

This is a brief paper expressing an attitude toward evacuation. It was written by an 18 year old college freshman in Chicago. Further details of this individual, E.K., may be found in C.K. Diary. The composition was written for the freshman English class and it was read to the class to acquaint the students a little with the nisei group. None of the class had any knowledge of the evacuees up to the time that this student enrolled in the school.

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#### THE IMPACT OF PEARL HARBOR UPON MY LIFE AND AMBITIONS

I suppose that the event which was the turning point in my life was December 7th, 1941, the day when the Japanese Army and Navy so treacherously attacked our forces at Pearl Harbor. I was walking home from church that Sunday morning with my sister, and call it psychic if you may, but I had the strangest feeling that everything was not quite right. Upon turning the first corner, we walked by a cigar store, its radio on full blast, with a lot of people standing about. As we passed, two men looked at us and said, "There goes a couple of those dirty Japs!" My sister answered them with an "I beg your pardon, we're Americans!" Still not knowing what had happened we went home, and it wasn't until we turned on the radio that we heard the news--The Japs had bombed Pearl Harbor! Dad couldn't believe it and he said that it all must be a joke of some kind. As the minutes went by and still the news came on, we realized that it had happened...they had attacked. (I'd like to say right now



that we were just as sore about it as the next fellow for after all, weren't we Americans too?)

The next day I went to school, and in all of my classes we just discussed what had happened the day before. Some of my classmates sort of looked at me and started to whisper. To them I was a Jap because I had a yellow face. Others came up to me and told me not to worry. They didn't stop to consider that I had gone all the way through school with them; that I had never been out of the United States, let alone California; that I was just plain American as they were. At ten o'clock an assembly was called in the auditorium for us to listen to the President's speech. It was then that the President declared war with Japan. Some girls came up to me and said that they would tell me what the assembly was all about when it was over. They were under the impression that I wasn't going to the assembly for I was the only Japanese-American in school. That day we only had classes in the morning. All afternoon I couldn't stop thinking about it. I was all mixed up inside because here I had grown up with my schoolmates; they had treated me as one of the gang...now I was different because of the color of my face. As my friends got used to the idea of being in this war, they began to realize that they were wrong in being prejudiced against me, so they again took me into their "gang".

In January, I graduated from high school. At that time I had no knowledge of the coming evacuation, so I planned to go on with my education. The town in which I was brought up was the home of the Mare Island Navy Yard. My dad had opened up a shop there in 1904 after he was honorably discharged from the United



States Navy. He knew many of the leading citizens there, and I know that they thought as much of him as he did of them. That was why it was so hard for us to leave there, for in February, 1942, we received word that since we were Japanese, and Japan was at war with America, we would have to leave. I guess they had to be careful because of the Navy Yard being just across the channel. Then too, it was getting dangerous to stay there because of the many threats we got from the local Filipinos, Negroes, sailors, etc. I'll never forget the day we left. All of our classmates, my dad's and mother's friends and customers came to say goodbye to us. Just before we got into the car, my dad went to two of his best friends and put his arms around them... they were all over six feet tall and very husky, and he was not an inch over four feet eleven. They said goodbye for the last time, with tears rolling down all three of their faces. As we rolled along the highway, I began to think of how much had happened in so short a time. However, I did not feel bitter about all this because it probably was a military necessity. I felt that it was my duty as an American to cooperate with anything that was best for everyone.

