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T H E E X I T W E S E A R C H

by

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It was two years ago that the evacuation of Japanese from the coastal area began. It was then that some 112,000 people made an "entrance" into a new life in new locations.

The experiences of the people involved, their feelings, their attitudes, their reactions, are adventures that could not be told in a general way. Each individual is only a part of all he has met and all he has experienced. No two people react alike.

From fishing villages, agricultural centers, from hustling, bustling cities, Niseis, Kibeiis, Sanseis, and Isseis from every walk of life were assembled hurriedly into a so-called "bordered world." Freedom, to many, seemed to be something of the past. Yes, there was bitterness. Yet, on the other hand, there were others who were grateful, and some who were indifferent.

The conglomeration of feelings certainly did not spring over-night. Opinions and feelings are not concocted and created from nothing in no time, but from past experiences, contacts with people, from the radio, newspapers, circumstances, situations, one's own emotional reactions, attitudes, and all the beliefs, creeds, prejudices, weaknesses, virtues, and meaningful things that are part of ones innermost feelings.

Let's turn the clock back to February of 1942.

The city is Los Angeles, California. There is a large family of four boys, three girls, father, mother and grandmother. Yutaka, 28, is the eldest son and closest to the parents. He has followed in his father's footsteps in the restaurant business in Little Tokio. He was deferred from the draft in 1941. Ayako, 26, and still unmarried, is a college graduate, a sociology major. Kenji, 24, was drafted four months before Pearl Harbor, was first stationed on the coast at Fort Ord, California, was transferred the following January to Camp Robinson, Arkansas. Masao and Masako are twins, 21. Both are extremely Americanized, having been outstanding students at a city high school. Masao volunteered just before evacuation. He received his basic training at Fort Warren, Wyoming; was placed in the Quartermaster Corp; and early last year was sent as one of the cadre to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. Masako is engaged to a serviceman in the Military Intelligence overseas. Joe is 17, a junior in high school, a happy-go-lucky fellow. May is 14, just at that awkward stage. The father and mother, though outwardly influenced by occidental customs, are conventional in the Japanese way of living. The grandmother is just a quiet individual living with the family.

All, except the two boys in service, are home. They are having a lengthy, controversial discussion after their evening supper.

Ayako: What a coincident. Both Ken and Mas wrote today. Ken, as usual is worrying about us. He thinks we might be evacuated. Mas is so excited about army life, that's all he talks about. He's been in almost a month now.

Yutaka: Talk about two different guys. They're it. What a pair. Ken would probably give anything to get out. Mas would give anything to stay in.

Father: Mas has no sense. Ken is intelligent and thoughtful.

May: I don't know about that. I think Ken is swell. . . and I know all my friends at school think so, too.

Mother: Quiet, May.

Father: You children don't realize what this war is going to do to you. . . and especially to us, the parents. We'll be losing everything. The people here want to get us out of here. They might even start lynching us.

Joe: Aw, Pop, don't be silly. America isn't that crazy. Besides, things like that don't happen.

Father: Listen, son, you don't know what we Isseis went through. Ask your mother. We were once spit on. But we worked and worked. . . and now we can stand next to anyone.

Joe: That's 'cuz people didn't understand you. You were foreigners. They never saw Japanese before.

Mother: Let father continue.

- Father: It wasn't an easy life, son. The color of your skin makes a great difference. You can't ever be accepted as an American like the rest of the white people. You'll always be considered a Japanese, no matter where you go, what you do, what you say. And you must be proud that you're a Japanese. Proud. . .because of your background.
- Joe: Listen, Pop, I'm an American. I don't care what you say.
- May: I feel the same as Joe. Our teacher said America was made up of all nationalities. You know--a melting pot.
- Masako: Right! For a young punk, I give you credit. You're O. K.
- Mother: But you children don't understand. Life at school and life after you finish school are two different worlds.
- Ayako: Yes, kids, it's true. I oughta know. I've lived it, and I've studied it. I can see Mother and Father's viewpoints, but I can also see yours, Joe and May. . .and yours, too, Masa. I'm only wondering if you can keep as strong in your beliefs about America now, as at some future date. You haven't begun to live yet. Pop and Mom have. But I don't say all parents are right about everything. Besides, in our case, we Japanese and Niseis are in a peculiar spot. You know, our family life is like that of living under two flags. What's right to our folks, is wrong to us----and vice-versa.
- Yutaka: I might be a Nisei, but I side up with Pop. We haven't got a chance here. I can tell you story after story of prejudice and stuff.
- Ayako: That's no way to talk. Let them make their choice for themselves. I want to see them live, really live. . .making their own decisions, not have parents and older ones like us tell them how to think and how not to think.
- Father: Ayako, why do you always talk like that. You look down on our judgement. You are a bad influence. You're the one that got Masako to volunteer.
- Masako: No, you're wrong. He's wanted to ever since Pearl Harbor. I'm glad he volunteered. Someday, you'll be glad, too.
- Mother: Masako, don't talk like that.
- Father: He might be my son, but I'll never forgive him for that. To think that he would fight against his own people.
- Masako: But we're Americans, Pop. This is our country. We don't even know Japan, nor do we ever care to go back there. I don't care what you. . .
- Ayako: Take it easy, Masa.
- Joe: Masa, I'm with you.
- Mother: Let's stop this.

