RIKKA

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"OUR civil liberties are precious rights and we should fight to maintain them. If we are willing to give up without a struggle at the first threat, we do not deserve to have them at all."
— JAMES OMURA

A Tribute to Integrity

MIDST hysteria engulfing the Pacific Coast during the early forties a singularly sane forthright voice crying in the Nikkei wilderness was that of San Francisco-based *Current Life* publisher, **James Omura** whose perspicacious ahead-of-his-time social and political commentaries also appeared in Japanese American vernacular newspapers (as well as later in the *Colorado Times*).

A random reading of Omura today cannot fail but to present evidence that here indeed was the North American Nisei Tom Paine, although no one was hardly aware of it at the time. Few perhaps are aware of it today.

Belatedly, we wish to acknowledge our debt to Jimmie Omura and to pay tribute to his sterling qualities by sharing some selected commentaries from his "Passing Show" column slated for publication February, 1942 — unpublished due to confiscation by American "security" agents (see facsimile copy, obtained by Freedom of Information Act appeal and claim, Doc. il 100-2887-1A, Denver FBI file).

It was when Omura resumed his journalism pursuits in Denver, where he had moved prior to the internment procedure, and reestablished a journal, *The Rocky Shimpo*, that he was jailed for outspoken defense of the Heart Mountain, Wyoming Concentration Camp protesters who were then affirming the prerogatives of citizenship, speaking out against flagrant administrative injustices.

On the essential political issues of the time — largely ignored by the mainstream Northamerican Nikkei print media — has anyone from that era spoken with the clarity of vision and perceptive thinking of this man? We would welcome response from readers.

The Cover....
Sharon Maeda:
Practical and Idealist

photo by ED IKUTA
courtesy *Tozai Times*

The Passing Show

By Jimmie Omura

A Fact

The great concern of 63,000 Nisei Americans living today on the Pacific coast is primarily the threat to their civil liberties. The loss of employments and bankruptcy of businesses as results of the current conflict are secondary in importance to the free exercise of their cherished birthright as Americans citizens.

The rising clamor for mass evacuation into the interior of all persons with Japanese faces is a cause for alarm. Such a movement would trespass upon fundamental precepts of our constitution and would deprive one segment of the nation's citizenry a just redress of its wrongs. In this respect the troubles of the Nisei are strikingly analogous to the difficulties confronted for centuries by people of Jewish birth.

Public hysteria is a parasite of every war. The current hysteria has for its basic foundation a clash between two opposing races. Racialism, as we all know, has been the irrevocable dividing gulf to understanding between Americans of racial descent and Americans of Caucasian derivations.

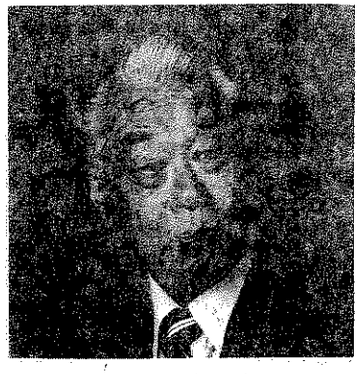
The mass evacuation of citizen Americans with Japanese faces is a far more serious matter than what our professional rabble-rousers would lead us to believe. There is the very grave matter of arbitrarily abridging the constitution — suspension of The Bill of Rights to citizen Americans merely because by accident of birth they happen to be Japanese. If we are any respecters of our federal constitution, we would hardly commit an overt act which would violate its essential structures.

Every Nisei should be unalterably opposed to mass evacuation. . . . Voluntary evacuation by the Nisei is a false idea of loyalty and is a betrayal of their inherited rights. We should not be so eager to give ground at the first threat to our civil liberties but should struggle to hold on to those inalienable privileges to which we are entitled.

In trying periods, such as the crisis we are now experiencing, false gods will appear to advise us. They will attempt to weaken us and then destroy us by subtle preachments and soothing promises for our submission. Whatever promises are made for us beyond the Sierras should not undermine our stern resolve to fight the good fight here where destiny has placed us. We ought not to barter our birthright for gold.

— **James Omura**

This is how Jimmie Omura spoke in 1942; judging from his extensive travelling, researching and writing (a regular column for *Hokubei Mainichi*, San Francisco) it is clear that his undaunted spirit remains as vigorous as ever.



James Omura

POEMS TO BREAD

Another poem is written
A glimmer of flesh.
Another promise is made.
A pillar of salt.

Another mouth to appease.
A thousand loaves.

The rest is nothing.
Poems to bread.

SPICE ISLAND

At dawn, as before
What burning sea-change
Emblazons the island
Coaxing the soursop

To bitter remembrance
And what strange fruit
What savage crime?
And starless nights

When Prospero sleeps
Who beats the Black
Slave, chained Caliban
Eyeless, ashamed?

— **Rob Rolfe**

ROB ROLFE is a poet librarian activist working in Toronto. He will be guest editing the next issue of *RIKKA* on a theme of apartheid.

CLEAN-UP

The ruins we are building,
they won't last.

