

4. Evacuation

When the war broke out, my sister was still taking care of the three-year-old child in Oakland. Her employers called immediately to reassure her that they wanted her to continue working for them, but she left to devote full time to her duties as head of our household.

I continued to attend classes at the university hoping to complete the semester, but the Nisei population on campus was dwindling rapidly. Already rumors of a forced mass "evacuation"¹ of the Japanese on the West Coast were circulating, and many Nisei students hurried home to various parts of California to avoid separation from their families. Others returned because they had to take over the businesses and farms abruptly abandoned when their fathers had been seized and interned.

I wasn't aware of any violence against the Japanese in Berkeley, but there were many reports of terrorism in rural communities, and the parents of one of my classmates in Brawley were shot to death by anti-Japanese fanatics.

One evening when some friends and I were having a late snack at a Berkeley restaurant, we were accosted by an angry Filipino man who vividly described what the Japanese soldiers were doing to his home-

1. The term "evacuation" was the Army's official euphemism for our forced removal, just as "non-alien" was used when American citizen was meant. "Assembly center" and "relocation center," terms employed to designate the concentration camps in which we were incarcerated, were also part of the new terminology developed by the United States government and the Army to misrepresent the true nature of their acts. I use them in this book because these were the terms we used at the time.

land. His fists were clenched and his face contorted with rage. Fortunately, he had no weapon, and he left after venting his anger on us verbally, but he had filled us with fear. It was the first time in my life I had been threatened with violence, and it was a terrifying moment.

We were already familiar with social and economic discrimination, but now we learned what it was to be afraid because of our Japanese faces. We tried to go on living as normally as possible, behaving as other American citizens. Most Nisei had never been to Japan. The United States of America was our only country and we were totally loyal to it. Wondering how we could make other Americans understand this, we bought defense bonds, signed up for civilian defense, and cooperated fully with every wartime regulation.

Still the doubts existed. Even one of our close white friends asked, "Did you have any idea the Pearl Harbor attack was coming?" It was a question that stunned and hurt us.

As the weeks passed, rumors of a forced mass evacuation of the Japanese on the West Coast became increasingly persistent. The general public believed the false charges of sabotage in Hawaii, given credence by statements (with no basis in fact) from such government officials as Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, who told the press he felt the Pearl Harbor attack was the result of espionage and sabotage by Japanese Americans. Rumors of fifth column activity in California were also allowed to circulate freely with no official denial, although they were later completely refuted.

At the time California already had a long history of anti-Asian activity, legitimized by such laws as those that restricted immigration and land ownership. Racists and pressure groups of long standing, whose economic self-interests would be served by the removal of the Japanese, quickly intensified their campaigns of vilification against the Japanese Americans.

They were aided in their shabby efforts by irresponsible and inflammatory statements by the radio and press, which usually referred to the Japanese Americans as "Japs," thus linking us to the enemy in the public mind. They also circulated totally unfounded stories. The Japanese Americans, they reported, had cut arrows in the sugar cane to guide the Japanese bombers to Pearl Harbor; they had interfered with vital United States communications by radio signals; they were treach-

erous, and loyal only to the Emperor of Japan; they had used their fishing boats to conduct espionage. So completely were these falsehoods accepted by the public that I have heard some of them repeated even today by those who still believe the forced removal of the Japanese Americans was justified.