And thus, each day, friction in the family increased and developed. A house divided. But the flaring words were not embittered by hate; just misunderstanding, but a misunderstanding so great, that family ties were impossible. How many other families did not have the same quarrels? And then came the sudden pell-mell rush of evacuation. Each community's "clearing out" days were numbered. Certain restrictions caused separation of family members residing elsewhere. The Curfew, too, proved inconvenient in settling business deals and personal arrangements.

Let's look into this family-life, an average home located in a Japanese residential district in San Francisco. The father and mother are grieving over the harshness of public sentiment that is causing their Nisei children to resign from their Civil Service jobs.

In the adjacent room, a brother and sister are "airing out" the same matter.

- Brother: Well, I guess it's my turn next week. But still I don't get it. I don't see how they could fire us just because our background is Japanese. We're Americans! We oughta' fight for our rights!
- Sister: Sure, I feel like you do, but we got to try to understand that any group of people would be hysterical after something like Pearl Harbor. We just can't blame it all on Caucasians and get bitter about it.

- Brother: Aw, nuts! But I guess you're right. We never had to face real issues as Americans until now. We gotta hold on to ourself, but I still say it's unjust and undemocratic kicking out everybody of Japanese descent like that.
- Sister: But Bud, in the kind of position you're in, maybe it's best. If anything happened at your plant, they'd probably blame you, just because you're Japanese. We've got to create understanding.
- Brother: You can talk about good attitudes and stuff cuz' you didn't have to plug your way through prejudice in finding even housing while going to college, or come up against discrimination trying to find a good job, or had people continuously tell you, "No Japs here" even before the war.
- Sister: But what have you actually done in service to your own community that you should expect so much? A lot of Japanese are brilliant in studies but you have not mingled and worked with your Caucasian brothers for a common civic interest.

Let's go into the farm area of Gardena.

- Oldest boy, 28,
and single: The paper said something about evacuation going to take place in about two months, but I don't believe it, do you?
- Younger
Brother: Naw, but I've got a hunch things are gonna get tough and when the first blow comes, it's really gonna hit the farmers. As it is, the Onos, Matsumotos, and Kimuras don't know whether they should start planting or not. What if they do plant and then found they'd have to evacuate, they'd have to give up everything. But, if we don't start planting, the government will call it sabotage.
- Younger: The only way to be happy is to look at the brighter side. . . that we won't have to move out; we can't let Pop down. He didn't work here thirty years for nothing. But if orders come, whatever the orders are, let's cooperate.

Now, let's make an imaginary trip to Northern California and listen in outside of a women's dorm at the University of California. The Caucasian student is talking to the Nisei student.