How clean the sweep?
It all depends.

One blast
is unlikely to purify the earth
and air
of all the stench and squalor
there.

Let it come fast,
that furious hurricane
uprooting everything
grown by the past!

— **Charles Kormos**
Ramat Aviv, Israel

Editors, **Rikka**:

I would like to ask the help of your readers so that I can obtain first hand information about the experience of Japanese Americans or Japanese Canadians who served in either the U.S. Merchant Marine or the Canadian Merchant Navy during W.W.II. The result of this research will be an article about these wartime experiences.

Ian A. Millar
1806 Bantry Trail
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27284 U.S.A.

General Executive Director
Radio Pacifica FM Network

SHARON MAEDA
Practical and Idealist

SINCE 1949, when first formed by a group of pacifists, Pacifica Radio has functioned as an alternative radio voice to the American public in the vast areas of the arts and culture, news and information.

As a non-profit communications network with five stations across the U.S. (including KPFK in Los Angeles), Pacifica Radio has experienced both good and bad financial times over its lengthy and noteworthy existence. In 1980, times were bad for Pacifica Radio. Poor fiscal management at the politically liberal network coupled with a less than robust national economy had Pacifica in severe debt. The ideology and sense of purpose among those in the organization were as strong as ever, but Pacifica lacked the budgetary pragmatism that was needed to keep the progressive network operating.

Enter Sharon Rae Maeda. Pacifica recruited Maeda from KRAB radio in Washington state. Between 1978 and 1980, the Portland-born Sansei had literally saved the financially strapped KRAB by implementing a sound budget policy. Pacifica correctly figured that Maeda might be able to pull off a similar coup with its faltering network.

"The fiscal [aspect] no longer takes up a lot of my time," explained Maeda. "When I came to Pacifica five years ago I spent most of my time trying to hold off creditors and trying to figure out payment plans and making sure we were only spending as much as we were bringing in. Now I just look over the ledgers."

Today, the fortunes of Pacifica Radio are on the upswing, solvent, and in the process of mapping its long range future. As the network's chief executive director, Maeda is the person responsible for making Pacifica tick. Not only does she oversee the financial aspects of Pacifica (including fund-raising and lobbying for government funds), but she is also in charge of implementing the overall policy set by the network's board of governors. Pacifica has an archive of over 20,000 program tapes covering topics from apartheid to nuclear issues. Maeda feels these tapes hold an important key to the network's future.

"I feel our real push into the 21st century will not be to acquire more stations. It's not cost effective to keep acquiring stations. The overhead is enormous and the responsibility is enormous. With the same amount of money we could disseminate the information we already have to the general public and to commercial radio stations through cassette sales," said Maeda. "There are radio stations that would play what we have, maybe not rock 'n'roll stations, but like an all news station might want something we've done on the Bill of Rights. And there are a whole loose knit group of Black commercial stations around the country. Some have already purchased heavily our material on civil rights. There are little inroads we're starting to make. Hopefully, we will have the resources in the coming years to market these heavily.

"(Cassettes) can also be conduits for information from other parts of the world. Because of U.S. foreign policy, some people simply can't get any information about their country to the people of this country without it somehow getting distorted. I think our role in the future can be that of a conduit in the United States for culture and information coming from around the world, particularly the Third World."

Pacifica has often been labeled a network of the far left, but Maeda believes this classification reflects more the conservative nature of the mainstream press rather than the liberal orientation of Pacifica. She denies that Pacifica's programming is stacked with a liberal political orientation. Maeda says 60 percent of the programs on Pacifica Radio is music-related (underground rock, reggae, Latin, African, etc.), the other 40 percent is informational programming. Topics can range from a program on the proposed "Star Wars" defense plan, the Car Show (devoted to automobile affairs), or the Organic Gardening program. The problem, she says, is getting people to realize that there is something for everyone with Pacifica programming.

"We may be the only radio network that has a philosophy that's not bottom line dollar philosophy," Maeda said. "Within that, you can do a lot. By presenting divergent views and cultures we aren't espousing a certain line. We want the audience to be aware of ideas, music, and cultures that are different from their own. There are a lot of ways you can view peace, and there are different ways of dealing with peace issues. We are a conduit for all different perspectives."

Maeda says Pacifica tries to get conservative opinions on the air, but that this is not always easy. The network has had the American Nazi Party and the Ku Klux Klan as guests, but in many instances conservatives have declined invitations to express themselves through Pacifica. Maeda believes the network's "anything goes," listener call-in format intimidates some potential guests who are used to more controlled environments.

Pacifica Radio really is community radio realized. Ninety-five percent of the programming for each of the five stations (located in New York, Berkeley, Houston, Washington D.C., and L.A.) is produced locally. And 90 percent of that is produced by volunteers.

Maeda emphasized: "Almost all the hosts, the people who do the Car Show or (the woman) who does Uncle Ruthie (a popular children's show), are doing it as volunteers. There are few exceptions. They're on the air because they have expertise and because they enjoy it. It's a whole different way of doing radio. It's participatory radio."

