock walls and ceilings had not yet been installed, nor had the black potbellied stove that was left standing outside our door. Cracks were visible everywhere in the siding and around the windows, and although our friends had swept out our room for us before we arrived, the dust was already seeping into it again from all sides.

The instruction sheet advised us not to put up any shelves until the carpenters arrived from Tanforan to install the sheetrock walls. It also indicated that there would be flush toilets and individual basins (rather than the tin troughs of our former camp) in all washrooms. When I went to inspect these facilities for our block, however, I discovered that there were no seats on the toilets, no water in the laundry, and no lights in the showers or latrines. Our water was being pumped up from nearby artesian wells almost 1,000 feet deep, and twice during our first day the water was turned off completely.

We returned to our room after lunch in the mess hall, and although our mattresses had not yet been delivered, we were so exhausted we spent the rest of the afternoon sleeping on the springs of our army cots. The temperature in our room the next morning was well below freezing, and we soon discovered that the temperature variation in a single day could be as much as fifty degrees. Some days started at thirty and soared by mid-afternoon into the eighties and nineties, so although we wore winter wools in the morning, by afternoon it became imperative to change to summer clothing. When my sister and I went out to meet some of the incoming buses in the afternoon, we would come home parched, sunburned, and feeling like well-broiled meat.

Although evacuees continued to arrive each day, the blocks to which they were assigned were progressively illequipped to house them. People who arrived a few days after we did found gaping holes in the roof where the stove pipe was to fit, latrine barracks with no roofs at all, and mattresses filled only with straw. Those who arrived still later did not even have barracks to go to and were simply assigned to cots set up in empty mess halls, laundries, or the corridors of the hospital. Many evacuees found themselves occupying barracks where hammering, tarring, and roofing were still in progress; and one unfortunate woman received second degree burns on her face when boiling tar seeped through the roof onto the bed where she was asleep.

I experienced my first dust storm about a week after we arrived. The morning had begun cold and brittle as always, but by afternoon a strange warm wind began to blow. I was in another block walking home with a friend when the wind suddenly began to gather ominous strength. It swept in on great thrusting gusts, lifting huge masses of sand from the ground and flinging them in the air. The sand quickly engulfed us and soon completely eclipsed barracks that stood only ten feet away. We dashed into the nearest laundry barracks, but even inside the building the air was thick with dust. The flimsy structure shuddered with each blast of wind, and we could hear objects being lifted from the ground and flung against the building. During the hour or more that we waited, there were moments when I <sup>was</sup> gripped with terror. I thought surely the barrack<sup>s</sup> would simply fly apart and we would be flung into the desert. When at last the wind let up a little, we decided to try to get back to our own barracks. As I ran the wind blew sand into my eyes and nose. I was breathing dust and my mouth was gritty with it. When I got to our room I found my mother sitting alone in a dust-filled room. She did not know where my father and sister were, but we hoped they were

safe somewhere. There was no point in trying to clean our room until the wind stopped blowing, so my mother and I shook out our blankets, lay down on our cots, and waited for the storm to subside. It was a long afternoon, and the wind did not die down until long after the sun had set.

As mornings and nights grew colder, we looked with increased longing at the black iron stove that stood uselessly outside our barracks waiting for work crews to bring it inside and connect it. One day, almost a month after our arrival, a work crew composed of resident men appeared and finally installed our stove. We were now reasonably warm in our quarters, and our food was beginning to improve. The correlation between good food and rising spirits was, I discovered, pathetically simple.

By now my father, sensing the tremendous needs of the struggling community, had volunteered to serve on several committees, two of which worked on the complex problems of employment and housing in camp. He was also an active lay leader of the interdenominational church, and when the camp canteen was converted into a consumer's cooperative, he was elected chairman of its first board of directors.

My mother, in her own gentle and quiet way, continued to be a loving focal point for our family, converting our dreary barracks room into a makeshift home where we invited our friends as we did back in Berkeley. Having been a close family, ours did not disintegrate, as many did, from the pressures created when entire families <sup>were</sup> ~~are~~ confined to living in a single room.

My sister, Keiko, utilized her training in preschool education at Mills College in Oakland, California, to establish a nursery school system for Topaz as she had done at Tanforan, and I applied for work in the Topaz

Elementary School System. We both earned a salary of \$19 a month for a forty-hour week, while workers in other categories earned \$16.

Blocks 8 and 41, located at opposite corners of camp, were designated as the two elementary school areas, and when I went with one of the white teachers employed at Topaz to inspect Block 8, we discovered that the school barracks ~~were~~ absolutely barren. There were no stoves, no tables or chairs, no light bulbs, no supplies, no equipment of any kind. The teacher invited me back to her quarters to write up our report, and I was surprised to see how comfortable a barracks could be when it was properly furnished. Until I had seen her comfortable, well-furnished quarters, I had not realized how much I missed our home in Berkeley, and I thought of it with more than the usual longing as I walked back to our room in Block 7.

I was assigned to register children and to teach at the school in Block 41, located at the opposite end of camp, farthest from the Administration Building. All the teachers there were resident Japanese, while the white teachers were all assigned to Block 8, close to the Administration Building and to their own home barracks. When we went to inspect the barracks of Block 41, the situation was even more alarming than had been the case in Block 8. There were large holes in the roof where the stovepipes were to fit, inner sheetrock walls had not been installed, floors were covered with dust and dirt, and there were no supplies or equipment for teaching. I wondered how we could ever open schools under these conditions, but registration of the children proceeded as scheduled Monday morning, October 19. Because it was so cold inside the barracks, we set up tables outside in the sun and registered the children there. The following day we had to send the children home because the barracks were still unusable and there were

no supplies or equipment for teaching. On Wednesday the barracks still remained untouched, although construction of the watchtowers and the barbed wire fence around the camp were proceeding without delay.