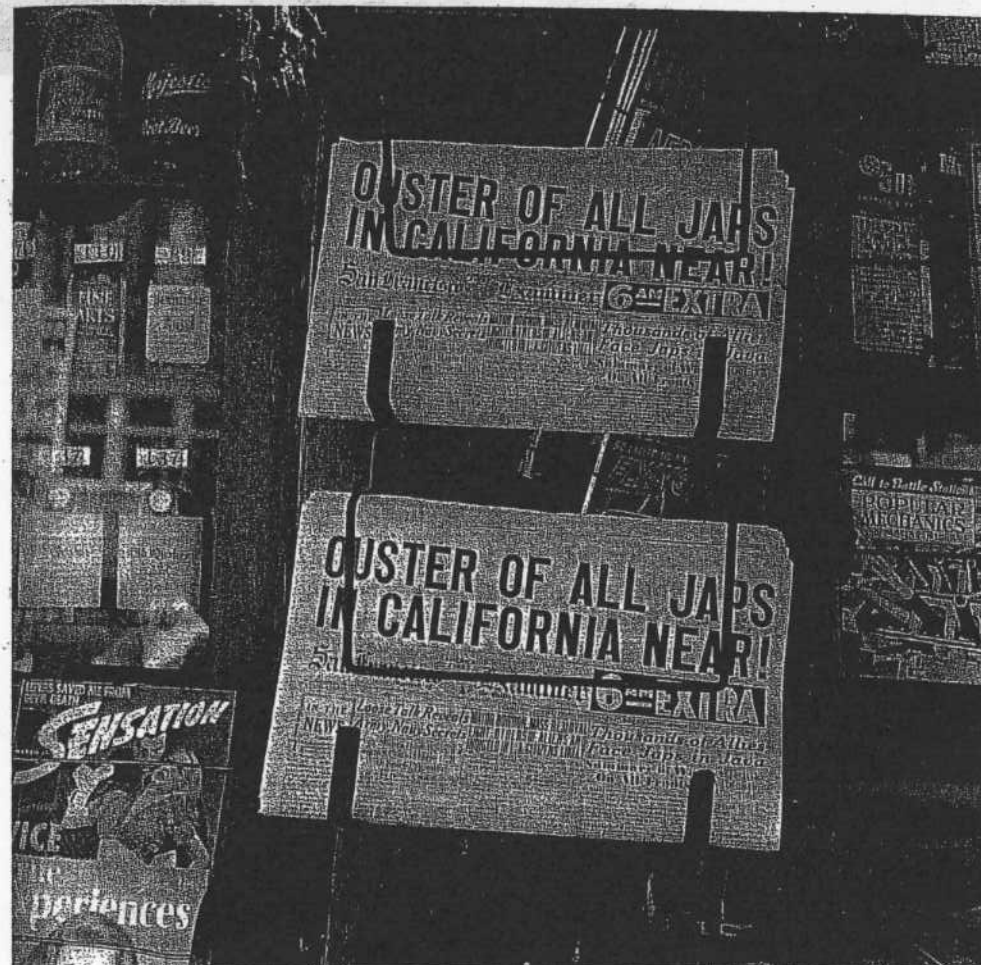
Compounding the mounting hatred, fear, and suspicion of the Japanese Americans on the West Coast were cynical manipulations of public opinion at many high levels of the government and the military. Earl Warren, then attorney general of California, testified that Japanese Americans had "infiltrated . . . every strategic spot" in California. He further made the appalling statement that there was no way to determine loyalty when dealing with people of Japanese ancestry, as opposed to those who were white.

On the floor of the House of Representatives, Congressman John Rankin urged, "I'm for catching every Japanese in America, Alaska and Hawaii now and putting them in concentration camps . . . Damn them! Let's get rid of them now!"

We now know that in the fall of 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his secretaries of state, war, and the navy had read the report of Curtis B. Munson (special representative of the State Department) written after he had made an intensive survey of the Japanese Americans in Hawaii and on the West Coast. In this report Munson stated that he found "a remarkable, even extraordinary degree of loyalty" among the Japanese Americans. Although this corroborated previous government findings, and although no evidence of disloyalty or sabotage on the part of Japanese Americans could be found, our government leaders were not persuaded. Overriding the concerns voiced by the attorney general and the justice department, they made the decision to forcibly evict all West Coast Japanese—"aliens and non-aliens"—under the guise of "military necessity." Furthermore, this decision was sanctioned by the Supreme Court of the land.

The fact that there was no mass eviction in Hawaii, which was closer to Japan and where the Japanese Americans constituted a third of the population, clearly invalidated the government's claim that the evacuation was a military necessity.