Maeda has been a success at Pacifica largely because she's both idealistic and practical, but it has been her ideology and political opinions which have gotten her the most attention. Anything but shy about expressing her views, last April she was arrested in Washington for demonstrating against South Africa's policy of apartheid.

She has also been in the center of several raging political-vocational storms over the years. When working with the University of Washington's public television station in the mid-'70s, Maeda co-produced several controversial documentaries, one of which was on the Japanese American internment. The documentary was co-produced with current San Francisco anchorwoman Wendy Tokuda and co-sponsored by Tokuda's then-employers at the NBC Seattle affiliate.

"What blew people away were the economic issues (of internment)," recalled Maeda. "We said clearly in the documentary that (the internment) was done to get people off the farmlands. At the time, that wasn't accepted by many historians as being fact. We researched it and we felt comfortable with it. So it was very controversial. We got 55 hate letters and a couple hundred phone calls. The typical one was 'My nephew was killed at Pearl Harbor. How dare you put this on the air. Go back to where you came from.' Wendy and I were quite shaken because we were disappointed with our production and because it was the first documentary for both of us. So we weren't able to say things as strongly as we wanted. It was not a hard-hitting documentary. But even in a lightweight fashion we were able to bring out people who still harbored that much hate.

"Wendy's boss was very excited. He's a very liberal person. He felt we did a good job and felt the issue needed coverage, though at my station there was dead silence for about a week. Colleagues would say 'Hi, Sharon,' looking down at the carpet as they walked past me. Nobody wanted to discuss it. Sometime

later, my job was discontinued. That was just one of a number of things. They didn't want to rock the boat."

The second controversy came at Pacifica Radio several years ago. This time, ironically enough, it was the liberal press who accused Maeda of being a reactionary after she fired two KPFK reporters. According to Maeda, the two KPFK reporters had done fund-raising among some of Pacifica's major donors for an unauthorized trip to El Salvador. They gave the impression to the donors that their Central American excursion was a Pacifica assignment although the station had not sanctioned such a trip.

"It was 18 months later before I was vindicated and in the meantime I was vilified in the progressive press," said Maeda. "They were saying I, along with the managers under me, were trying to turn the organization into a more conservative organization that was less willing to take chances and thought Central America was not a critical issue. But (the reporters) were creating their own junket with no approval from the station. I found out about it the day before they took off and I said, 'you get on that plane and you're fired.' So, they got on the airplane and I fired them. The (El Salvador) elections were happening and they thought they were hot-shot journalists. They were going to file stories with Pacifica, but they were also going to sell them to wire services and newspapers all over the country."

Maeda not only survived the criticisms and attempts by some people at Pacifica to get her fired, but eventually got promoted from executive director to general executive director. Today there are still many social-political issues that have Maeda's attention. Protesting at the South African Embassy, or picketing Mann's Chinese Theatre and "Year of the Dragon," Maeda seems constantly involved in community and global issues.

"I feel very fortunate that I was the first grandchild and the first child born after my parents got out of camp. I was the symbol of the next generation and the hope of a better future," stated Maeda, who in junior high school planned to be a senator. She worked on Bobby Kennedy's 1968 Presidential campaign, but, devastated after his assassination, became disillusioned with electoral politics. Maeda said she eventually "evened out" politically. While she views the country as lead by a regressive administration, Maeda cites Mike Woo's election (as L.A. councilperson) and Jesse Jackson's run for the presidency as encouraging.

The Asian American and Japanese American communities in Los Angeles, however, she finds to be disappointingly fragmented.

"I was very active in the (Asian American) community in Seattle, but here I feel I'm very much an outsider," Maeda lamented. "In Seattle, there's not so much a Japanese American community as it is a broad coalition of ethnic groups that work together. Seattle's a very liberal city. When I got down here it was a rude awakening because even among Asian Americans it was very segregated. I had to go way out of my way to try to meet Chinese and Pilipinos. Here, you can belong to 50 organizations and they can all still be JA organizations. And with so many people here . . . There's even two JA anti-nuclear groups!

"The community here is divided geographically, generationally, socially, politically, and economically. There's so many JAs that you can have a group of 50 people and you can be off into your own little thing without having to interact with other people. I think L.A. is the hardest city to organize participatory *anything*.

Very active in local Asian American affairs, Maeda is on the board of Great Leap (the Asian American media organization); a member of Pacific Asian American Writers-West (a creative writing organization); an Asian American Journalists Association member; and nationally, serves on the Commission on Communication, National Council of Churches; General Commission on Communications, United Methodist Church; and The Film Fund. As for her long term career, Maeda feels it's still not set, despite her success thus far at Pacifica.

"I am happy where I am now," explained Maeda. "It's the first time I've found that my philosophy, principles, and own sense of what needs to happen in the world fits exactly with those of my employers (Pacifica's founding goal was some autonomy and could affect some change — whether it's in commercial radio, motion pictures, TV, or the print media — I would have to consider it. A lot of networks would be hard put to hire me because they would know enough about my reputation.