It was impossible for the children to sit inside the unheated barracks which retained the nighttime temperatures of 30 and 40 degrees. We tried moving our classes outside, but the feeble morning sun could not dispel the penetrating cold, and after half an hour we sent our children home once more. It was finally decided that the daily teachers' meetings would be held in the morning and classes shifted to the afternoon when the barracks, though still incomplete, would at least be warmer.

Before the inner sheetrock walls were installed at school, we had a severe dust storm that brought to a head a crisis that had long been brewing. About noon, gray-brown clouds began massing in the sky, and a hot sultry wind seemed an ominous portent of a coming storm. There was no word, however, that schools would be closed. Shortly after lunch, I started the seven-block walk to Block 41, wrapping my head in a scarf so my nose and mouth were covered as well. Before I was half way to school the wind grew so intense I felt as though I were caught in a hurricane<sup>e</sup> of dust. Barracks only a few feet away were soon completely obscured by walls of dust and I was fearful that the wind might sweep me off my feet. I stopped every few yards to lean against a barracks and catch my breath and then plodded on to school. When I got there, I found that many of the children had braved the storm to come to school and were already waiting for me in the classroom.

It touched me deeply to see the eagerness of the children to learn despite the desolation of their surroundings and the meager tools for learning. At the time they seemed to adapt with equanimity and cheerfulness

to this total and bewildering upheaval of their young lives, although the experience may well have inflicted permanent damage to their psyches.

I tried to conduct class, but dust poured into the room from all sides as well as from the hole in the roof which still lacked a chimney. It soon became obvious that we could not continue classes, and it seemed prudent to send the children home before the storm grew worse and stranded us all at school until evening. The teachers of Block 41 hurriedly dismissed school for the day, urged the children to be careful, and hoped they would make it safely to their home barracks.

That night the wind reached such terrible force I was sure our barracks would be blown apart. Pebbles and rocks rained against the walls, and the paper we stuffed into the cracks was quickly blown back into the room. Dust seeped in like smoke. For hours the wind shrieked around us like a howling animal, rattling and shaking our flimsy barracks. I wondered what I would do if I ever had a roomful of children under my care during another such storm but faced the sobering reality that actually there was not a thing I could do. The wind stopped short of destroying our entire camp, but I learned later that many of the camp's chicken coops had been blown out into the desert.

The following day, the non-Japanese head of elementary schools reprimanded the teachers of Block 41 for having dismissed school without consulting him. With no telephones in the barracks, however, there was no way we could have reached him in the Administration Building at the opposite end of camp. He had been unreasonable and inept in other matters as well, and this was simply the last straw. We were willing to put up with the physical inadequacies and to work hard to overcome the <sup>m</sup>the, but arrogance and <sub>λ</sub>

insensitivity on the part of a white employee was too much to bear. These were days of such frustration and despair that we were often close to tears, and the teachers of Block 41 were ready to resign en masse. The high school teachers, with problems of their own, were similarly demoralized. Only our superintendent, Dr. John C. Carlisle, who had the wisdom to accord us some dignity and understanding, prevented the mass resignations of the entire resident teaching staff. Eventually, with the appointment of a new and able elementary school head, things simmered down.

Toward the end of October we began to see snow on the mountains that ringed our desert, and even afternoons began to grow cold. A coal shortage soon developed and hot water was limited to two hours between 7:00 and 9:00 p.m., bringing on a hectic scramble for the showers each evening.

The sheetrock crews finally came to the block where I lived but moved at such a snail's pace that when the first snows fell in Topaz, they still had not reached our barracks. As if to compensate for this delay, we discovered one morning that small ten-by-twenty-inch mirrors had been installed over each basin in the washroom. By this time, however, we had grown so accustomed to living without mirrors that it was almost a shock to look up and see our sun-browned faces looking back at us.

A succession of dust storms, rain squalls, and a full-fledged snowstorm finally brought our limping schools to a complete halt in mid-November. Snow blew in from the holes that still remained in our roof, and we all shivered in 10-degree temperatures even though we wore coats, scarves, and boots. An official notice finally appeared stating that schools would close and not reopen until they were fully winterized with sheetrock walls and

stoves. It seemed close to miraculous that we had been able to hold any kind of school for as long as we had, and I knew it was possible only because the children had been so eager to come and the residents so anxious to have some semblance of order in their lives. Although my class had just begun a Thanksgiving project of cardboard cabins and pilgrims, we were happy to leave it half-completed on the table, hoping that when we returned our classrooms would finally be warm and livable.

As the cold, bleak winter months came upon us, the residents of Topaz grew increasingly frustrated and despondent in their isolated barbed-wire enclosure. Tensions and internal friction increased, and I, like most of the evacuees, felt a desperate need to get out of camp and back into the mainstream of life. I was fortunate to get a scholarship to Smith College to complete my education, and my sister was invited to a Quaker retreat in Pennsylvania. After what seemed an interminable wait, our indefinite leave papers finally arrived, and we were able to leave Topaz in May of 1943.

As we boarded the dusty bus for Delta where we would catch our train to the East, it was as though we had finally come to winter's end, and now, at last, were within reach of spring. The afternoon sun was already hot and a slight breeze filled the air with a fine haze of dust. We looked out the bus window and waved to our parents and our friends, wondering when we would see them again. I watched from the window as long as I could, waving until my mother and father were two small spots in the cluster by the gate. I knew they were waving long after they could no longer see us. I turned then, and faced the road ahead. We were on our way back, at last, to the world we had left over a year ago.