The confluence of all these factors, coupled with the fear and hys-



In 1942, hatred against the Japanese Americans was fueled by newspapers that usually referred to us as "Japs." Courtesy of National Archives

teria exacerbated by severe United States losses in the Pacific war, eventually combined to make the evacuation a tragic reality for us.

By the end of February my father's letters and telegrams began to reflect his growing concern over the matter as well. "Worrying about reported mass evacuation," he wired. "Please telegraph actual situation there."

But we didn't know what the actual situation was. None of us could believe such an unthinkable event would actually take place. Gradually, however, we began to prepare for its possibility. One night a friend came to see us as we were packing our books in a large wood crate.

"What on earth are you doing?" he asked incredulously. "There won't be any evacuation. How could the United States government intern its own citizens? It would be unconstitutional."

But only a few weeks later, we were to discover how wrong he was.

By February 1942, there was no longer any doubt as to the government's intention. On the nineteenth of that month, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, authorizing the secretary of war and his military commanders to prescribe areas from which "any or all persons may be excluded." Although use of the word "Japanese" was avoided in this order, it was directed solely at people of Japanese ancestry. The fact that there was no mass removal of persons of German or Italian descent, even though our country was also at war with Germany and Italy, affirmed the racial bias of this directive.

By the middle of March, Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt began to execute the order and set in motion the removal from Military Area Number One, along the entire West Coast, of over 120,000 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry, the majority of whom were American citizens.² From his later testimony at a House Naval Affairs Sub-committee on Housing (April 13, 1943), it is apparent that he performed this task with undisguised enthusiasm. He is quoted as having said, "It makes no difference whether the Japanese is theoretically

2. Of these, some 10,000 made their own way outside the excluded zones, while the remaining 110,000 were incarcerated.

a citizen. He is still a Japanese. Giving him a scrap of paper won't change him. I don't care what they do with the Japs so long as they don't send them back here. A Jap is a Jap."

With such a man heading the Western Defense Command, it is not surprising that no time was lost in carrying out the evacuation order.

Both the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution providing for "due process of law" and "equal protection under the law for all citizens," were flagrantly ignored in the name of military expediency, and the forced eviction was carried out purely on the basis of race.

Stunned by this unprecedented act of our government, we Nisei were faced with the anguishing dilemma of contesting our government's orders and risking imprisonment (as a few courageous Nisei did) or of complying with the government edict.

Because the FBI had interned most of the Issei leaders of the community, effectively decimating Issei organizations, the vacuum in leadership was filled by the Japanese American Citizens League, then led by a group of relatively young Nisei. The JACL met in emergency session attempting to arrive at the best possible solution to an intolerable situation. Perceiving that a compromise with the government was impossible, and rejecting a strategy of total opposition, because it might lead to violence and bloodshed, the JACL leaders decided the only choice was to cooperate "under protest" with the government.

My sister and I were angry that our country could deprive us of our civil rights in so cavalier a manner, but we had been raised to respect and to trust those in authority. To us resistance or confrontation, such as we know them today, was unthinkable and of course would have had no support from the American public. We naively believed at the time that cooperating with the government edict was the best way to help our country.

The first mass removal of the Japanese began in Terminal Island, a fishing community near San Pedro, and because these people were close to a naval base, their treatment was harsh. With most of their men already interned as my father was, the remaining families had to cope with a three-day deadline to get out of their homes. In frantic haste they were forced to sell their houses, businesses, and property. Many were exploited cruelly and suffered great financial losses.

We knew it was simply a matter of time before we would be notified to evacuate Berkeley as well. A five-mile travel limit and an 8:00 P.M. curfew had already been imposed on all Japanese Americans since March, and enemy aliens were required to register and obtain identification cards. Radios with short wave, cameras, binoculars, and fire-arms were designated as "contraband" and had to be turned in to the police. Obediently adhering to all regulations, we even brought our box cameras to the Berkeley police station where they remained for the duration of the war.