- Caucasian
Room-mate: Masa, what's the matter? I know something's wrong. You're not ill, are you?
- Nisei
Student: You wouldn't understand, Jean. It's something to complain about, but hard to convey the real situation we're trying to cope with. We don't want sugar-coated sympathy, but we'd like you to know how we Nisei feel.
- Jean: You mean you're scared you may not be able to continue school because of public sentiment? Why, that's absurd, Masa. We want all you Nisei to stay. You're our scholars. People couldn't be that narrow-minded. Why that'd be ignorance. And you have only one year to get your RN rating.
- Masa: Thanks for trying to be encouraging, but you still can't understand. You've never met up with race prejudices. . . and then, too, you couldn't possibly know what kind of problems are surging through our minds. You see, our parents and we Nisei kids were brought up and educated in different countries. As for nursing, I must go on. I can't quit. As for my family life, there just isn't. One reason is, I can't speak Japanese and my folks can't speak English. Our religion is even different. And since Pearl Harbor, we've had more misunderstandings than ever.
- Jean: I see, Masa. But still, if there's anything I can possibly do for you, let me know. I'll always think of you as one of the dearest friends I've had, and no matter what happens, nothing can sever our friendship. Time nor distance can't separate us.
- Masa: I'll never forget you, or the campus, that Campanile towering over there, the good times at the football rallies, the days we ditched together, and just everything that college has brought to us both.

Now let's go down the coast to Monterey. An issei couple is working at their vegetable stand. They are speaking in Japanese. If translated, it would probably sound like this:

- Man: Here, we were doing so well, but now look.

Woman: Yes, I never knew war could bring about such a great change in people. Even our neighbors look at us suspiciously. ... and our children have grown up with their children. What have we done?

Man: We should have gone back three years ago.

Woman: Don't say that. We have our children to think about. They're all so Americanized except Tsuruko.

Commentator: Tsuruko, 'tho born in America, was raised in Japan. Such Nisei are more specifically classified as Kibeis.

Man: That's the trouble with our children. They're too Americanized and so darn independent. They don't care about us. Jimmy, Tom, June, and Mary. . . they don't want to even use their Japanese names. And they don't even try to speak Japanese. They're getting out of our hands.

What followed evacuation was the beginning of a series of new experiences that we can term as "making or breaking". . . yes, making or breaking of not just our individual life, but making or breaking the morale of all people of Japanese ancestry, making or breaking its reputation; chances of assimilation into American life; its ties with Caucasian friendships of the past; making or breaking the thread of an American way of life, that somehow, through the years weaved into the personalities and habits of even the Isseis as well as the Nisei.

Over a year has elapsed. Some have grown bitter. Some are just bored. Some are indifferent and don't care. Some are trying to hang on to faith. Some are lost as to what is democracy. Some never knew. Some are taking it in a spirit of a vacation. Some are hoping that anything might happen, good or bad, but as long as it is a change. Some are worried as to whether they'll be able to go back to their home state or not. Others say now they wouldn't want to return. Still others feel a home is where you make it, so they'll make the best of any situation. Some want to relocate but are fearful of outside hostility. Many have gone out. Only a few have returned. The majority have gone back into American life without too much difficulty in readjusting themselves. A few have tried and are trying to make this community a more livable place, a more meaningful home, where we may someday profit, not so much by our experiences, but by the attitudes we developed in meeting our respective problems.

Yes, people have changed. People have matured. People have slackened. People have grown careless. People have grown more thoughtful.

A drama in the acting; a history in the making, and each is playing an unconscious role of hero or villain, fool or coward, or bit roles in the background. You, the outside world, our only audience? No! Strangely, we are also the audience.

We belong to God, though we do not all accept Him. We need His aid and ask for it, but we do not answer His call. We are equal in His sight, but we have lost sight of His Guidance.

We need Love. We need understanding. We need broad-mindedness. We need tolerance, and yet a strong grasp on righteousness. We need courage to forget past grievances, but grateful hearts to remember past kindnesses. We need perseverance to live what may seem a drab life, but fortitude to forge on to a better life. We need youth to vision, create and build, but maturity to meet the set-backs and disillusionments that also come with the results of visions. We need God!

But let's turn the clock back to the present. Let's trace back the various characters whose lives we hastily glimpsed into a year ago.

That large family, remember? But. . . are they in a relocation center? Strangely, they are not. Ayako, the eldest of the girls, is outside, somewhere on the East coast, doing wonderful work in social welfare. Masako, the one engaged to an overseas serviceman, is doing domestic work in Minneapolis. She chose that location so that when her fiance returns, they can easily be together. Joe, who is now 19, volunteered for the all-Nisei combat outfit at Camp Shelby, Mississippi. Kenji, who was stationed at Robinson, is now at Fort McClellan, Alabama. Masao, who was at Shelby, went overseas, as a 100th Infantry Replacement, and is somewhere in Italy. The father, mother, grandmother, and the eldest son, however, chose to repatriate. They are now in Tule Lake. They were happy and even anxious to go. Though the family is broken, everyone made their own choice, and everyone is satisfied EXCEPT little May. May, the spunkiest in the family is now 16, and a typical American girl, yet today she is to be found in Tule. Driven against her will, she was more or less, shanghaied to expatriate. She was torn from the American way of life she loved. Her parents felt they were doing the right thing. We often wonder, too. How can one be right or wrong? Was it fair to force one into a new way of life? Will May ever be really happy? Would she be able to make

