

# *MY INSPIRATION*



“What’re you doing! Get out of our house. You don’t belong here,” father said, as the soldiers, who broke down the door to our house, came storming into our living room.

Mother screamed, “Our family has lived here for over fifty years. What did we do to deserve this?”

The soldiers ignored them and continued to enter the house.

“You may take one bag each. Be quick, we have many more homes to clear out before we are due at the camp!” the sergeant ordered looking at his watch. “You’ve got exactly ten minutes.”

We were pushed to the back of the house. Father took four bags he had found in the closet and set them onto the bed. Mother collected pictures and all of the valuables she could hold onto. We had to pack quickly. We could only take what we could carry.

We were told that this might happen. Stories of other families being forced from their homes were spreading in our community, but we had a hard time believing it. How could our country be doing this to us?

We looked around the house and felt sad that we could not take more. Our whole life was in this house and now we were leaving, not knowing why.

My brother and I stuffed our clothes into the luggage father had given to us.

I took what I could from my dresser and then got my diary from under the mattress on my bed. I took my purse and I put all of my personal things inside.

“Move, you’ve had too much time already. Get outside!” the soldier yelled at us.

We were moving quickly trying to not make the soldier even angrier with us.

We carried what we could and then they pushed us out of the door onto the front porch. In front of our house there was a big transport truck used to move soldiers from place to place. It had a green cover over the top.

There was a crowd of people looking at us watching what was going on. These were our neighbors and they just stared at us. No one came to help us, not even Father McCulley.

We climbed up into the truck. Once inside we held our bags in our laps. There were already about ten other people on the truck. We looked out the back as the truck pulled away from our home. The people who had been on the street were running into our house to take what they could. We knew we would never see this place again.

We all sat in silence, not knowing what to say or do. We had heard about this happening in other places, but we did not think it would happen to us. We had lived here all of our lives. Why did they think we were such a threat?

When our family arrived in Oregon, over seventy years ago, we were welcomed with open arms. Now they looked at us as if we were their enemies.

Many of the people of our town were becoming jealous of us. They wanted our land, and now with this new law, they were going to get what they wanted.

We stopped a few miles later, and we observed a similar story. They gave the people in the house ten minutes to gather what they could and then leave their home. Just like at our house, a crowd stood silently, watching the events in front of them.

A family of seven climbed into the truck; a mother, father and three small children got onto the truck first, followed by a grandmother and grandfather.

The young children were screaming, "Why do we have to leave our house. Where're you taking us?"

I wanted to scream as well, but I knew it would not help.

We picked up two more families and then we drove for a long time. As it got dark we tried to sleep in the crowded truck. The light of the moon came in through the opening

at the back of the truck. It was getting colder. We were all tired, hungry, and thirsty.

The truck was loud and very bumpy. The trip was very long. We had no idea where we were going. We could hear the sound of the tires on the pavement as the truck rolled to our unknown destination.

About dawn, we started to slow down. I looked out of the back of the truck and there was nothing as far as the eye could see; just brown grass and an occasional small tree.

We turned off the highway and onto a dirt road. The dust billowed behind us and blocked the view. The dust came inside of the truck and we all began to cough. Everyone was awake now.

The truck came to an abrupt stop, throwing us forward.

“Alright, get off now. Hurry!” the soldier said as he dropped the gate. We jumped off one at a time onto the soft dirt.

As we looked around we saw a gate that led through a wire fence. At the entrance there was a table with three people asking questions. Inside of the gate there were many buildings.

“Get your things and go to the gate for processing,” the soldier, who had told us to get off of the truck, gave us another order.

They put us into the line as families. My father was at the end.

He asked the guard, “Where are we?”

“Shut your mouth and stay in line!” the guard responded.

We moved slowly while they asked each person questions. We couldn't hear what they said, but we knew we would find out when it was our turn.

A lady came through the gate in the fence with a bucket of water. When she got to me I wanted to drink all of it, but I only took a little and let my parents have more than me.

When I got to the table the person sitting on the other side asked me, “What is your name?”

“I am Mitsu Yomata,” I answered.

“How old are you Mitsu?” she asked another question of me.

