

# *INSPIRATION*



“What are 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, “We have 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 visit before we are due at the camp!” the sergeant ordered looking at his watch. “You have exactly ten minutes.”

We were pushed to the back of the house. Father found four bags and set them on the bed. Mother collected pictures and all of the valuables she could carry.

My brother and I stuffed our clothes into the luggage father had given 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 have 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 were pushed out the door onto the front porch. In front of our house 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 watching at 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 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 the 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 didn't 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 we were looked at as if we were 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 heard a similar story. They gave the people in the house ten minutes to gather what they could and then leave the house. Just like at our house, a crowd stood silently, watching the events in front of them.

This was a family of seven; grandmother and grandfather got onto the truck first, followed a mother, father and three small children.

The young children were screaming, "Why do we have to leave our house. Where are 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 heard 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 for far as the eye could see. Just brown grass and an occasional small tree.

We turned off of 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. On the other side 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 another order.

We got into line as families. My father was at the end of the line.

He asked the guard, “Where are we?”

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

The line moved slowly. They asked each person questions. We couldn’t hear what was said, but we knew we would find out when it was our turn.

A lady came out of the fence with a bucket of water. When she got to me I wanted to drink all of it, but I took only 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 am 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 are older.

Once we were all together we were led 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 are late, you will not eat. Have a seat and then someone will come to take you to your house," she finished.

She walked away and left us all to wait.

It was a little 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 am Captain Greeves. You have been assigned to this camp and you will 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. You young men will go with Private Robbins. You parents and grandparents, stay here until we come to get you.

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 didn't 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 made a loud noise with each footstep. We passed several buildings until we stopped at building thirteen. The building was old. It

smelled like horses had been living here. We went inside and saw rows and rows of double bunk beds. The floor was dirt. The windows were small and dirty.

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

The soldier took us to the last row of beds.

“This is where you will sleep. You have ten minutes to put your things away. Then you are to meet us back at the dining hall for more instructions,” 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 inside. I had so much to write about, but I didn't have time right then.

I helped the other girls put their things away. Some of them copied what I had done and put all their clothes on. We looked funny and fat. It didn't matter, we didn't want our things to be stolen.

We walked funny as we headed back to the dining hall.

As we got there, the place was crowded with people waiting to eat lunch. I was so hungry I could hardly wait I line.

When I finally got to the serving table, I was given 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 when he saw me in all of my clothes.

“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 did they take you Mitsu?” mother asked.

“They took us to building thirteen. I think 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 will have to clean!”

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

“I am in building twenty-seven. It is the opposite direction. My building sounds like it is the same as Mitsu,” Hideki responded.

“We are in building forty. We have separate rooms, but they are very small,” mother informed us.

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

“We will get through this. We are a strong family!” mother smiled through her tears.

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

“It is 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 and now they think we will 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.

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 our release we returned to Oregon. There was nothing there for us.

We took the little money that father and my husband had saved and went to Washington State and bought a small farm where we raised chickens and pigs.

My husband was a good business man and soon our farm grew.

My oldest daughter 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.

*Akao "Jenny" Tomita was my English teacher in seventh grade. She was born in an internment camp in Idaho. While the story is fiction, it is based on fact.*

*She was instrumental in me being interested in English, and literature.*

*"From humble beginnings rises greatness"*