The budding plum  
Holds my own joy  
At the melting ice  
And the long winter's end.  
Yukari

~~Yoshiko Uchida~~  
~~1685 Solano Ave., #102~~  
~~Berkeley, Calif. 94707~~

TOPAZ, CITY OF DUST ) CAPS + l.e.

~~Excerpt from DESERT EXILE~~

] BY Yoshiko Uchida [ All CAPS

NOH ←

It was decidedly not by choice that I happened to spend eight months during World War II living in a cluster of dusty barracks located in the middle of Utah's bleak Sevier Desert. This unhappy circumstance occurred because I was one of several thousand Japanese-Americans incarcerated by our government in Topaz, Utah, one of ten wartime concentration camps established to house the Japanese uprooted from the west coast of the United States. This mass evacuation, without trial, was the result of Executive Order 9066 <sup>that</sup> ~~which~~ was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in February 1942, and ~~which~~ placed 110,000 Japanese, two-thirds of whom were American citizens, under guard and behind barbed wire. Deprived of our constitutional rights, <sup>as well as</sup> our privacy and our dignity as human beings, <sup>we were guilty of nothing more than</sup> ~~our only crime was~~ that we resembled the enemy in Japan.

Until the war, my parents, sister, and I lived in Berkeley, California, where I grew up and went to school. My father was an executive of Mitsui and Company, a Japanese business firm in San Francisco. Only hours after the Pearl Harbor attack, the FBI came to apprehend my father, and for three days we had no word where they had taken him. When he was finally able to

contact us, we learned that he and hundreds of other Japanese businessmen and community leaders were to be sent to a Prisoner of War Camp in Missoula, Montana.

My mother, sister, and I were left behind in Berkeley to cope with the mounting anti-Japanese feelings (fed by long years of anti-Asian sentiment in California) and to face mounting rumors of a mass evacuation of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the west coast.

The nightmare of evacuation became a reality in April 1942, and the U. S. Army gave us ten days' notice to get out of the home in which we had lived for fifteen years.

Allowed to take only what we could carry, we were shipped along with 8000 Japanese of the San Francisco Bay Area to the Tanforan Race Track. There, for six months, <sup>we</sup> ~~the three of us~~ lived in a horse stall formerly occupied by a single horse. My father

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(continued)



*was eventually released "on parole" from Montana and joined us.*

family to the diner half asleep, but was rewarded with a fine meal, this time served on china. Dawn was breaking over the desert as our family sat eating together in the diner, just as we had done so many times on happier occasions. For a few moments there lingered the faint illusion that we were once more on a vacation trip together, but the presence of Japanese faces at every table, and the need to eat quickly and vacate our table for those still waiting, soon propelled us back to our stiff-backed seats and to the harsh reality of our situation.

NOFF  
Start →

← As the train approached our destination we watched the <sup>landscape</sup> (scenery) closely, hoping it would give ~~us~~ some indication of what ~~the~~ Topaz Relocation Center would be like. We felt cautiously optimistic as we reached the town of Delta, for the land did not look too unfriendly or barren.

A cheerful man boarded the train and passed out copies of the first issue of "The Topaz Times" which gave us instructions regarding procedures at the new center. I could tell that a PR man was already at work for the masthead contained a picture of a facted topaz gemstone and in large print the words, "Jewel of the Desert."

~~Once more~~ We were counted as we got off the train and then ~~we were~~ transferred to buses for the final leg of our journey to Topaz. As we rode along, we ~~continued~~ <sup>felt</sup> ~~to feel~~ fairly hopeful, for we were passing pleasant little farms, (fields green), with cultivation and (large) clusters of trees. After a half-hour, however, there was an abrupt

change. All vegetation stopped. There were no trees (or grass) or growth of any kind except for clumps of dry greasewood. We were entering the edge of the Sevier Desert some fifteen miles east of Delta, and the surroundings were now as bleak as a bleached bone. Beyond the desert there were mountains rising above the valley with great majesty, but they were many miles away. The bus made a turn into the heart of the sun-drenched desert and there in the midst of nowhere, were rows and rows of squat, tar-papered barracks sitting sullenly in the white, chalky sand. This was Topaz, <sup>Utah,</sup> ~~the Central Utah Relocation Center,~~ one of

~~ten such centers located throughout the United States in equally inaccessible areas.~~

~~In April of 1942, the Director of the War Relocation Authority and a representative of the Western Defense Command had met with the governors of the western states to discuss the feasibility of assisting the Japanese evacuees to relocate in small groups throughout the intermountain and western states. All but one of the governors opposed this plan, however, and indicated that the evacuees could enter their states only under strict military guard. Thus it was that this was precisely the way we entered the state of Utah.~~

As the bus drew up to one of the barracks, we heard the unlikely sound of band music. Marching toward us down the dusty road was a group of young boy scouts who

had come with the advance contingent, playing bugles, trumpets, and drums, and carrying signs that read, "Welcome to Topaz-- Your Camp." It was a touching sight to see them standing ~~there~~ in the burning sun, covered with dust and making such a determined effort to lessen the shock of our arrival at this bleak desert camp.

A few of our friends who had arrived earlier, were also there to greet us. They tried hard to look cheerful, but their pathetic dust-covered appearance told us a great deal more than their brave words.