"But I think that you can make an impact wherever you are. You can have an influence. People say 'I can't take a straight job' or 'I'm going to sell out and go do my suburban thing.' It doesn't have to be either or, you can make an impact wherever you are. I think most Americans, specifically Japanese Americans, don't give themselves enough credit for what they can accomplish.

— Jon Matsumoto

Grateful acknowledgements to *Tozai Times*, Los Angeles, for permission to reprint this article from their issue of October 1985.

SILENT STEP

slender
warm brown
feet
shadowed against
the tiles
in perfect sculpture
of delicate angles
wanting to turn
yet stilled against
movement. cedar skin
shaped around
ages of stalked
time
lingers, smooth
as patience, distant
feet
etched into
the room's glance,
etched into
the mind
pulsate,
echoless

— Mylene Pepin
Montreal, Quebec

FROM PERSIAN MINIATURE

"Five Sufis Discussing Mystical Love"
(Safavid period / Isfahan style, c. 1590)

Life's stream softly
gurgles past
the foot of the Beloved.

eager faces
asking eager questions
beneath gnarled limbs
of a tree

one Sufi sits
aside with languid
eyes
he doesn't hear
the others

beside him
wild flowers
stare back at the sun
(though for a day)
he knows he can never do that

the visage of the Beloved
must forever remain
unseen . . .

— Nirmal Dass

NIRMAL DASS is a graduate student in English at York University, Toronto.

MEMOIRS OF A JAPANESE DAUGHTER

HAD I been able to forgive my mother during her lifetime and tell her so, I might have spared myself years of feeling *hagaii* ("itchy teeth," Japanese for helpless anguish tinged with frustration). I had long buried the events that shaped me into a mother-hating adult until they surfaced one evening during a sex seminar when I was well into middle age. Its leaders, in order to purge me of the naughtiness I attribute to sex and the guilt I assume for participating in it, exposed — no, overexposed — me via film to nudity. I had already watched male and female frontal nudes superimposed one upon the other, dissolve and coalesce into unisexual blobs, until I felt no shock, no shame, only boredom at the sight of another naked body.

Then, as I viewed vagina after vagina, topped with full or sparse curly hair and bracketed by limp vulvas — overkill again — my mind raced back to my adolescence and an altercation with my mother when she had so enraged me with her deceit that I vowed never to trust her again. For my story to make sense, however, I first must tell about my mother's early life that had the impact of a fist upon mine.

My mother was born about 1885, roughly 30 years after Japan, following 250 years of self-imposed isolation, was persuaded by Commodore Perry, commanding gunboats, to resume trade relations with Western nations. She grew up in a nation sprinting away from feudalism and a caste system toward industrialism and a more democratic society. My mother was born only 20 years after peasants were permitted to take surnames, though by decree workers still wore garments that denoted their occupations. Parties to adultery no longer feared punishment by crucifixion in the town square. And though the law that forbade it was rescinded, few couples married across class lines.

Reared in a sexist environment and imbued with mid-Victorian morals, my mother accepted her inferior lot as a matter of course, but not without indrawn fury. All she really wanted was the love of her father; she worshipped him. But he had no interest in her and never reciprocated her adoration. So her efforts to overcome his apathy formed the leitmotiv of her life.

Her father was more than apathetic. He was cruel. A rice merchant and a scholar, he branded her a disappointment by naming her Ura, which means the "opposite" or "reverse"; in short, the wrong gender. She was the third daughter as well as the third child. The next one, also a girl, was nameless for two years until her father went to register the birth of his first son. Offhandedly he told the clerk that the girl was to be called Four. He gave his sons less flippant, even noble names, and on them concentrated his love and his concern.

Of the eight children in the family, five were girls. Rivalry among them to attract their father's notice was fierce, their chances to succeed doomed by his sexism. But my mother did succeed. She became pregnant by the boy next door. And when she did, her shame radiated beyond her person on to the members of her family, whose esteem in the village was diminished by her sin. They felt sympathy one day because her hunger for love was understandable and loathed her the next because she had disgraced them.

My mother's one transgression took place during the August O-bon festival, when she and the neighbor's son were left to mind their respective houses. The others, each carrying a lantern, had gone to services at the ancestral cemetery, thereafter to light the way home for a visit by the spirits of the departed ones. When the two were alone together, probably for the first time, my mother was flattered by the boy's appeals and responded, at first tentatively, and with inhibition, then wholeheartedly, from the deep, undernourished recesses of her heart. She cherished the love the youth had shown her and kept it secret until her changing silhouette gave it away.

My mother's pleas that she and the boy be wed were refused by his parents, who said she was wanton and unfit to be their daughter-in-law. At 16, she gave birth to a son. Her lawsuit to have the youth declared the father of her child was fruitless. The case dragged on, and in mid-litigation her two-year-old baby died.

Embittered, shunned by her friends, and tortured most of all by the reproach in her father's eyes, my mother resigned herself to a life of spinsterhood. She had no trade and no place to go; no daughter ever left home except to marry. She had to stay and endure the abuse the townspeople dealt her.