“I am twenty years old,” I replied.

“Do you have any medical problems?” she asked.

“No, ma’am, I’m fine,” I responded.

“Next!” the lady yelled.

I went inside the gate and waited for my parents to answer the questions. I think they asked them more questions because they were older.

Once we were all together, they led us into the first building. The doors were open. When we got inside it took a minute for our eyes to adjust to the dark.

The place was big and had many tables in rows from one end to the other.

The woman who brought us the water began to speak, “This is the dining hall. Breakfast is at seven o’clock, lunch is at noon, and dinner is at six-thirty. If you’re late, you’ll not eat. Have a seat and then someone will come to take you to where you will stay,” she finished.

She walked away and left us all to wait.

It was cooler in the building. The breeze came in through the open door and gave us all a chill.

It was quite a long wait until an officer followed by six soldiers entered the room.

“I’m Colonel Greaves. You’ve been assigned to this camp and you’ll be under my control for as long as the government gives us the responsibility to make sure you do not communicate with the enemy.”

“All of the young ladies will follow Private Jones,” Colonel Greaves pointed to the private and directed he wanted him where to go.

“You young men will go with Private Robbins,” Colonel Greaves directed the private to go the in opposite direction.

“You parents and grandparents, stay here until we come to get you,” the captain said looking at the older members of the families.

One of the younger girls screamed, “NO! I won’t leave my family.”

My heart was in my throat. All of this had happened so suddenly. Our lives were being torn apart, and we did not even know why.

I looked over at the young girl and saw the panic in her face. I felt it too, but I knew I needed to be strong for my family.

One of the guards went over to her, picked her up and carried her off while she kicked and screamed.

I got my bag and my purse and did as I was instructed.

They took us out of the building and led us down a long walkway made of wooden slats. The wood beneath our feet made a loud noise with each footstep. We passed several buildings until we stopped at building thirteen.

The building was old. It smelled as if horses had been living there. We went inside and saw rows and rows of double bunk beds. The floor was made of dirt. The windows were small and dirty.

I thought to myself, “I’ve got a lot of cleaning to do to make this place livable.”

We passed many girls who looked at us as we walked by. They looked very sad. There was the noise of whispers. It was uncomfortable having all of the girls looking at us. I thought of some games we might play later to make them happy.

The soldier took us to the last row of beds.

“This is where you’ll sleep. You have ten minutes to put your things away. Then you’re to meet us back at the dining hall for lunch,” the soldier instructed us.

I looked around. How could I make sure that none of my things would be taken? If I left them out in plain sight, I was sure that someone would steal from me.

I decided to put on as many clothes as I could. I put my money and small items into my socks. I looked around and saw a small opening in the wall. I slowly walked over to the wall and put my diary gently inside. I had so much to write about, but I did not have time right then.

I helped the other girls put their things away. Some of them copied what I had done

and put on all of their clothes. We looked funny and fat. It did not matter, we did not want our things to be stolen.

We looked funny as we walked back to the dining hall. We were at the back of the crowd of girls who were running to get at the front of the food line. The sound of so many feet on the wooden walkway echoed through the camp.

When we got to the dining hall, the place was crowded with people waiting to eat lunch. I was so hungry I could hardly wait in line.

When I finally got to the serving table, they gave me a small bowl of soup, a piece of bread and a cup of water.

I looked for my family and finally found them sitting in the corner.

“You look really funny!” my brother laughed at me.

“Just wait and see what is left in your bag when you get back!” I retorted.

He suddenly had a look of panic on his face.

We talked about what had happened. It was the first time that we were free to talk.

“Where’d they take you Mitsu?” mother asked.

“They took us to building thirteen. All of us in the building are girls. The beds look hard and the room is very dirty,” I answered.

Mother laughed softly, “Now you’ll have to clean!”

“Where are you staying Hideki?” father asked my brother.

“I’m in building twenty-seven. It’s in the opposite direction. My building sounds like it’s the same as Mitsu’s, only we are all boys,” Hideki responded.

“We’re in building forty. We’ve got separate rooms, but they’re very small,” mother informed us.

She then pulled us together and gave us a big hug.