the readjustments? What would her Caucasian friends think of her? A traitor? Would they know the true story behind the change of allegiance? How many others also were forced to go in the same way? Who has the right to judge the action of another? Life, so strange and complicated. . . why must some undergo such mental strifes, while others may evade it? Or do we all meet such experiences sometimes in our life? So much happens behind the lighted scenes. Why cannot these truths be revealed to the eyes of the public, that understanding may be culminated?

The unfinished story of but one family. May they all find God, and be reunited in love.

Now, remember that family in San Francisco? Let's just listen to the brother and sister!

Brother: Whenever I think of what a good job I lost, it makes me so mad I feel like going back there and tell that doggone manager off.

Sister: But, Bud, it wasn't just his doings. He couldn't do anything about it. Why harbour such hatred?

Brother: It isn't just that. It's this darn camp life. I'm getting sick of it! Sixteen dollars a month. That's a joke! Why the heck should we work? I don't blame the guys for all for all fooling around.

Sister: If you feel that way about it, why don't you go out and work? Go to Chicago or Minneapolis or Cleveland. Go anywhere, but quit complaining!

Brother: Yeah? and be called a Jap and tossed around? I'm not a sucker yet. You're just a sap working as a nurse's aid. What a job! That's just as good as being a maid.

Sister: Mrs. Tanaka is working as a matron, when on the outside, she didn't have to do any kind of work. She was well off, but she's not whining or thinking that her job is beneath her dignity. Thanks to people like her, that this camp is still going.

And now, let's go back to the farm in Gardena. Remember the two brothers?

Older: Did you read this letter?

Younger: What? Another one?

Older: Yep, our farm's gone now, I can't figure it. I thought they were supposed to watch our farms and equipment, but those darn politicians and some of those big organizations, they. . . .

Younger: Look! We've got some money saved. We could start somewhere over again.

Older: Let's not be funny. You don't know anything about money or the farm. I've been doing most of the work here. You've just been going to a Jr. College. What do you know about anything? Let's wise up!

Younger: Well, we can go out on these seasonal work. . . .

Older: Come on. Quit that talk. I wouldn't work on any white man's farm. The government put us here and they're going to get us out. We're getting food and housing.

Younger: That's it! We expect the government to do everything now. You think all Caucasians hate us. And look at the shortage of labor now. If we're big enough, we'd think more of national security than our own troubles. Though I'm no brainstorm at college, at least, I learned about the powers of goodwill, cooperation and team work. And I met plenty of swell Caucasians. And what do you think these WRA offices and hostels and Y's and churches are doing on the outside?

And remember the Caucasian and the Nisei girl in the dorm? The Nisei girl, if you remember, had but one more year to go to earn her stripe to become a full registered nurse: the top-most goal in nursing. She wanted to go out of camp and finish school, but was not able to meet expenses. And, too, because of the shortage of nurses, the center hospital asked that she remain. Torn between her own desire and that of the concern over her people, she finally made a decision and wrote the following letter to her old school-mate.

Dear Jean:

First, congratulations, making your RN rating. May it always be meaningful to you as you carry on your work.

As for myself, I'm forgetting all desires toward earning the stripe, but please don't misunderstand me. My heart is still in nursing. . . and that is why I'm going to remain in camp. I sincerely feel that I can be of greater service here than on the outside. Although my pay is \$16.00 a month, I have no reason to complain, when the physicians here are only getting \$19.00. For the work they are doing here, they could easily make \$400 a month on the outside.

Wishing you luck, Jean.

With love,
Masa (signed)

Let's go back to that man and woman who owned the vegetable stand. Theirs is a peculiar situation and yet, not an unusual one. Four of their children have been reared in America in the usual fashion. One was sent back to Japan, having spent nine years there and returned just three years ago. This latter, who went to Japan, is close to the parents, but distant from her brother and sisters. They have never shown much interest in the family. They are individuals. They are frustrated. They get along with people outside the family, but not with those within the family.