Still without knowledge of the evacuation, I entered the San Francisco Junior College. We were living temporarily in San Francisco, not knowing what was to come next. My sister had lost her job soon after the war broke out, after faithfully serving her employers for four years. I had been going to school for two months when we received the news that all Japanese Aliens and Japanese of American ancestry were to be evacuated from the Pacific Coast. On May 7th, a dull and rainy day, we left for the Assembly Center which was called Tanforan. Formerly a race track,



it is located about thirty-five miles away from San Francisco. I had the funniest feeling as we entered the center for it was surrounded with barbed wire; guards were placed everywhere and I could see row upon row of barracks and horse stables, which were to be our homes until we were moved to permanent relocation centers. After we all had our physical examinations, we were shown to our "suite", consisting of two horse stables, divided into four rooms. It was just sprayed over with white paint without a thorough cleaning first, for I had found many strands of horse hair on the wall. This was to be our living quarters---for how long, I did not know. At noon, we went for lunch at the mess hall. We had to bring our own eating utensils and wait in line to be served. Showers were placed in one small, square room and we gradually got used to that. The lavatories were seated in two long rows with a skimpy wall between every two. Once a week we had a talent show, a dance and a movie. Each block had its own recreational halls where the younger boys and girls went to play games or learn to do handcraft.

After we settled ourselves in our new homes the best we could, I got myself a job as a mimeograph operator at twelve dollars a month in the center. Through this job I met quite a few other Japanese-American boys and girls. Before camp I had known very few Niseis (Americans of Japanese ancestry) since I had been around only Caucasians, Chinese and Negroes all the years before.

Since Tanforan was so close to the city, a great many of my friends came to visit me. However, we were not allowed to bring them down to our barracks. We met up on the grand stand, across tables. They brought us candy and cookies, which were always



welcomed for we could not purchase any of these at the canteen. I would often go up to the grand stand at sunset and look out over the fence upon the outside world. A few miles down the road I could see neon signs flashing off and on. How long were we to be kept here?

Six months went by very quickly. In that space of time, I went to work daily, took in the weekly shows, went to the various hobby shows that they had, attended the two concerts that they put on and went to the plays and dances that they held. The time came closer to the day when we were to be sent to Relocation Centers. On September 7th, my older brother, younger sister and brother and I left on the first contingent for the Gila River Relocation Center in Arizona. The rest of the family were to follow in about a month. We traveled by train, had a very uncomfortable trip, and on the third day we reached Casa Grande. From there we traveled by bus for five hours and on 3 o'clock of the same day, we reached our destination...Rivers, Arizona, located in the middle of nowhere, so it seemed, with nothing but miles and miles of desert surrounding it. Here and there I could see huge buttes and cacti sticking up from out of the sand. We all felt hot, sticky and dirty, (temperature was 120 degrees) but had to stay with our escort in the stuffy little office until we got our clearance and barrack appointed. The barracks there were much better than the ones in the Assembly Centers, and they were not as crude. The construction was of plaster boards and double roofs, to protect us from the terrific heat. The roofs were red and the walls were creamed colored, so it seemed much more cheerful than the Tanforan horse stables. (Incidentally, barracks in all the other relocation centers were constructed of



black tar paper, so I think we were very fortunate to have the red and white buildings.

I started to work on the newspaper in Gila cutting stencils, doing a few cartoon, etc. It was so hot at that time that I had to do something useful to keep my mind off of the heat. Around the third week after I had started working, the rest of our family came down to Arizona and we were all at the Administration office way ahead of schedule, anxiously waiting for their arrival. They arrived in camp around noon time and we were so happy to see each other that it wasn't until three or four minutes later that I noticed dad not being in sight. I asked where he was and it was then that my mother told us that he had had a stroke on the train on the way down from California. He was taken to the hospital in San Luis Obispo, California, and none of the members of the family could stay with him. They came ahead, leaving dad behind in the strange hospital. However, my older sister got permission from the War Relocation Authority to go back to see how he was getting along. She stayed with father for a week and when she got back she told us that he had regained consciousness but he didn't seem to recognize her. Four months later, he was transferred to the Rivers Community Hospital. When I first saw him I didn't know what to say or do. I told him that I was glad to see him looking so well, but he just nodded. When we got home my sister told me that he was paralyzed completely on the right side and his voice was also paralyzed. On visiting him I usually told him what I had done all day long, the little things that happened at home, etc. Since his eyesight was so bad, he couldn't read what we wrote and he could not write in either English or Japanese; the only thing he could do when he wanted anything was motion to us by hand. I



guess being around familiar faces helped him a lot, for at the end of the second month he looked much better, and the color seemed to creep back into his shallow cheeks.