My father's offer of marriage 20 years later enabled my mother to leave the scene of her misstep and seek fulfillment in a fresh environment. She came to the United States in 1920. They had not met before they were betrothed. The intermediary was a neighbor of my father's in Santa Barbara, who also happened to be my mother's cousin. He was about to return to Japan to bring back a bride, and asked my father whether he, too, would like to be introduced to a prospective wife. My father, 46, requested an older woman, one who would not be likely to run off with a bachelor younger than he, the ratio of Japanese women to men being small.

Her cousin thought my mother to be suitable and so advised her father, who not only sanctioned the match but called it a miracle — an opportunity to rid himself of a hopelessly unmarriageable daughter. While agreeing that any husband was preferable to none, he and my mother played out the charade of investigating my father's background. They learned that he came from a poor and uncultured but honest farming family not 10 miles from their own village.

My mother and my father started to correspond and exchange pictures. Their letters no longer exist, but every once in a while I look at their photographs. My mother was a slim woman, not breathtaking but comely, with puffy hair lacquered in the mode of the period. She appears totally unlike the fat, contentious person I called Mother.

In his serge suit, my father, a balding man with a Pancho Villa mustache and piercing black eyes, seems affluent and urbane. His studio portrait invests him with authority, dash, and a strength he did not have. The picture does not show that he was self-effacing and gentle, with neither the drive nor the powerful will possessed by my mother.

My father had left his first wife and gone to the United States in 1901. Because he sent small sums sporadically for a year and then nothing — not even letters — for eight years thereafter, she divorced him. Of this fact he was informed by a man from his prefecture, a San Francisco hotelkeeper, who served as a clearinghouse for information of this nature. For nearly 10 years my father labored on railroads as far East as Colorado, returned to California to farm, and saved enough money by 1918 to sponsor a wife.

My father wooed my mother by mail through the efforts of a professional letter writer. While his letters caused her father to marvel at the scholarship shown by a man who had not progressed beyond the third grade, my mother fell in love with the self-educated poet who in haiku described his dreams for their future together. She felt she knew him well and that he would love and understand her.

The author of those letters remains a phantom. I asked my father about the letters, but he did not remember, though it was he who told me about the other events that took place before my birth. They are here pieced together from my own recollections, surmises, and from information obtained from those of my mother's siblings who survived her.

Full of foreboding about leaving home to take up life in a foreign land with a man she had never met, my mother accepted my father's proposal of marriage. Because he never asked why a woman as able-bodied as she had remained single to the age of 35, she volunteered nothing, thus compromising her integrity and activating her conscience.

My parents were ushered into binding matrimony by a clerk. Upon their written instruction, but with neither of them present, he added my mother's name to my father's family register. Ordinarily, she then would have moved in with his parents, but they were both dead. She therefore lived at home in Japan for the six months she was required to wait before she applied for a passport. Upon receipt of steerage fare and a little extra from my father, my mother booked passage on the next vessel.

She made the five weeks' trip from her home in the mountains of the Southern Island, three days by horse cart to the railhead, by train to Yokohama (where she tested negative for hookworm and trachoma), and finally by ship to San Francisco. Because my father's documents had been destroyed in the earthquake and fire of 1906, my mother was detained at Angel Island for two weeks until the Immigration Service was satisfied by a cable from Japan that his entry had been a legal one.

During the entire voyage my mother wrestled with the conflict of whether she should reveal her blemished past to her husband. She decided that she must. At dockside she blurted out the story of her life. She promised that she would cause him no regret and be faithful forever if he would permit her to stay. My father was touched by her candor and courage — and decided in her favor, for as he explained to me much later, "I couldn't expect a thirty-six-year-old woman to be a virgin."

My mother was grateful, for only my father had the power to grant her her wish, the exchange of her label of outcast for that of matron. At the same time she was incensed that he had passed off as his own the letters that had so deeply affected her. To her disgust he held himself blameless. He said all unschooled men of

The author's mother as a picture bride

saw no reason to apologize and gave her disillusionment no credence.

To her father my mother expressed affront that her husband had not written the eloquent letters they both had admired. He answered: "Don't whine. You are fortunate to have a husband at all. Make the best of it. Don't come home."

It is true that my mother was in no position to complain. Now she stood a chance to lead a life of respectability. But it came too late to undo the knots in her spirit. Her father's indifference and 20 years of unremitting torture had warped her ability to get along with others. She attributed malice to the words and deeds of everyone.

She believed the mildest reproof or contradiction to be the harbinger of rejection. It aroused such fear that she flew into a rage that never spent itself. She gathered that energy all back inside, added it to her reservoir of earlier wounds, and used it to fuel more violent, subsequent eruptions.

The goodwill of others concerned her little. What she cared about most was her father's approval. She ached for a hint that her existence made a difference to him, that he forgave her for having stained the family's reputation and loved her nonetheless. She sent letters and pictures. She sent money, accumulated five and ten cents at a time. His replies were perfunctory, no more than receipts. She never received what she yearned for.