Tom, 23, is leaving camp in a few days and he is talking to Jimmy, 20, who volunteered.

Tom: Somehow, I don't feel sad about leaving the family. Here, I'm going outside, and may not see Mom and Pop for a long time, but I don't really care. Something's wrong with me. I don't care about anything. . . . and I cannot stand our home life.

Jim: Home life? Is that what you call this existence? We don't know what home life is! But I feel like you do. Something's gone from me, too. Maybe it's this camp-life. I know I used to have more ambition than this. I volunteered, but it was just to get out. What is patriotism, anyway?

June: (25 years of age, coming through the doorway) I couldn't help but hear you fellows. You know what I think? You'll laugh, but it's because you don't go to church anymore that you feel the way you do.

Tom: There she goes again. . . church, church, church!

June: Yes, church. I can remember when you used to go to the services regularly in High School. Your thoughts had more depth, and your motives were less selfish. You knew you needed Him. But ever since Pearl Harbor, you've lost your head. You've taken the easiest way out of blaming people and situations and things, and making excuses, and thinking your attitude is justified because of what you went through. You've given up. You just can't take it without letting bitterness get you down. And you've put God somewhere in the background. Now, you're both going out to represent us. With your present frame of mind, I can see what kind of impression you're going to make. Can't you both see what you're doing?

Tom: O. K., Sis, you could just about shut up! We've heard enough of that. I'm glad I'm getting out. (Pause) Aw, don't go feeling hurt. You're all right and some of the things you say has some sense, but I can't stand Mom and Pop's gab.

Jim: Yeah, they're always saying: "What will the neighbors think?" What do I care what the neighbors think? But what's worse, they don't just worry about us. I don't mind that. But you'd think that every resident in the block were their own kids. They worry about this man's gambling, that girl's soldier friends, that boy's smoking, and what happened to yesterday's left-over rice in the mess hall. Embarrassing, ain't it?

Mary: (17 years of age) And just because I went to two dances with Joe, they think I'm gonna marry him. . . and to top it off, he's younger than me. What kind of people are our parents, anyhow?

June: Stop it! That's no way to talk. We've been brought up in different world. The reason we say we don't understand our parents is because we don't ever try to understand them. Here, they are aching for our love and we disregard them altogether. They're trying to make our world-in-the-future

a happier one so we won't have to go through what they did, but we're not interested enough to know what they went through. Some day, we're going to be parents and if and when our children talk back to us, we'll know what it feels like to be hurt and crushed and cast aside.

Yes, each has had his and her problem. Some have met their problems with courage. Some have let bitterness get the best of them and have been unhappy, and thus, what they could have contributed to camp-life was never given. Some have not, as yet, found a means to solve their problems. But all in all, we are all searching for an Exit to the outside world, but we are hoping this exit will lead us to wider horizons, higher ideals, more people, to be of greater service and to rise nearer to God.

We feel that we do not have to step out of this center to reach that outside. Spiritually, if there is understanding of the present situation, love for country and fellowmen, faith and hope in God, and a desire to hold on to the Christian way of life, then there is no borderline. There is no barrier. True, but now, we must go out. It was once our patriotic duty to cooperate; to stay in the centers and build a community of our own--an assembly center. It is still our patriotic duty to cooperate, but we must do so, by helping to liquidate these centers by going out; not rebuild a community of our own, but become a part of an already established community, and continue in beautifying it.

A quotation from Henry Thoreau reads: "Aim above morality. Be not simply good. Be good for something." As Christians, that "Aiming above morality must be our Exit from a limited way of living to an expanding one, where no border line can be the "detour" sign in our endeavors, and it must also be our pass and Exit to the outside world. We cannot just live haphazardly. We must leave with purpose, with courage, and faith in our America and her people, our people.

When Stanley Jones visited he said that it was up to us, the followers of Christ (and we are His followers, aren't we all?) to go out and bridge the gap between races and creeds and stations in life, that friendship and brotherly love may hold fast and permeate, and be a unifying, spiritual, and living means to a world peace.

We must get out of a mile square world. We cannot confine ourselves through pity. We must move beyond those gates. We must expand. We will get out! We will be useful! We will become a part of America so America will become a part of us!