We went through the usual arrival procedure which consisted of registering, having a brief medical examination, and being assigned living quarters. Our family was to occupy Apartment C of Barracks 2 in Block 7. Henceforth our address would be 7 - 2 - C , Topaz, Utah. ~~Our block was located in the northeast corner of the camp, just opposite the quarters of the Military Police and not far from the camp hospital.~~

*Mississipp* { The entire camp was divided into forty-two blocks, each containing twelve barracks constructed around a mess hall, a latrine-washroom, and a laundry. The camp was one mile square and eventually housed 8,000 residents, making it the fifth largest city in ~~the state of~~ Utah.

As we plodded through the powdery sand toward Block 7, I began to understand why everyone looked like pieces of flour-dusted pastry. In the frantic and hasty

construction of this barracks city, every growing thing had been removed, and what had once been a peaceful lake bed was ~~now~~ churned up into one great mass of loose flour-like sand. <sup>With each step</sup> We sank two to three inches, ~~deep into the dust, with every step,~~ sending up swirls of dust that <sup>crept</sup> ~~got~~ into our eyes and mouths, noses and lungs. After <sup>two long</sup> ~~the~~ sleepless nights <sup>sitting up</sup> on the train, this sudden encounter with the sun, the glaring white dust, and the altitude, made <sup>me</sup> ~~us~~ feel weak and lightheaded. <sup>Just as I was on the verge of collapsing, we</sup> ~~and I was relieved when we~~ finally reached Block 7.

Each barrack<sup>s</sup>, one hundred feet in length, was divided into six rooms for families of varying size, and we were assigned to a room in the center, <sup>eighteen-by-twenty feet in dimension,</sup> about ~~twenty by eighteen~~ feet, designed for occupancy by four people. ~~When we arrived~~ We found that our room contained nothing <sup>but</sup> ~~except~~ four army cots without mattresses. The inner sheetrock walls and ceilings had not yet been installed, nor had the black pot-bellied stove that was left standing outside our door. Cracks were visible everywhere in the siding and around the windows, and although our friends had swept out our room for us before we arrived, the dust was already seeping into it again from all sides.

The instruction sheet advised us not to put up any shelves until the carpenters arrived from Tanforan to install the sheetrock walls. ~~Recalling the raids on the lumber piles at Tanforan, the sheet devoted three para-~~

~~graphs to reassuring us that plenty of scrap lumber would be available and that a committee had already been organized to supervise its distribution. "A rough estimate of 400,000 board feet of lumber is now available," one paragraph stated. "Since sufficient wood is available, there will be no necessity for hoarding or nocturnal commando raids."~~

~~There was also a paragraph about words. "You are now in Topaz, Utah," it read. "Here we say Dining Hall and not Mess Hall; Safety Council, not Internal Police; Residents, not Evacuees; and last but not least, Mental Climate, not Morale." (Our eager PR man was still at work.)~~

No para

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~~the sheet indicated with a hint of pride that there would be four bathtubs for the women in each block, flush toilets and individual basins in all washrooms. When I went to inspect these vaunted facilities for our block, however, I discovered that there were no seats on the toilets, no water in the laundry, and no lights in the showers or latrines. Our water was being pumped up from nearby artesian wells almost 1,000 feet deep, and twice during our first day the water was turned off completely.~~

~~I didn't think the first lunch served in our mess hall was too bad, but the Japanese chef seemed crushed that he had not welcomed us with a better meal. He came out from the kitchen to apologize personally for the meagre fare, explaining that he couldn't do better because of the lack of material and proper assistance. It seemed that~~

everything, including food and personnel, was still in extremely short supply.

We returned to our room after lunch <sup>in the mess hall,</sup> and although our mattresses had not yet been delivered, we were so exhausted we spent the rest of the afternoon sleeping on the springs of our army cots.

That evening our project director, Mr. Charles F. Ernst, came to our block to talk to the new arrivals. We met in the mess hall and he introduced several of the thirty Caucasian administrative heads (civil service employees), who were in charge of various camp functions. He seemed a kind and understanding man of considerable warmth, and left us feeling sufficiently heartened to face the next day.

→ The temperature in our room the next morning <sup>was</sup> ~~seemed~~ to be well below freezing, and we soon discovered that the temperature variation in a single day could be as much as fifty degrees. Some days started at thirty and soared by mid-afternoon into the eighties and nineties, so ~~that~~ although we wore winter wools in the morning, by afternoon it became imperative to change to summer clothing. When my sister and I went out to meet some of the incoming buses in the afternoon, we would come home parched, sunburned, and feeling like well-broiled meat.

My father, who always had more energy than the rest of us, was quick to seek out our block's most pressing needs and to alleviate them where he could. He spent his first morning in Topaz with three other men cleaning the latrines which a rash of upset stomachs had put into

an appalling state of filth. In the afternoon, he discovered ice cream bars at the Canteen and purchased enough for all the boys in the band as they marched again in the dust and heat to greet each new busload of evacuees from Tanforan.

Although evacuees continued to arrive each day, the blocks to which they were assigned were progressively ill-equipped to house them. People who arrived a few days after we did found gaping holes in the roof where the stove pipe was to fit, latrine barracks with no roofs at all, and mattresses filled only with straw. Those who arrived still later ~~didn't~~ <sup>did not</sup> even have barracks to go to and were simply assigned to cots set up in empty mess halls, laundries, or ~~in~~ the corridors of the hospital. Many evacuees found themselves occupying barracks where hammering, tarring, and roofing were still in progress; and one unfortunate woman received second degree burns on her face when boiling tar seeped through the roof onto the bed where she was asleep.