Ura, we in Japan all miss you. But we know your place is with your husband, making a life for yourselves in a foreign land. We admire you for working so hard, for you were not brought up to grub in the fields. Your mother and I are proud to have a daughter as spirited and as brave as you.

Consistently rebuffed, my mother directed her rage at my father, for he too had let her down. But to him she owned allegiance because he had saved her (after a 20-year lapse) from a fate worse than death. Her wrath was compounded by her dependence on him for support and protection. She was infuriated by his ignorance, his toadying to the white men who smelled. Yet she dared not show her true feelings, because in spite of his promise to tell no one, he might reveal her terrible secret and expose her to the opprobrium she had fled. He was unworthy of trust, an incipient traitor. Back and forth, back and forth, she paced the confines of her cage and decided that no place was a refuge, no one her friend. She was alone in hostile territory where she had to stay because she couldn't go home.

My mother's life thereafter was one of grim endurance. Engaged in stoop labor in order to survive, she slogged through each day, her loneliness a chill in the bones. For as long as a week sometimes she spoke to no one but my father. Their conversations were civil. Occasionally she excoriated him for real or imagined offenses, or for errors in judgment that had lost them money.

They lived on a farm with no telephone, a quarter mile from a paved road and my mother could not drive. She had access only to my father and the Mexican field hands they hired during harvestime. My father was incapable of stimulating her mind which might, in turn, have nourished her soul. He gave her a last name, his presence, no tenderness, and no matter how hard she worked, either grudging acknowledgment of her contribution after she had begged for it, or none at all.

Their first child died at three months. Initially, my mother wrote her father of her happiness at the birth of her legitimate son and promised to send pictures. His reply was stiff and guarded. Later she shared her grief. Again he was noncommittal. No matter how many times she read his letter, she could not extract the comfort that she sought.

Their son's death drove a further wedge between my parents. They performed their chores in silence, anxious about this season's crops on whose yields depended their payment of last season's bills for seed and fertilizer.

My mother was 40, my father 50 when my birth quelled their fear that they might be childless. They had no other children; I was the only one. My mother's panic that I might perish as had her two children before me was understandable to those who knew of her misfortune, but not to me. I was miserable under the layers of mismatched, constricting garments she made me war in winter. And I resented her refusal to let me skate, ride a bicycle, or climb a tree.

She became more eccentric after her father died. He left her no deathbed message. She wrote to make certain it was not an oversight. He may have said something to Ura that her mother in her excitement had forgotten to note. But the reply came back, no, no message. In those days I frequently came upon her weeping soundlessly, tears pouring down her cheeks.

I could do nothing about her sorrow. Sensing that their capacity for joy had evaporated long before I was born, I felt defeated by the size of the vacuum in my parents lives that they expected me to fill. I tried anyway, because I was an intuitive child and above all, an obedient one. My mother had seen to that. Yet she demanded a perfection I could never achieve.

In any event, I was useful as an outlet for her frustrations. Whenever I displeased her and expressed remorse, she remembered all the details of my previous misdeeds and relived them each afresh. She experienced her agonies over and over again, much as a miser caresses his coins. The list increased with the passage of time so that even for trivial offenses I was subjected to hour-long diatribes. I dreaded them but never found the key to turning them off.

Then, mercurially, my mother would be kind. I recall that once she ordered me to go that instant to the outhouse.

"But, Mama, I have no urge — maybe later."

"Do not disobey," my mother commanded. "Go now, while the seat is still warm."

Haunted by the horror of her own unwed pregnancy, my mother chose to protect me from a similar fate. Hers was an onerous calling, for she imagined that I was irresistible to all men, young or old, who were lechers, and that I was being ravished whenever I was out of sight. When I reached puberty, she lived in constant terror. It was this fixation that led to our final estrangement.

While I was still a little girl and a compliant one, my mother examined me regularly to determine that my hymen was intact. As I grew older, inspection required my acquiescence. At 13, I balked. She read my refusal as proof that I had been violated. I denied it. She declared that as my mother she had a right to see my genitals. I disagreed. She reasoned, she pleaded, she yelled. I was adamant. Then, on one condition, I relented: "Only if I can look at you in return."

She assented. We disrobed and then spent 10 minutes in "You first," "No, you first," interspersed with long, squirmy silences. Feeling foolish, I allowed her the first look. When she could stall no longer, my mother refused.

I was furious. I argued that she had promised; a promise was sacred. She offered to let me see her rear and got on her hands and knees. After peering at her anus a minute, I decided that her compromise was worse than outright refusal. I again challenged her and reminded her of the importance of keeping her word. She did not answer. Abstractedly she put on her clothes and turned away, unable to meet my eyes. Awful certainty settled about her — certainty that she would never again allay her qualms by inspecting me, in her mind the only sure way to stifle her ever-surfacing dread.

My mother had tricked and betrayed me. She had lied and played me for a fool. I hated her! That was the emotion I relived 35 years later when those vaginas flashed on the screen.