“We’ll get through this. We’re a strong family!” mother smiled through her tears.

“Father, can you explain to me why we’re here?” my brother asked.

“It’s pretty complicated,” he began. “Our country is at war and they think we will help the enemy,” father explained.

“Help the enemy? What do you mean?” Hideki asked surprised.

“We are Japanese. The Japanese army attacked our country at Pearl Harbor, and now they think we’ll help the Japanese,” father answered.

“Just because we have Japanese ancestry?” Hideki exclaimed.

“Yes, that is the only reason I can figure out,” father said sadly.

We spent four long years in the internment camp. Occasionally father would go out of the camp to work on a farm in another state. He would be gone for months at a time. I would stay with mother during those times.

My brother joined the army to get out of the camp. He became a member of the 442nd Infantry Regiment, which consisted primarily of Japanese-American soldiers. He was killed in Italy, and was given a medal for his bravery.

I got married and had two children while living there. My husband also worked on farms from time to time. Those were hard times for all of us.

After the war was over, we were released. We returned to Oregon. There was nothing there for us.

We took the little money that father and my husband had saved from the work they had done during our internment. We went to Washington State and bought a small farm where we raised chickens and pigs.

My husband was a good businessperson and soon our farm grew.

My oldest daughter, Akao Tomita, went to college and graduated with honors. She became an English teacher at a junior high school in the Chicago area.

She is happy, married and has a wonderful family. I am so proud of her.

*Mitsu Yomata’s daughter, Akao “Jenny” Tomita, was my English teacher in seventh grade. She was born in an internment camp in Idaho. While the story itself is fiction, it is based on fact.*

*Akao “Jenny” Tomita was my inspiration and she was instrumental for me to be interested in English, literature and creative writing. Thank you for your dedication.*

*“From humble beginnings rises greatness”*

**VOCABULARY:** (*Match the word to its definition*)

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|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. ignore _____       | a. unspoiled, pure              |
| 2. stuff (v) _____    | b. soft colorful material       |
| 3. luggage _____      | c. esteem, like                 |
| 4. diary _____        | d. spin, turn                   |
| 5. neighbor _____     | e. get well, improve            |
| 6. similar _____      | f. disconnect                   |
| 7. bumpy _____        | g. injure, hurt                 |
| 8. abrupt _____       | h. stamina, strength            |
| 9. bucket _____       | i. baggy blue jean pants        |
| 10. complicated _____ | j. tube to transport oil or gas |

**TRUE / FALSE:**

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|---|-------|
| 1. My family lived there for fifty years.                     | T / F |
| 2. We were taken to a train station.                          | T / F |
| 3. Our neighbors yelled at the guards to stop taking us away. | T / F |
| 4. My brother ran away.                                       | T / F |
| 5. The buildings smelled like horses.                         | T / F |
| 6. I gave away all of my clothes.                             | T / F |
| 7. The girls were in building number eleven.                  | T / F |
| 8. The Japanese had attacked our country.                     | T / F |
| 9. I died in the camp.  | T / F |
| 10. We were taken to the city.                                | T / F |



**MULTIPLE CHOICE:**

1. What was the dog's name? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Duke
  - b) Buddy
  - c) Fluke
  - d) Doobey
  
2. With who would Ken live if he hated Alaska? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) parents
  - b) cousins
  - c) grandparents
  - d) foster parents
  
3. How far was Aunt Millie's house from Ken's? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) next door
  - b) about five kilometers
  - c) about two miles
  - d) about one hundred miles
  
4. What did Ken find in the old shack? \_\_\_\_\_
  - a) Duke
  - b) coins
  - c) newspapers
  - d) car

**COMPREHENSION:** (*Write a complete sentence to answer the question.*)

1. What was the truck like?

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2. Who watched as we left our home?

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3. How many bags were we allowed to take with us?

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4. What state did we live in?

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5. How many people were in the second family who got onto the truck?

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6. What began to blow into the back of the truck?

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7. What did the lady bring to us while we waited in line?

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8. What name did I give when I was asked about my name?

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9. What did I do with my diary?

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10. What did I do with my clothes?

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