

Pearl Harbour has been bombed! To my family this was shocking news but not so horrible as to when we were notified to evacuate from our home to a place of protection as the authorities called it. What followed was a nightmare only temporarily swept away in a web of forgetfulness by the hope that a democratic country would surely provide a better future. But now with deportation facing my parents, those events come back to me very vividly.....

My parents came to this promising country in 1906 and took up fishing as an occupation because lack of fluency of the English language did not present such a drawback. They were naturalized and proved law-abiding citizens but with the outbreak of hostilities they were immediately looked upon as enemies. At school we had to go through the humiliating experience of having to be jeered and scorned in public by our schoolmates. Many a times we were ostracized in games which meant so much to us. But always we looked forward to a day when hatred would be a thing of the past and bore this treatment in silence. However, this day was not yet to be when rumour that we would have to evacuate from our homes grew into reality with the closing of the month of March. Within the short week that our notice of evacuation left us, we painstakingly went through our possessions, keeping only those things that would be of immediate use. True, besides, was the fact that each person was to be allowed only one clothes bag and one grip so what could be put in those aside from our bedding was very little indeed. What could not be taken, we sold or put in a community hall which since has been broken into and our belongings stolen. Our furniture of which we were so proud, along with the beds, kitchenware, and carpets were sold for the paltry sum of fifty dollars. Then the day came for us to leave our beloved home which our parents had so diligently worked and saved for hoping to give us some fashion of security. Now all this was left behind on that cold morning of March the twenty-first.....

Fifteen passenger cars were filled to capacity with other fellow Japanese and our baggage filled one freight car only. We had been promised proper meals but on our three-day trip just four meals were provided. What with hunger, cold, as the heating system in the trains seemed out of order, and anxiety as to our uncertain future made sleep quite impossible. Babies cried for warm milk, tiny tots looked on with wonderment in their eyes marvelling at the change in environment, parents looked on with pity and great concern. Perhaps things would be better when we reached Hastings Park so we patiently waited.

Hastings Park belied its name. What place could be better than this park surrounded by a high wire fence and its great buildings? On entering into the enclosure, we were immediately separated from our parents and left to find quarters for ourselves. The day after our arrival, my brother who had not fully recovered from his appendicitis operation was forced to leave for labour near Schreiber somewhere in Eastern Canada. With events moving so rapidly, it was difficult to realize that we were not to see our brother anymore. Days passed very slowly but eventually days passed into weeks and weeks passed into months during which time, Hastings Park became a breeding place for petty crimes committed by children no longer under the loving care of parents. Occasionally we were allowed to visit our mother in her dormitory. Their dormitory was the former stall where in exhibition times poultry and domestic animals were exhibited. Still on the walls and floor were the remains of excrement of animals. A nauseating stench reeked out from unidentified sources. This was the place where my mother and sisters were living in.....with the vermin that oozed all over the floor when the boards were uprooted. Our young bodies were destitute from the lack of wholesome food so most of our life savings was exhausted to make up for this deficiency. I remember too, the night when some plain-clothes men woke us up at a very frightful hour with the gutteral, "Get up you dirty Jap." while outside armed guards watched us like criminals under surveyance. Two men, not wanting to be torn away from their families were in concealment and were now being hunted. Almost everyday, names of loved ones were called forth. They were to be sent to work in road camps and other places of hard labour of which we had never heard.

Shortly this became a hated rite and part of our daily life which we dreaded the most. This was the place of protection we were promised.....protection from the good things of life. And this was democracy!

Before long, evacuation to the interior housing centre of Slocan City took place. It was animating news to know that we were finally going to leave this "park", this breeding place of bitter memories. So accordingly, it was with high hopes that we set out for a new horizon each praying that our family would not be separated again.

Slocan City has been another panorama of hardship and tears. Then to crown all these vents came the government's proclamation that all Japanese would have to designate their loyalty and move East to an uncertain future or remain in the ghost towns as an unwilling repatriate but with some denomination of security for the present. Here was the biggest threat of them all which would for certain, culminate in the breakup of our family definitely. Was this unCanadian-like question legal? Surely the government would not take this repatriation form as valid and would instead allow her citizens to prove themselves honest and devoted members and accept us as one of her own. Recently our worst fears have come to force and the Orders-in-Council loom over us all like a Nazi weapon to deport us from our birthplace to a foreign country. What have we done to deserve this maltreatment, misery and heartbreak? Is this the Land of Promise that our parents came to? But we have not given up hope as long as there is a Christian God and people of goodwill in this world our cause is not lost and surely happiness will not be denied to the people of Japanese ancestry who have known only hardship and prejudice for so long.

..... Kazuo HAMAZAKI