We were told by the military that "voluntary evacuation" to areas outside the West Coast restricted zone could be made before the final notice for each sector was issued. The move was hardly "voluntary" as the Army labeled it, and most Japanese had neither the funds to leave nor a feasible destination. The three of us also considered leaving "voluntarily," but like the others, we had no one to go to outside the restricted zone.

Some of our friends warned us to consider what life would be like for three women in a "government assembly center" and urged us to go anywhere in order to remain free. On the other hand, there were those who told us of the arrests, violence, and vigilantism encountered by some who had fled "voluntarily." Either decision would have been easier had my father been with us, but without him both seemed fraught with uncertainties.

In Montana my father, too, was worried about our safety. He wrote us of an incident in Sacramento where men had gained entrance to a Japanese home by posing as FBI agents and then attacked the mother and daughter. "Please be very careful," he urged. We decided, finally, to go to the government camp where we would be with friends and presumably safe from violence. We also hoped my father's release might be facilitated if he could join us under government custody.

Each day we watched the papers for the evacuation orders covering the Berkeley area. On April 21, the headlines read: "Japs Given Evacuation Orders Here." I felt numb as I read the front page-story. "Moving swiftly, without any advance notice, the Western Defense Command today ordered Berkeley's estimated 1,319 Japanese, aliens and citizens alike, evacuated to the Tanforan Assembly Center by noon, May 1." (This gave us exactly ten days' notice.) "Evacuees will report

at the Civil Control Station being set up in Pilgrim Hall of the First Congregational Church . . . between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. next Saturday and Sunday."

This was Exclusion Order Number Nineteen, which was to uproot us from our homes and send us into the Tanforan Assembly Center in San Bruno, a hastily converted racetrack.

All Japanese were required to register before the departure date, and my sister, as head of the family, went to register for us. She came home with baggage and name tags that were to bear our family number and be attached to all our belongings. From that day on we became Family Number 13453.

Although we had been preparing for the evacuation orders, still when they were actually issued, it was a sickening shock.

"Ten days! We have only ten days to get ready!" my sister said frantically. Each day she rushed about, not only taking care of our business affairs, but, as our only driver, searching for old crates and cartons for packing, and taking my mother on various errands as well.

Mama still couldn't seem to believe that we would have to leave. "How can we clear out in ten days a house we've lived in for fifteen years?" she asked sadly.

But my sister and I had no answers for her.

Mama had always been a saver, and she had a tremendous accumulation of possessions. Her frugal upbringing had caused her to save string, wrapping paper, bags, jars, boxes, even bits of silk thread left over from sewing, which were tied end to end and rolled up into a silk ball. Tucked away in the corners of her desk and bureau drawers were such things as small stuffed animals, wooden toys, *kokeshi* dolls, marbles, and even a half-finished pair of socks she was knitting for a teddy bear's paw. Many of these were "found objects" that the child in her couldn't bear to discard, but they often proved useful in providing diversion for some fidgety visiting child. These were the simple things to dispose of.

More difficult were the boxes that contained old letters from her family and friends, our old report cards from the first grade on, dozens of albums of family photographs, notebooks and sketch pads full of our childish drawings, valentines and Christmas cards we had made for our parents, innumerable guest books filled with the signatures

and friendly words of those who had once been entertained. These were the things my mother couldn't bear to throw away. Because we didn't own our house, we could leave nothing behind. We had to clear the house completely, and everything in it had either to be packed for storage or thrown out.

We surveyed with desperation the vast array of dishes, lacquerware, silverware, pots and pans, books, paintings, porcelain and pottery, furniture, linens, rugs, records, curtains, garden tools, cleaning equipment, and clothing that filled our house. We put up a sign in our window reading, "Living room sofa and chair for sale." We sold things we should have kept and packed away foolish trifles we should have discarded. We sold our refrigerator, our dining room set, two sofas, an easy chair, and a brand new vacuum cleaner with attachments. Without a sensible scheme in our heads, and lacking the practical judgment of my father, the three of us packed frantically and sold recklessly. Although the young people of our church did what they could to help us, we felt desperate as the deadline approached. Our only thought was to get the house emptied in time, for we knew the Army would not wait.