In January, 1943, I started to work in the Camouflage Net Factory there in the center. They had opened it for production the month before, and since I could think of no better way to help with the war effort, I thought this was just the opportunity. Our factory and the one in the Poston R.C. were the only two in the United States that were making these camouflage nets for the Army. Upon hearing this, I felt that I was really doing something worth while. The boys and girls working there were very enthusiastic about their weaving, and we ran way over the minimum of nets that we were supposed to produce per day. Wages were about the same as that of the defense workers set on the outside, minus some odd dollars that were set aside, to be divided later on among all the workers in camp who were making twelve dollars per month. (non-camouflage workers)

I was saving all I could because I still hoped to go on with my education some day. About this time they were beginning to let the Japanese go out to resettle in the Middle West, New York, etc. We had put in our application early so it wouldn't be long before we could leave camp.

In March, 1943, they had a registration for all the people in all the camps to more or less see what country they were sympathetic with, at the same time asking for volunteers in the Armed Forces. Of the first generation, there were quite a few who declared their loyalty to Japan, but the majority had decided that America was their home. The disloyal Japs are now in a separate camp in Tule Lake, Newell, California, where they will



eventually be traded with Americans who are prisoners of war in Japan. Up to date, there are over 8,000 Nisei boys who have volunteered for the Army. Just a few days ago there was a big article in the paper about how some of these Japanese American Combat Teams who went over to Italy captured many German prisoners.

In April we got our clearance for resettling, because we had put in our application early. At last we were to be like any other American--free to do as we pleased without barbed wire fences and guards to watch over every move we made. Again we boarded the train, only this time it was to the outside. The trip was uncomfortable, but I didn't notice it because I was feeling so happy. Upon arriving in Chicago, we went directly to the Friends' Hostel, an organization which is helping Loyal Japanese to resettle. We rested for two days there, for we were tired from the trip, and on the third day we started our apartment hunting. We were very lucky for we hadn't walked but three blocks when we found a nice apartment on the South Side of town. I found a job as a receptionist almost immediately and the people that I worked with were so nice to me. Everyone helped us in any way that they could and I was really happy. This is what I had missed all these many months in camp; to walk on pavement instead of fine sand two or three inches deep; to see movies in nice theatres instead of on the hill where there were so many scorpions and rattlesnakes; that free feeling, the way an American should feel!

Things went on very smoothly for me, and at the end of four months we were pretty well established. Then on August 27, we received a telegram from Arizona saying that dad had passed away.



We all wanted to go back to see our father for the last time, but we weren't able financially, so in the end it was decided that my older sister and I should go...to comfort mother and also handle the funeral details. Mother and the little ones at home took dad's death pretty calmly. The funeral was held in the barrack-church. It was a quiet, simple ceremony.

We stayed in Gila for six weeks and once more we set out for Chicago. As the train went on its way, I thought of the decision that I had to make. I could either work and help to bring the rest of the family out from the camp, or go on with my education. I finally decided that I would go on with my education, for in the future when I graduated from college, I could take better care of mother, little sister and brother.

I enrolled in the Wilson Junior College as soon as I got back. There was a lot of red tape to go through because of the out of state fees, etc. I am paying \$226 per year to go to school, and even if that is sort of a large sum, I am glad that I have the opportunity to continue with my schooling. I like junior college very much; the teachers and students are really "swell."

In spite of what I went through, I do not feel bitter about it. All that has happened during this evacuation has made me realize how much Americanism means to me. I also realize that democracy is at stake. This is not only my problem for there are hundred of others like me who have gone through the same thing. This country is composed of many racial groups; we are all Americans fighting for the American way of living, which is the best in the world for me!