

Journal May 12, 1947

1. Berkeley Rest Camp

For some time Hattie, my wife, and I have been thinking of going away someplace for a vacation this summer. We've both been working hard and did not get a vacation last year. About two weeks ago Hattie went to the Travel Bureau here in Berkeley, and came back with a folder and the advice from the lady at the desk that we should make our reservations early. We went again Saturday before last, and a man waited on us this time. He asked us what kind of place we wanted to go to, and we explained that we were not sure, but wanted housekeeping rooms, if possible. They were hard to get, he said, and gave us a folder for a resort in the Santa Cruz Mountains. We told him that we would come back again. Before leaving, I asked him whether they handled the camps operated by Berkeley City, and he said that we would have to go to the City Hall for that. Since it was Saturday afternoon and the man thought that the office would not be open, we decided to wait until the following week. Hattie asked me why I did not tell her that Berkeley City was running a camp. I said George Sabagh and his wife Renee had told me about it, and that I thought that she had known all along. They seemed to have enjoyed themselves, and they had mentioned that the rates were reasonable.

Monday, May 5th, I went to the Recreation Department of the City Hall. A young woman waited on me and pleasantly gave me information about the three camps which the City ran. Tuolumne Camp at Yosemite was pretty well booked up, she said, but not Echo Lake, the one to which George and Renee had gone. She said



Journal May 12, 1947--2

that I would have plenty of time if I applied within a week or two. I took home a folder on the camps, and Hattie seemed to be satisfied with it. We figured up the dates carefully and decided to leave on August 2, and come back on the 14th. That would give us some time to recuperate before going back to work. Friday, the 9th, I went to make our application and the girl at the desk said that I would have to have an interview with Mr. Davis. Since he was not in at the time, I made an appointment for Monday morning. I didn't think anything about the interview. Hattie asked some questions about it, but evidently didn't give much thought to it either.

This morning I was at the office at 8:45 and waited for a little while for Mr. Davis to show up. In the meantime I was working at some statistical problems. The girl at the desk called me, and I went into Mr. Davis' office. He was not particularly impressive or antagonistic. He asked me when I expected to go to Echo Lake, and I said that we expected to go in August. I had heard about the camp from a friend at the University. He asked me who he was, and I said George Sabagh. What was he doing? He was a teaching assistant and a student. Mr. Davis cocked his head, but evidently didn't remember him. Then he went on to say that he thought it was only fair to warn me that we might not enjoy going to camp because some people might make it unpleasant for us. Of course, he said, if we wanted to apply, there was nothing that he could do about it since we were citizens of Berkeley and paid our taxes. For some time I couldn't get a word in edgewise, and sat and listened to him calmly. His line of reasoning was interesting.



Journal May 12, 1947--3

He said that they hadn't had any Orientals or Negroes in the camps run by Berkeley, and he didn't know how we would be received. Of course, the people of Berkeley were less prejudiced than people elsewhere. He himself, he said, didn't feel any prejudice. The class of people that went to the camps were neither extremely upper or lower class and not the sort to cause trouble. But some Chinese went last year, I believe it was, and the people made it uncomfortable for them and they came back before their time was up. I said to him about this point that we have never had any trouble in Berkeley and didn't expect to at the camp.

He then went on to explain how at Los Angeles the Negroes had made a test case of the city camps there and the white people stopped going there. Then they set up a separate camp for Negroes, but very few of them went. He explained that the camps could not be operated on a paying basis unless a large number of people went. It would be all right, he said, if there were enough Negroes, say, to support such a camp, but there isn't. They were willing to accommodate Orientals or Negroes or other groups if they could book the whole camp for a period. Church groups sometimes did that, he said. If the minority insists upon its rights, he said, then the majority would be deprived of their enjoyment of the camps. If the camps could not be made to pay, then they might have to be closed up. The issue probably would have to be met sooner or later, he said, and the outcome would only be known several years hence. I said that perhaps it was best to face the issue and see what happens. I said that he worried too much about the matter and that I didn't expect that we would have any trouble.

He tried again. The Negroes get very resentful when the



Journal May 12, 1947 -- 4

when the Orientals get some favors that they don't. After all, he said, we were fighting your people, and they don't understand why the Japanese should be allowed more consideration than they. He referred to the large number of Negroes and Orientals that have come to Berkeley lately. He asked me about the number of Japanese who returned, and asked whether it was not true that most of them had come back to the Coast. I said that probably about a half of them did. He pointed out that at the municipal swimming pool many white people did not enter the pool when only a few Negroes were there. They could tell because they came, poked their heads in, saw the Negroes, and then walked away. He told me how a light-colored Negro boy had been at one of the boys' camps and some parents had called up about the policy of the department. He mentioned again that we might not enjoy it and others might resent our presence. Food, for instance, was served family style at large tables, and it was more or less a family affair. I told him that at the Black Sheep Restaurant people were seated together during rush hours. I had a feeling he was trying to make me feel like a louse for even making an application, although he was trying to be pleasant about it. I told him that I didn't expect any trouble, and would let him know if there were any. I got up to go.

But he kept talking to me. He asked me what I was doing. I was a research assistant and a student at the University. Where was I working. For the Evacuation and Resettlement Study. Was I in the Armed Forces? No. I had a deferment. Was I born in this country? I said I was. Well, he thought that that would be different from being an alien. I left with the definite impression that



Journal May 12, 1947 --5

he was afraid of having the Negroes make a test case on the camps and have the majority group deprived of the enjoyment of them.

I went to the desk and made my application as I had planned. The young woman at the desk was as pleasant as ever.