Organizations such as the First Congregational Church of Berkeley were extremely helpful in anticipating the needs of the panic-stricken Japanese and provided immediate, practical assistance. Families of the church offered storage space to those who needed it, and we took several pieces of furniture to be stored in the basement of one such home. Another non-Japanese friend offered to take our books and stored more than eight large cartons for us. In typical Japanese fashion, my mother took gifts to express her gratitude to each person who helped us.

Our two neighboring families, one Swiss and the other Norwegian, were equally helpful. We had grown up with the two blond Norwegian girls, whose ages nearly matched my sister's and mine. We had played everything from "house" to "cops and robbers" with them and had spent many hot summer afternoons happily sipping their father's home-made root beer with them.

The two boys in the Swiss family were younger, and I had taken one of them to grammar school every day when he was in kindergarten. In loving admiration, he had offered to marry me when he grew up. We were close to our neighbors and they both extended the warmth

of their friendship to us in those hectic days. We left our piano and a few pieces of furniture with one, and we piled all the miscellaneous objects that remained on the last day into the garage of the other.

The objects too large to leave with friends, such as beds, mattresses and springs, extra quilts, and rugs, we stored in a commercial storage house, whose monthly statements never failed to reach us even in the stalls of Tanforan or, later, in the sandy wastes of Utah.

Not knowing what crude inadequate communal facilities we might have in camp, we also took the precaution of getting typhoid shots and lost a day of packing, which we could ill afford, as we nursed sore arms and aching heads.

Two problems that remained unsolved until very near our departure deadline were what to do with Laddie, our pet collie, and our almost new Buick sedan. A business associate of my father's offered to store the car in his garage for us, but a few months after we entered Tanforan he needed the space and sold it for us for \$600.

Our pedigreed Scotch collie was a gentle friendly dog, but our friends didn't want to take him because of his age. In desperation, I sent a letter to our university's student newspaper, the *Daily Californian*.

I am one of the Japanese American students soon to be evacuated and have a male Scotch collie that can't come with me. Can anyone give him a home? If interested, please call me immediately at Berkeley 7646W.

I was quickly deluged with calls, one of which was from a fraternity that wanted a mascot. But we decided on the first boy who called because he seemed kind and genuinely concerned.

"I'll pay you for him," he offered, trying to be helpful.

But how could we accept money for our old family pet? We eventually gave the boy everything that belonged to Laddie, including his doghouse, leash, food bowl, and brushes.

It was a particularly sad day for my sister, who was the avid animal-lover of our family. It was she who had begged, cajoled, and coerced my parents into getting all of our dogs. But once they became our pets, we all loved them, and Mama used to cook a separate pot of vegetables to feed our dogs along with their cans of Dr. Ross's dog food.

Although the new owner of our pet had promised faithfully to write us in camp, we never heard from him. When, finally, we had a friend

investigate for us, we learned that the boy hadn't the heart to write us that Laddie had died only a few weeks after we left Berkeley.

By now I had to leave the university, as did all the other Nisei students. We had stayed as long as we could to get credit for the spring semester, which was crucial for those of us who were seniors. My professors gave me a final grade on the basis of my midterm grades and the university granted all Nisei indefinite leaves of absence.

During the last few weeks on campus, my friends and I became sentimental and took pictures of each other at favorite campus sites. The war had jolted us into a crisis whose impact was too enormous for us to fully comprehend, and we needed these small remembrances of happier times to take with us as we went our separate ways to various government camps throughout California.