For me at that time a curtain rang down. I never afterward shared anything that mattered. Many times, perceiving that I was troubled, she declared that she was my best friend and urged me to confide in her. I nodded, not wanting to arouse her ire, but was mute. Besides, she was not my best friend. We were glued together as mother and daughter, but I had not chosen it that way. I longed to get away. As that was not possible, I prayed that she would die.

My prayers were partially answered. My mother became an invalid. Her hypertension grew out of her preexisting anxieties, which were aggravated by reports of increasing animosity between the United States and Japan. She was proud that her blood pressure was high, raising it above the level of that of the populace. She competed with a neighbor to see who could register the higher reading and was unhappy to lose that rival to a fatal stroke.

War did come with the bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japanese planes in December 1941. Mingled with relief to have the inevitable occur was my personal anguish that my country, my own America, was at war with the country of my parents' origin. Whipped up by an irresponsible, vicious press, the public clamored that we of Japanese ancestry — indistinguishable from the enemy and therefore the enemy itself — should be put away "for our own protection." We suspected that our incarceration would soon follow. Those responsible for bringing it about rationalized that we had not committed acts of sabotage in the past and therefore were planning to do so in the future.

In March, 1942, I was 19 years old, a hundred pounds, and considered a menace to national security. I dumbly, unresistingly, with my parents left our farm and boarded a bus that bore us to a concentration camp in Arizona. We took with us only those clothes, bedding, and hand tools that we could carry. We settled into one of a row of black, tar-papered barracks, surrounded by barbed wire with watchtowers at regular intervals like exclamation points. For a change from the stifling desert heat, we experienced sudden, penetrating dust storms of unbelievable force. It was only "for the duration," they said.

Our family of three, plus a bachelor-stranger (four to a cubicle) occupied a 25-by-25-foot space with no water, no partitions, and, except for army cots at first, no furniture. We ate in a communal mess hall and bathed in a communal shower room.

My parents believed that the United States government had shunted us into the desert so that no one could witness our extermination. By including me, they reasoned, the United States was calling my citizenship worthless and me as undesirable as they. I too would be killed.

Our anxiety exploded in arguments. My parents taunted me for siding with America while it kept me and them locked up. Unable to defend my country or my beliefs, I wept in frustration. In time we stopped quarreling. Stoically we bore our imprisonment, tolerated each other, and waited out the war. My three years' stay would have been shorter had I succeeded in my attempt at suicide.

My mother's fears for my purity increased, if possible, when we left the isolation of our farm for the densely populated concentration camp. The only way she could calm them was to tie me to her side. She could not spare me to work because she needed a nurse and a handmaiden. Robotlike, I complied. I fetched her meals from the mess hall, fed her, and returned the trays. I washed, ironed, and cleaned. I showered, shampooed my hair and hers, ete, and went to bed when my mother told me to. She controlled every aspect of my physical existence. Because she did not require my constant attendance and sometimes napped, I frequented the library two blocks away. She soon plugged that fissure.

"You mustn't read. It will ruin your eyes."

I did not have the wit to inquire what eyes were for.

My mother's distrust of men spread to include everyone. She hated the librarian, for she was providing me with a place for clandestine liaisons. As though their condition were contagious, she complained that my girl friends wore glasses; that their teeth were crooked. She condemned them because their parents had come from a prefecture not her own.

Using her sickness, my mother clubbed my father and me into subservience. While he and I were still presenting a tranquil exterior to our neighbors, as though nothing were wrong, she was not above throwing a temper tantrum to bring us into line. Singly or together we did not have the power to defy her.

She was oblivious of my feelings. Tighter and tighter she drew my tether until I gave up. I quit struggling to have friends, to read, to write letters, to reach

Noriko Sawada

out. Thus closed off from others, my parents and I spent more and more time together. Since my mother was likely to take umbrage at the most innocuous remark, my father and I avoided speaking to her. We whispered together like visitors in a sickroom. But even that stopped. She accused me of turning my father against her. Thereafter we each lived alone in a unit called a family.

I began to view my life as too burdensome to continue. Once in a while I emitted a cackle that bordered on madness and was meant to make my mother's hair stand on end. She took no notice. That enraged me. I wanted her to notice. I wanted her to see me as a person with feelings, hopes, and urges. I would hit her with the only weapon I had.

I would kill myself. I would slam the door in her face, and she wouldn't be able to summon me back. I regretted that I would not be around to witness her thwarting. Then, surely, she would know what pain I had suffered. She would even feel pain of her own, pain that, tee-hee, I had inflicted myself. I would have revenge and freedom too. I felt ingenious for having thought of suicide as a means of achieving both goals. I was cracking up in my prison within a prison.

Carefully I planned my escape. I burned every photograph so that after I was gone my mother would have no picture of me smiling, no proof that she had lost anyone of worth. I swallowed 20 of her sleeping pills and expected the end to come swiftly. Instead, I got very hungry and had a huge lunch, which diluted the pills' effect. I was saved by an acquaintance who happened by and wanted to chat. I apologized that I could not entertain her because I preferred to sleep and die within the hour. She ran for the doctor.