~~Life was simply too disorganized to apply for a regular job, but wanting to do something constructive with my time, I volunteered to work as secretary to the manager of our block. His duty was to function as liaison between the residents of our block and the administration, but during the first few days, most of his time was spent in appeasing people who came in with complaints. No one was happy with his housing assign-~~

~~wire fencing and we knew that they were lonely young boys who were far from home too.~~

I experienced my first dust storm about a week after we arrived. The morning had begun cold and brittle as always, but by afternoon a strange warm wind began to blow. I was in another block walking home with a friend when the wind suddenly began to gather ominous strength. It swept in on great thrusting gusts, lifting huge masses of sand from the ground and flinging them in the air. The sand quickly engulfed us and soon completely eclipsed barracks that stood only ten feet away. We dashed into the nearest laundry barrack, ~~our knees weak with fear,~~ but even inside the building the air was thick with dust. The flimsy structure shuddered with each blast of wind, and we could hear objects being lifted from the ground and flung against the building. During the hour or more that we waited, there were moments when I thought <sup>surely</sup> the barrack would simply fly <sup>and we would be flung into the desert,</sup> apart ~~and~~ I was gripped with a real sense of terror. When at last the wind let up a little, we decided to ~~run and try~~ to get back to our own barracks. ~~If I were going to get blown into the desert, I at least wanted to leave from my own room and with my family.~~

As I ran, the wind blew sand into my eyes and nose. I was breathing dust and my mouth was gritty with it. When I got to our room, I found my mother sitting alone in a dust-filled room. She didn't know where my father and sister were, but we hoped they were safe somewhere.

<sup>was</sup> There ~~seemed~~ no point in trying to clean our room

until the wind stopped blowing, so my mother and I shook out our blankets, lay down on our cots, and waited for the storm to subside. It was a long afternoon, and the wind <sup>did not</sup> ~~didn't~~ die down until long after the sun had set.

~~When I went outside and looked up at the sky, it was almost as though the dust storm had only been a bad dream. The air was calm and still, and the night sky was a mass of brilliant stars.~~

~~My mother and I tried to do a wash in the morning, but all the tubs were taken and the water soon ran out. We swept out our room and wiped away what dust we could, but by afternoon another windstorm blew up, so we simply covered everything with newspapers and waited for the storm to blow itself out.~~

~~Just as at Tanforan, we had to deal in the early days at Topaz with the matter of physical adjustment. With the daily extremes in temperature, the altitude (4600 feet above sea level), and the dust, it was several weeks before most of us were acclimated and could overcome the despondency caused by the inadequacy of everything from housing to food. Some of us tried taking salt pills, but found that instead of helping, they simply nauseated us.~~

~~Once more my sister grew ill, and had to spend many days in bed, prompting a well-meaning friend of my mother's to bring her a broth which she guaranteed would restore her strength. It wasn't until my sister was up and about that the friend dared reveal that the broth had been brewed~~

to keep busy and to help other people, the two essential ingredients in his life.

It wasn't long before the Coop had a paid-in resident membership capitalization of close to \$5000. and in November the Canteen grossed over \$20,000. It eventually included such services as a barber shop, a radio repair shop, and it later opened two movie houses and a dry goods store which did almost \$2700. worth of business on its opening day.

→ As mornings and nights grew colder, we looked with increasing<sup>ed</sup> longing at the black iron stove that stood uselessly outside our barrack<sup>s</sup> waiting for work crews to bring it inside and connect it. Although we had instructions not to bring the stoves inside, many of our neighbors had disregarded the notice and simply installed their own stoves. Such were the ways of our lumbering camp bureaucracy that our neighbors' independence secured them some heat, while our acquiescence to orders almost cost us our stove.

no para  
← One day, almost a month after our arrival, a work crew composed of resident men appeared <sup>and finally</sup> ~~not to~~ install our stove, but to carry it off along with others that remained outside. Fortunately, my father was home at the time and quickly pointed out to them the injustice of confiscating only the stoves of those who had obeyed instructions. The work crew knew he was right and not one man gave him an argument.

*in Oakland, California,*

education at Mills College, to establish a nursery school system for Topaz as she had done at Tanforan, and I applied for work in the Topaz Elementary School System. We both earned a salary of \$19 a month for a forty-hour week, while workers in other categories earned \$16.

By now my father, sensing the tremendous needs of the struggling community, had volunteered to serve on several committees, two of which worked on the complex problems of employment and housing in camp. He was also an active lay leader of the interdenominational church, and when the camp canteen was converted into a consumer's cooperative, he was elected chairman of its first Board of Directors.

My mother, in her own gentle and quiet way, continued to be a loving focal point for our family, converting our dreary barrack<sup>s</sup> room into a makeshift home where we invited our friends as we did back ~~home~~ in Berkeley. Having been a close family, ours did not disintegrate, as many did, from the pressures ~~caused~~<sup>created</sup> when entire families ~~were~~<sup>+</sup> confined to living in a single room.

My sister, Keiko, utilized her training in pre<sup>f</sup>school → over

Instead they quietly carried our stove inside and installed it without further delay. It was good, at last, to have a little heat in our room.

NOVA ← We were now reasonably warm in our quarters, and our food was beginning to improve. The correlation between good food and rising spirits was, I discovered, pathetically simple.

By now my sister was again busy organizing a nursery school system for the camp, and I had applied for work in the Topaz Elementary School System. We both earned a salary of \$19 a month for a forty hour work week.