The *Daily Californian* published another letter from a Nisei student that read in part:

We are no longer to see the campus to which many of us have been so attached for the past four years. . . . It is hoped that others who are leaving will not cherish feelings of bitterness. True, we are being uprooted from the lives that we have always lived, but if the security of the nation rests upon our leaving, then we will gladly do our part. We have come through a period of hysteria, but we cannot blame the American public for the vituperations of a small but vociferous minority of self-seeking politicians and special interest groups. We cannot condemn democracy because a few have misused the mechanism of democracy to gain their own ends. . . . In the hard days ahead, we shall try to re-create the spirit which has made us so reluctant to leave now, and our wish to those who remain is that they maintain here the democratic ideals that have operated in the past. We hope to come back and find them here.

These were brave idealistic words, but I believe they reflected the feelings of most of us at that time.

As our packing progressed, our house grew increasingly barren and our garden took on a shabby look that would have saddened my father. My mother couldn't bear to leave her favorite plants to strangers and dug up her special rose, London Smoke carnations, and yellow calla lilies to take to a friend for safekeeping.

One day a neighboring woman rang our bell and asked for one of Papa's prize gladiolas that she had fancied as she passed by. It seemed a heartless, avaricious gesture, and I was indignant, just as I was when

people told me the evacuation was for our own protection. My mother, however, simply handed the woman a shovel and told her to help herself. "Let her have it," she said, "if it will make her happy."

Gradually ugly gaps appeared in the garden that had once been my parents' delight and, like our house, it began to take on an empty, abandoned look.

Toward the end, my mother sat Japanese fashion, her legs folded beneath her, in the middle of her vacant bedroom sorting out the contents of many dusty boxes that had been stored on her closet shelves.

She was trying to discard some of the poems she had scribbled on scraps of paper, clippings she had saved, notebooks of her writings, and bundles of old letters from her family and friends. Only now have I come to realize what a heartbreaking task this must have been for her as her native land confronted in war the land of her children. She knew she would be cut off from her mother, brothers, and sister until that war ended. She knew she could neither hear from them nor write to tell them of her concern and love. The letters she had kept for so long were her last link with them for the time being and she couldn't bear to throw them out. She put most of them in her trunk where they remained, not only during the war, but until her death. In the end, it fell to me to burn them in our backyard, and I watched the smoke drift up into the sky, perhaps somewhere to reach the spirit of my gentle mother.

Our bedrooms were now barren except for three old mattresses on which we slept until the day we left. But in one corner of my mother's room there was an enormous shapeless canvas blanket bag which we called our "camp bundle." Into its flexible and obliging depths we tossed anything that wouldn't fit into the two suitcases we each planned to take. We had been instructed to take only what we could carry, so from time to time we would have a practice run, trying to see if we could walk while carrying two full suitcases.

Having given us these directions, the Army with its own peculiar logic also instructed us to bring our bedding, dishes, and eating utensils. Obviously the only place for these bulky items was in the "camp bundle." Into it we packed our blankets, pillows, towels, rubber boots, a tea kettle, a hot plate, dishes and silverware, umbrellas, and anything else that wouldn't fit in our suitcases. As May 1 drew near, it

grew to gigantic and cumbersome proportions, and by no stretch of our imagination could we picture ourselves staggering into camp with it.

"Mama, what'll we ever do with that enormous thing?" my sister worried.

"We obviously can't carry that thing on our backs," I observed.

But all Mama could say was, "I'm sure things will work out somehow."

There was nothing to be done but to go on filling it and hope for the best. In the meantime, we watched uneasily as it continued to grow, bulging in all directions like some wild living thing.

We could have been spared our anxiety and agonizing had we known trucks would be available to transport our baggage to camp. But it is entirely possible the omission of this information in our instructions was intentional to discourage us from taking too much baggage with us.

The night before we left, our Swiss neighbors invited us to dinner. It was a fine feast served with our neighbors' best linens, china, and silverware. With touching concern they did their best to make our last evening in Berkeley as pleasant as possible.

I sat on the piano bench that had been in our home until a few days before and thought of the times I had sat on it when we entertained our many guests. Now, because of the alarming succession of events that even then seemed unreal, I had become a guest myself in our neighbors' home.

When we returned to our dark empty house, our Norwegian neighbors came to say goodbye. The two girls brought gifts for each of us and hugged us goodbye.

