WHY I'M RETURNING TO MINIDOKA CONCENTRATION CAMP THIS SUMMER

BY Mich Matsudaira

My childhood is there waiting for me, still there, the mystery, the joy, the wonder and pity and small triumph of bone, skin, and hormones, get and getting in the know of the we what's what of hubba hubba, we witch's tits floating teeth and yes yes and no no and the suicides of ge Gold Star mothers in the toilet, in spite of what the folks didn't tell me for my own good, It's all there, just where I left it, in the powdery dust and sagebrush Shangri-la of Minidoka.

Farmers have homesteaded my childhood. Mr. T.C. Robison grows beans in a field rich withxhaxingx and deep for having been the camp cemetery. Mr. John Herrman keeps his tractors and machines in the what used to be the camp firehouse. They know where everything used to be because they were here when the fences and barbed wire and guard towers and barracks came down and because of people like me, who come back to reflect.xmdxkxxxxxxxx

My memories of growing up in a concentration camp are like any beats man's memories of childhood. We are all children when we think back on the beginnings of who we were, REXMERS All of us who grew up together inside Minidoka remember them as happy days. We took advantage of the fear and shocked helplessness of our parents who'd been wrenched from solid livings and seen their lifetimes! work and savings for our future smashed, destroyed, confiscated by a series Presidential Executive Orders. In camp I forgot that I had never lived anyplace else but a tarpaper slum tenement and slept soundly every night after a full day s of play, while and thought nothing special of hearing parents, women, whose husbands had been picked up by the F.B.I. for a "couple hours talk" one Max December 7, 1941, ******************************* and still hadn't been seen or heard from in August, 1942. My playmates who ran in the sunshine and told me their mothers said they wished they wouldn't wake up in the morning, every night, instead of prayer were just kids and didn't mean anything to me then. But we're not kids anymore. Some of our mothers, while we slept, fixed it, so they, indeed, did not wake up the next morning. We took it for granted.

I played and ran with other kids, said hubba hubba, pondered the mysteries of Betty Grable, pitched woo, acted goofy made gah gah eyes, went to school taught by a white woman who looked just like Whistler's mother, cheered the slaughter of hated "Japs" in the movies and took the barbed wire, guards and guns for granted, the way other kids took city streets, cars, and reps the cop at the crosswalk for granted. The guards pointed their M-l rifles at us when we get to boys got too close to the fence and gave flowers to the little girls. Our antics, I'm sure, contributed to the intensity of our parent's silent terror. That's why we taunted the guards, screamed at them to shoot us, dared them, sang "Don't Fence Me In," at them; to make our parents tremble in admiration. Our parents' text frozen terror was ourxiterix childhood freedom. The camps showed us our parents at their weakest, their lowest, helpless, was useless, Thexaminitation the United States called it Japanese culture, and we took their word for it, and ran free of them.

I am Nisei, one of the American born second germ generation Japhese American or Nikkei folk. My pagents' generation, the Issei, accuse my generation of selling them out by becoming willing and enthusiastic accomplices to the creation and operation of the American concentration camps, in 1942.

/ Issei and pp popular Nisei

Before camp, the government spirited all of Japanese America's/leaders and potential leaders away, xm leaving us, who were old enough, to imagine xk on the horrors they were suffering. Before and during camps, some Issei say, the Nisei were government spitches, and the government made the m spitches, the leaders of xhexemex Japanese America and camp "self-government."

I was only a kid, neither grateful nor bitter about the concentration camp I knew only as home. Perhaps, that is the worst thing and that can be said about the camps. There I was, **xk** a happy little experimental rat in a community of laboratory rats, controlled, manipulated, fed, housed and graterined by government has behavioral engineers who used me, my parents and everyone I knew from one end of the barbed wire world to the other, to play out their Pavolovian sociological fantasies of making us "aliens" live for one purpose: to be acceptable to whites, to make ourselves worthy, as if whites were our god.

Many of us where were marked marked not lives, during the war, outside the camps, proving our "worthiness" by joining the mob in heaping loathing and contempt on the Nikkei inside the camps, still live as if war is on. In Idaho, the Nikkei who were not impounded, went so far as to were more try to get their state legislature to pass a bill, saying kneetake Nikkei outside the barbed wire of Minidoka, were morally and patriotically better than the Japanese Americans inside the barbed wire. These people still fear whites, and are agressively hush hush about the camps in their state and fear the return of the internees this August 18th. They act as if white the whites are still flaming racists. If they were, we would not be returning to Minidoka, 38 years to the day after our first arrival, to with our old and our families, and our white friends, to heal the rift between our generations, honor the faith and endurance of our people in hardship, celebrate our history, and make peace with our childhood.

For years, the former internees have it kept their bitterness and suffering and histories private, to save their children framex the burden of an older generation's bitterness. At Puyallup and Portland, on ground that used to be a our concentration camp on the edge of town, we all learned that our stories was are not private, has our emotions are about camp are not merely personal mental disorders. They do not belong bottled up inside individuals bursting from containing horrors, they can't contain. They belong to history. They are shared and released in history, American history.

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