~~At the first meeting of the educational staff, we were addressed by Dr. John Carlisle, head of the Education Section and Dr. Gibson, Assistant Director of Education and Recreation of the War Relocation Authority centers. They both seemed to be sensitive to our special needs, and presented plans for a Community School that would encompass a flexible and informal program applicable to life in Topaz. We were given copies of a syllabus prepared by a Stanford University Summer Session class outlining the core curriculum we were to follow, and Dr. Carlisle expressed the hope that schools would open in a few days.~~

Blocks 8 and 41, located at opposite corners of camp, were designated as the two elementary school areas, and the following <sup>when</sup> day I went with one of the <sup>white</sup> Caucasian teachers employed at Topaz, to inspect Block 8, ~~Much to our dismay,~~ we discovered that the school barracks were absolutely barren. There were no stoves, no tables or chairs, no light

bulbs, no supplies, no equipment of any kind. ~~Nothing.~~  
The teacher invited me back to her quarters to write up  
our report, and I was surprised to see how comfortable a  
barrack<sup>s</sup> could be when it was properly furnished.

~~The Caucasian staff members at Topaz lived in special  
barracks located near the Administration Building. This  
woman and her husband had come as teachers, bringing with  
them a six month old baby who would be cared for by a  
resident worker. They lived in half of a barrack (the area  
occupied by three evacuee families), with linoleum and  
carpeting on the floor, a houseful of comfortable furniture,  
a fully equipped kitchen and all the usual household objects  
that comprise a home. Furnished in this way, the barrack  
didn't even look like a barrack. I was amazed at the trans-  
formation and realized that this was the first time in six  
months that I had been inside a normally furnished home.~~

Until I had seen her <sup>well-furnished</sup> comfortable quarters, I hadn't realized  
how much I missed our home in Berkeley, and I thought of  
it with more than the usual longing as I walked back to  
our room in Block 7.

I was assigned to register children and to teach at  
the school in Block 41, located at the opposite end of  
camp, farthest from the Administration Building. All the  
teachers there were resident Japanese, while the <sup>white</sup> Caucasian  
teachers were all assigned to Block 8, close to the Adminis-  
tration Building and to their own home barracks. When we

No para-

went to inspect the barracks of Block 41, the situation was even more alarming than had been the case in Block 8. There were large holes in the roof where the stove pipes were to fit, inner sheetrock walls had not been installed, floors were covered with dust and dirt, and there were no supplies or equipment for teaching. I wondered how we could ever open schools under these conditions, but registration of the children proceeded as scheduled on Monday morning, October 19. Because it was so cold inside the barracks, we set up tables outside in the sun and registered the children there.)

The following day we ~~simply~~ had to send the children home because the barracks were still unusable and there were ~~still~~ no supplies or equipment for teaching. On Wednesday the barracks still remained untouched, although construction of the watch towers and the barbed wire fence around the camp were proceeding without delay. When Dillon S. Myer, head of the War Relocation Authority visited our camp, he was questioned about the necessity of the fence, but replied that it was under the jurisdiction of the army which was free to do whatever it felt necessary for our protection.

It was impossible for the children to sit inside the unheated barracks which ~~still held~~ <sup>retained</sup> the nighttime temperatures of 30 and 40 degrees. We tried moving our classes outside, but the feeble morning sun could not dispel the

It touched me deeply to see the eagerness of the children to learn despite the desolation of their surroundings and the meager tools for learning. / At the time they seemed to adapt with equanimity and cheerfulness to this total and bewildering upheaval of their young lives, although the experience may well have inflicted permanent damage to their psyches.

penetrating cold, and after half an hour, we sent our children home once more. It was finally decided that the daily teachers' meetings would be held in the morning and classes shifted to the afternoon when the barracks, though still incomplete, would at least be warmer.

Before the inner sheet rock walls were installed at school, we had a severe dust storm that brought to a head a crisis that had long been brewing. About noon, gray-brown clouds began massing in the sky, and a hot sultry wind seemed an ominous portent of a coming storm. There was no word, however, that schools would be closed. Shortly after lunch, I started the seven-block walk to Block 41, ~~taking the precaution of~~ wrapping my head in a scarf so ~~that~~ my nose and mouth were covered as well. Before I was half way to school the wind grew so intense. I felt as though I were caught in ~~the eye of~~ a hurricane of dust. Barracks only a few feet away were soon completely obscured by walls of dust and I was fearful that the wind might sweep me off my feet. I stopped every few yards to lean against a barrack and catch my breath and then plodded on to school. When I got there, I found that many of the children had braved the storm to come to school and were already waiting for me in the classroom.

I tried to conduct class, but dust poured into the room from all sides as well as from the hole in the roof

which still lacked a chimney. It soon became obvious that we ~~couldn't~~ <sup>could not</sup> continue classes, and it seemed prudent to send the children home before the storm grew worse and stranded us all at school until evening. The teachers of Block 41 hurriedly dismissed school for the day, urged the children to be careful, and hoped they would make it safely to their home barracks.

That night the wind reached such terrible force I was sure our barrack<sup>s</sup> would simply be blown apart. Pebbles and rocks rained against the walls, and the paper we stuffed into the cracks was quickly blown back into the room, ~~so it was seen thick with the~~ dust ~~that~~ seeped in like smoke. For hours the wind shrieked around us like a howling animal, rattling *and shaking* our <sup>flimsy</sup> barrack<sup>s</sup>, ~~and making us wonder how much longer its insubstantial foundations would hold.~~ I wondered what I would do if I ever had a roomful of children under my care during another such storm but faced the sobering reality that actually, there was not a thing I could do. The wind stopped short of destroying our entire camp, but ~~we~~ <sup>I</sup> learned later that many <sup>of the camp's</sup> chicken coops had been blown out into the desert, ~~along with their hapless occupants.~~