My mother was jubilant. She had been right all along. She crowed that I was pregnant, the only reason a woman of 20 would want to end her life. The doctor implored me to reveal the name of my lover.

At this point I saw that everyone was reciting lines from an outdated script in parody of a melodrama. While I interpreted my suicide attempt as a strike for freedom, all the others saw it as my way of avoiding the shame of my pregnancy. How had this crucial, solemn moment in my life gone so awry and turned into low comedy? It was so ridiculous that I laughed until I cried. No one understood of course. They were still cast in that other play. They stood by and exchanged looks that agreed that I was crazy.

The doctor forced me to drink diluted ammonia and had my father jab my foot with a needle each time I dozed. My mother ascribed no guilt to herself and took no part in the rescue effort. She was miffed that I had usurped her place as the ill member of our family and had received the ministrations of the doctor in her stead.

In this context I saw that it was silly for me to offer up my life as a way of getting even with my mother or of making her sorry. My grand exit had not touched her at all. She was beyond my reach. This too struck me as funny. My death would serve only to nourish her sickness and enable her to exude more pity for herself, and to pry it from others as well. None of it was real any more.

On his return visit I told the physician my reasons for wanting to die. After he assured my glum mother that I was not expecting a baby, he ordered her to let me get a job (in the camp administration), read books, and have dates. She did not demur. Thus her stranglehold was broken. But her fears flared anew.

Not only did my mother not trust me to defend my virtue, but she attributed such carnal intent to my suitors that none ever asked me out twice. I reasoned with her, and as *Mademoiselle* magazine suggested gave her no cause to suspect me, but none of it worked. When my boyfriends and I walked to the dances and movies in camp, my mother followed close behind. She never spoke to us, but waited and followed us home again.

My mother was torn between her need to remain ambulatory in order to continue her surveillance of me and her desire for the care that a life-threatening ailment requiring recumbency would command. She became bedridden only at the very end.

She was an invalid for 12 years before a third heart attack killed her. By that time the war had ended, and we were living in San Francisco. At 28 I was my parents sole support, but no longer lived with them. On my weekly visits my mother warned me that I possessed only one thing that men wanted, but she could not supervise my every move and restricted herself to urging me to marry "before it is too late."

After her funeral, after all the company had gone, my father handed me the missing pieces of the puzzle. He told me about my mother's early life and the baby that she had borne, and about the pact of silence she had sworn him to. I protested that he should have told me sooner; after all, I was no longer a child. But of course he couldn't. Only my mother's death released him from his promise.

I mourned a daughter whose father belittled her worth and shriveled her spirit. I mourned a newly pubescent female whose single yes to the blandishments of a young man wiped out her future and embittered her heart. I mourned a wife whose husband denied her the acknowledgment that might have cushioned the bleakness of her life.

I wept for a woman who gamely wore her hair shirt of guilt and who was so perverted by the experience that she could not alter the fatal course of her relationship with her own daughter. I wept for a mother who became grotesque in her daughter's eyes, an object for pity.

I wept for myself.

—**Noriko Sawada**

NORIKO SAWADA spent three years in an Arizona concentration camp. Presently residing in California she was second prize winner of a James Clavell short-story contest.

short story

"I Will Dance This Summer"

TOM is alone in the house, "rocking" on the couch. He likes "rocking" because he likes to chant like the Indian drummers at a Pow-wow; and the "rocking" gives him the rhythm of the drum.

I am his mother and I can see him rocking and hear his chanting through the open window as I hang out my clothes to dry. Tom is five years old and will be dancing in his first Pow-wow this summer. Tom's grandmother and myself have been working on his dancing outfit since last fall. We have made him a vest out of deer hide strung with bones; mocassins, knee ornaments with bells and rabbit fur; a headband to keep his long hair out of his face; and he was given a pair of beautifully beaded dancing sticks.

Tom's favorite dance is the "hunt," where the dancer moves as though he is pursuing an animal in a hunt — bending down close to the ground looking for tracks, moving his head deftly from side to side and shaking his dancing sticks.

Tom can be shy when he first starts dancing and is aware of the people watching — but absorption in the dancing itself quickly takes over and he forgets about all of the people and just dances.

Tom is slim and brown, an Ojibwe Indian boy.

He has named his favorite chant, "the fire song." I would like to know the images and thoughts in his mind as he chants. Tom's father once asked him if he would like to drum with the men but Tom said "no, I am not big enough." We respected his decision so enjoy him only in our home.

I am proud of my Indian boy and cannot wait for the Pow-wow!

— Susan Daybutch Hare

LAST CALL

eyes
the moon's shadow,
trapped.
screams
blasts of ruptured air
hitting at the walls.
arms and legs
icicles entwined,
refuge inside body.
space is thinner
looking for heat,
an ice mask
suffocates,
the curtain falls.

— Mylene Pepin
Montreal, Quebec