"Come back soon," they said as they left.

But none of us knew when we would ever be back. We lay down on our mattresses and tried to sleep, knowing it was our last night in our house on Stuart Street.

Neat and conscientious to the end, my mother wanted to leave our house in perfect condition. That last morning she swept the entire place, her footsteps echoing sadly throughout the vacant house. Our Swiss neighbors brought us a cheering breakfast on bright-colored



Baggage was a major problem, for we were told to take into camp only what we could carry. *Courtesy of National Archives*



From the moment we boarded the buses for Tanforan, every move we made was under armed guard. *Courtesy of National Archives*

dishes and then drove us to the First Congregational Church designated as the Civil Control Station where we were to report.

We were too tense and exhausted to fully sense the terrible wrench of leaving our home, and when we arrived at the church, we said our goodbyes quickly. I didn't even turn back to wave, for we were quickly absorbed into the large crowd of Japanese that had already gathered on the church grounds.

It wasn't until I saw the armed guards standing at each doorway, their bayonets mounted and ready, that I realized the full horror of the situation. Then my knees sagged, my stomach began to churn, and I very nearly lost my breakfast.

Hundreds of Japanese Americans were crowded into the great hall of the church and the sound of their voices pressed close around me. Old people sat quietly, waiting with patience and resignation for whatever was to come. Mothers tried to comfort crying infants, young children ran about the room, and some teenagers tried to put up a brave front by making a social opportunity of the occasion. The women of the church were serving tea and sandwiches, but very few of us had any inclination to eat.

Before long, we were told to board the buses that lined the street outside, and the people living nearby came out of their houses to watch the beginning of our strange migration. Most of them probably watched with curious and morbid fascination, some perhaps even with a little sadness. But many may have been relieved and glad to see us go.

Mama, Kay, and I climbed onto one of the buses and it began its one-way journey down familiar streets we had traveled so often in our own car. We crossed the Bay Bridge, went on beyond San Francisco, and sped down the Bayshore Highway. Some of the people on the bus talked nervously, one or two wept, but most sat quietly, keeping their thoughts to themselves and their eyes on the window, as familiar landmarks slipped away one by one.

As we rode down the highway, the grandstand of the Tanforan racetrack gradually came into view, and I could see a high barbed wire fence surrounding the entire area, pierced at regular intervals by tall guard towers. This was to be our temporary home until the government could construct inland camps far removed from the West Coast.

The bus made a sharp turn and swung slowly into the racetrack grounds. As I looked out the window for a better view, I saw armed guards close and bar the barbed wire gates behind us. We were in the Tanforan Assembly Center now and there was no turning back.

5. *Tanforan: A Horse Stall for Four*

As the bus pulled up to the grandstand, I could see hundreds of Japanese Americans jammed along the fence that lined the track. These people had arrived a few days earlier and were now watching for the arrival of friends or had come to while away the empty hours that had suddenly been thrust upon them.

As soon as we got off the bus, we were directed to an area beneath the grandstand where we registered and filled out a series of forms. Our baggage was inspected for contraband, a cursory medical check was made, and our living quarters assigned. We were to be housed in Barrack 16, Apartment 40. Fortunately, some friends who had arrived earlier found us and offered to help us locate our quarters.

It had rained the day before and the hundreds of people who had trampled on the track had turned it into a miserable mass of slippery mud. We made our way on it carefully, helping my mother who was dressed just as she would have been to go to church. She wore a hat, gloves, her good coat, and her Sunday shoes, because she would not have thought of venturing outside our house dressed in any other way.

Everywhere there were black tar-papered barracks that had been hastily erected to house the 8,000 Japanese Americans of the area who had been uprooted from their homes. Barrack 16, however, was not among them, and we couldn't find it until we had traveled half the length of the track and gone beyond it to the northern rim of the race-track compound.

Finally one of our friends called out, "There it is, beyond that row of eucalyptus trees." Barrack 16 was not a barrack at all, but a long