The following day, the <sup>non-Japanese</sup> ~~Caucasian~~ head of elementary schools reprimanded the teachers of Block 41 for having dismissed school without consulting him. With no telephones in the barracks, however, there was no way we could have reached him <sup>in</sup> the Administration Building at the opposite

end of camp. He had been unreasonable and inept in other matters as well, and this was simply the last straw. We were willing to put up with all the physical inadequacies and to work hard to overcome them, but arrogance and insensitive <sup>ity</sup> officiousness on the part of a <sup>white</sup> Caucasian employee was too much to bear. These were days of such frustration and despair <sup>that</sup> we were often close to tears, and the teachers of Block 41 were ready to resign en masse. The high school teachers, with problems of their own, were similarly demoralized. Only <sup>our superintendent,</sup> Dr. Carlisle, who had the wisdom to <sup>John C.</sup> accord us some dignity and understanding, prevented the mass resignations of the entire resident teaching staff, and eventually, with the appointment of a new and able elementary school head, things ~~began to simmer~~ <sup>ed</sup> down.

Toward the end of October we began to see snow on the mountains that ringed our desert, and even afternoons began to grow cold. A coal shortage soon developed and hot water was limited to two hours between 7:00 and 9:00 p.m., bringing on a <sup>hectic</sup> scramble for the showers, <sup>each evening.</sup> ~~that was much like an evening rush hour.~~

The sheetrock crews finally came to <sup>the</sup> ~~our~~ block <sup>where I lived</sup>, but moved at such <sup>a</sup> snail's pace that when the first snows fell in Topaz, they still had not reached our barrack? As <sup>if</sup> though to compensate for this delay, ~~however,~~ we discovered one morning that small ten-by-twenty-inch mirrors had been in-

stalled over each basin in the washroom. By this time, however, we had grown so accustomed to living without mirrors that it was almost a shock to look up and see our sun-browned faces, <sup>looking back at us,</sup> ~~and I discovered that there was no pleasure whatever in looking at myself.~~

~~On October 30, over a month after our arrival, the sheetrock crew finally reached our room. We greeted them with great joy, only to learn that as of the previous day, they had been given orders to install ceilings only. It was a bad disappointment, but a ceiling was better than nothing, and we quickly carried our belongings next door while the sheet rock crew worked on our room. The new ceiling made the room seem cozier, and sounds from the neighboring rooms were now muffled, much to our mutual relief. A week later, with no explanation at all, another work crew appeared to install our sheetrock walls. We didn't ask any questions. We were by now prepared for any kind of irrational behavior from those in charge of our lives, and we simply carried all our possessions once more to our neighbor's room, while the new crew put up our sheet rock walls. We now had our stove and we had our walls. My father was anxious to put up some shelves so we could organize our room for more comfortable living and we could now face the ~~extremely~~ pleasant prospect of settling down at last.~~

~~The first thing my mother did was to order some~~

moved from camp to various cities in the east, and eventually back home to California, and I hear from some of them even today.

A succession of dust storms, rain squalls, and a full-fledged snowstorm finally brought our limping schools to a complete halt in mid-November. Snow blew in from the holes that still remained in our roof, and we all shivered in <sup>10</sup> ~~ten~~ degree temperatures even <sup>wore</sup> ~~though~~ we/coats, scarves, and boots. An official notice finally appeared stating that schools would close and not reopen until they were fully winterized with sheetrock walls and stoves. It seemed close to miraculous that we had been able to hold any kind of school for as long as we had, and I knew it was possible only because the children had been so eager to come and the residents so anxious to have some semblance of order in their lives. Although my class had just begun a Thanksgiving project of cardboard cabins and pilgrims, we were happy to leave it half-completed on the table, ~~hoping~~ <sup>hoping</sup> that when we returned our classrooms would finally be warm and livable.

~~With the approach of the holiday season, touching attempts were made to bring some cheer into our drab lives, and one day the high school band from Delta came in their fine red uniforms to give us a concert. They played to a full house of eager and appreciative residents~~

As the cold, bleak winter months came upon us, the residents of Topaz grew increasingly frustrated and despondent in their isolated barbed-wire enclosure. Tensions and internal friction increased, and I, like most of the evacuees, felt a desperate need to get out of camp and back into the mainstream of life. I was fortunate to get a scholarship to Smith College to complete my education, and my sister was invited to a Quaker Retreat in Pennsylvania. After what seemed an interminable wait, our indefinite leave papers finally arrived, and we were able to leave Topaz in May of 1943.

(continued)



It was a touching and heartwarming tribute, and one of which any Issei could well be proud. Similar words might have been said of other Issei who also guided us through this devastating period of upheaval, for many of the Nisei were too young at the time to assume positions of leadership. Our Issei parents had been steadfast and persevering, and our mothers had somehow managed to create new homes for us in the dreary barrack rooms. My own mother, in her gentle, quiet way had continued, as in our Berkeley home, to be a loving focal point for our family and our friends.

As we boarded the dusty bus for Delta where we would catch our train to the east, ~~such thoughts of gratitude toward our parents still lay unrealized and unspoken in our hearts.~~ For my sister and me, it was as though we had finally come to winter's end, and now, at last, were within reach of spring.)

The afternoon sun was already hot and a slight breeze filled the air with a fine haze of dust. We looked out the bus window and waved to our parents and our friends, wondering when we would see them again.)

I watched from the window as long as I could, waving until my mother and father were two small spots in the cluster by the gate. I knew they were waving long after they could no longer see us. I turned then, and faced the road ahead. We were on our way back, at last, to the world we had left over a year ago.

CORRECTIONS AND CHANGES for "Excerpt from DESERT EXILE" by Yoshiko Uchida

New Title: TOPAZ, CITY OF DUST

✓ Page 1 line 10 delete "which" between "and" and "placed"

✓ Page 2 4th & 5th lines from bottom: Change sentence to read:

*They  
changed*

"There for six months we lived in a horse stall formerly occupied by a single horse, and were eventually joined by my father who was released "on parole" from Montana."

○ Page 102 line 11 add "Utah" after "Topaz"

✓ Page 104 end of line 4, add comma and delete "into the dust"

✓ Page 109 10th line from bottom, delete "run and" between "to" and "try"

✓ Page 114: Delete paragraph beginning "By now my sister ..."

Insert the following:

8           By now my father, sensing the tremendous needs of the struggling community, had volunteered to serve on several committees, two of which worked on the complex problems of employment and housing in camp. He was also an active lay leader of the interdenominational church, and when the camp canteen was converted into a consumer's cooperative, he was elected chairman of its first Board of Directors.

My mother, in her own gentle and quiet way, continued to be a loving focal point for our family, converting our dreary barrack room into a makeshift home where we invited our friends as we did back ~~home~~ in Berkeley. Having been a close family, ours did not disintegrate as many did, from the pressures caused when entire families were confined to living in a single room.

My sister, Keiko, utilized her training in pre-school

education at Mills College to establish a nursery school system for Topaz as she had done at Tanforan, and I applied for work in the Topaz Elementary School System. We both earned a salary of \$19 a month for a forty hour week, while workers in other categories earned \$16.

✓ Page 114, 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> lines from bottom: delete "the following day" and add "when", 4<sup>th</sup> l. change "Caucasian" which sounds dated, to "white"

✓ 3rd line from bottom: change period after "Block 8"

to a comma and delete "much to our dismay"  
✓ Page 115 - 3rd line from bottom, change "Caucasian" to "white"  
Page 116, 3rd line of 2nd paragraph: delete "still" between "were" and "no"

Pages 117-119 are now to be included as discussed with Stan.

✓ Page 117, line 13 delete "taking the precaution of"

✓ line 14 delete "that" between "so" and "my nose"

✓ Page 117, 3rd line from bottom, add new paragraph after "in the classroom" as follows:

✓ It touched me deeply to see the eagerness of the children to learn despite the desolation of their surroundings and the meager tools for learning. At the time, They seemed to adapt with equanimity and cheerfulness to this total and bewildering upheaval of their young lives, although the experience may well have inflicted permanent damage to their psyches.

New copy of page 118 is enclosed.

✓ Page 119, line 5: change "insensitive" to "Insensitivity", delete "officiousness" change "Caucasian" to "white"

✓ line 10, add "our superintendant" between "Only" and "Dr."

✓ line 14, delete "began to", add "finally simmered" in place of "simmer"

new for Utah Quarterly  
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Yoshiko Uchida  
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## Topaz, City of Dust

( Excerpt from DESERT EXILE )

It was decidedly not by choice that I happened to spend eight months during World War II living in a cluster of dusty barracks located in the middle of Utah's bleak Sevier Desert. This unhappy circumstance occurred because I was one of several thousand Japanese Americans incarcerated by our government in Topaz, Utah, one of ten wartime concentration camps established to house the Japanese uprooted from the west coast of the United States. This mass evacuation, without trial, was the result of Executive Order 9066 which was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in February 1942, and (which) placed 110,000 Japanese, two-thirds of whom were American citizens, under guard and behind barbed wire. Deprived of our constitutional rights, our privacy and our dignity as human beings, our only crime was that we resembled the enemy in Japan. B

Until the war, my parents, sister and I lived in Berkeley, California, where I grew up and went to school. My father was an executive of Mitsui and Company, a Japanese business firm in San Francisco. Only hours after the Pearl Harbor attack, the FBI came to apprehend my father, and for three days we had no word where they had taken him. When he was finally able to

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contact us, we learned that he and hundreds of other Japanese businessmen and community leaders were to be sent to a Prisoner of War Camp in Missoula, Montana.

My mother, sister and I were left behind in Berkeley to cope with the mounting anti-Japanese feelings (fed by long years of anti-Asian sentiment in California), and to face mounting rumors of a mass evacuation of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the west coast.

The nightmare of evacuation became a reality in April 1942, and the U. S. Army gave us ten days notice to get out of the home in which we had lived for fifteen years.

Allowed to take only what we could carry, we were shipped along with 8000 Japanese of the San Francisco Bay Area to the Tanforan Race Track. There, for six months, <sup>we</sup> (the three of us )

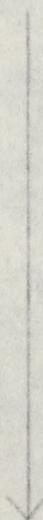
lived in a horse stall formerly occupied by a single horse, and

*eventually* *during that time were joined by my father who was released "on parole" from Montana*

In May of 1942 we were shipped by train to a concentration camp which we knew to be somewhere in Utah and was called "Topaz."

We had no idea where it was or how long we would be there.

(continued)



p. 101 of "Desert Exile"  
see marked carbon copy

news  
for Utah quarterly.

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As the cold bleak winter months came upon us, the residents of Topaz grew increasingly frustrated and despondent in their isolated barbed wire enclosure. Tensions and internal friction increased, and I, like most of the evacuees, felt a desperate need to get out of camp and back into the mainstream of life. I was fortunate to get a scholarship to Smith College to complete my education and my sister was invited to a Quaker Retreat in Pennsylvania. After what seemed an interminable wait, our indefinite leave papers finally arrived, and we were able to leave Topaz in May of 1943.

(continued)

(skipped pp 123-145)