

COPY



EVACUATION
recollection of:

George Toyama



THE TRAIN RIDE.

That beautiful balmy morning early in April of 1942, our large orange tabby kitten was sitting on his favorite perch, the huge old stump in front of our house, watching us leave. Each of us, even my young seven year old sister, Mutsuko, struggling with full suit-cases toward the road-side. I wondered if it knew that it probably would not see us again. That the big breakfast Mom made for him may be his last human supplied meal? Where was its mother, out hunting already? She was a good hunter so they should be able to servive by themselves. At least games were plentiful during the summer. But what about winter? I wondered for how long they would maintain their customary vigil by the road-side, waiting to greet us as we returned from the school, as was their habit. They always went to greet Mom too when she came home from work. As much as it broke our heart to abandon them, we were not allowed to take any pets with us. With sad tears misting my eyes, we trudged through the dew laden grass that soaked our legs.

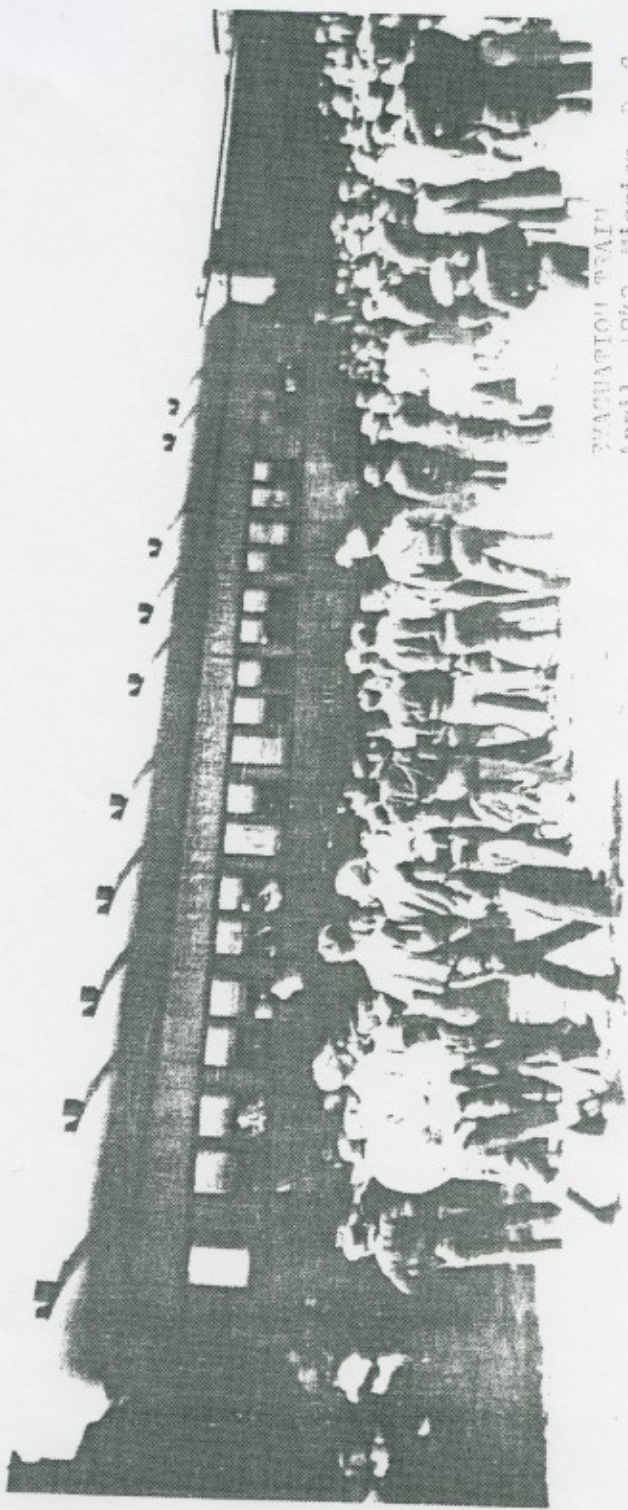
That sad fateful morning, we locked up our home for the last time. We had to leave almost all of our belongings behind, taking with us the barest of necessity because of the luggage restriction imposed on us. We were to take only what could be packed into equivalent of two suitcases allotted each of us. The rest, the officials of the Canadian government promised, will be properly protected and maintained for us till we returned. Take as little as possible, they exhorted us, because we will be returning soon. Thus we were duped into leaving behind all the beautiful solid mahogany dresser, chest of drawers, tables and many other beautiful furnitures Dad had so lovingly made and finished, almost all of his irreplaceable carpentry and boat-building tools, many specially imported from Japan. Mom's precious sewing-machine and most of her best clothe, her treasured china, many memorable items she brought with her as a young bride. The water colours Dad painted for us, particularly the big one of the village where he grew up in Japan. I used to gaze at it and let my imagination roam free while lying there on the living room sofa. It must have been particularly difficult for our parents who came to Canada as teenager, worked hard and saved, persevered against the harsh

discrimination, survived through the depression, and just as the living was finally getting easier, to have to abandon every thing. We left behind a house full the life-time's of acquisition and memories of our family.

For the record, none of our possessions were ever returned to us nor were we ever compensated for their loss.

It was going to be a beautiful day. Robins were loudly quarrelling close by, a rooster crowed in the distance, the dew-drops on the road-side grass beamed rainbow colours into our eyes as we sat on our luggage waiting for the truck. My younger brother, Shigeto, always exuberant, was running around throwing stones at road-side trees while sister Mutsuko sat quietly leaning against mother as Dad brought up the last of our luggage. The box-factory's large stake truck soon arrived already loaded with other evacuees and their luggage, Sawada, Yakashiro, Taniguchi, Kono and others who lived further up 32nd Avenue. We were the last to be picked up. The trip to the Ruskin railway station was uneventfull if rather bumpy.

There was a huge crowd at the station. As the first group to be evacuated from the villages of Ruskin, Whonnock, Happy Valley, and Albion, we had the dubious previlage of having the rest of the villages to see us off. There were many tearfull partings as people bid farewell to their relatives and lifelong friends. Although we were assured by the officials from the B.C. Security Commission and from the Custodian of Enemy Alien's Property that we will be allowed to return to our home soon, most of us felt in our hearts that this probably would become a permantent farewell to our friends and the villages that were our home for decades, place where most of the younger ones were born and raised, went to school, played together, fought and made up, the strawberries, blackberries, raspberries that we had to pick, the road-side huckleberries that sustained us while returning from Whonnock Japanese school on Saturdays, the apples and pears that we raided from Mr. Gilchrist's orchard, the trees that we fell out off playing Tarzan, the ice-cold water of our swimming-hole on the Whonnock creek that all of the neighbourhood children worked so hard to build, the familar stars and constellations that used to greet us as we came out from the Ruskin Japanese language



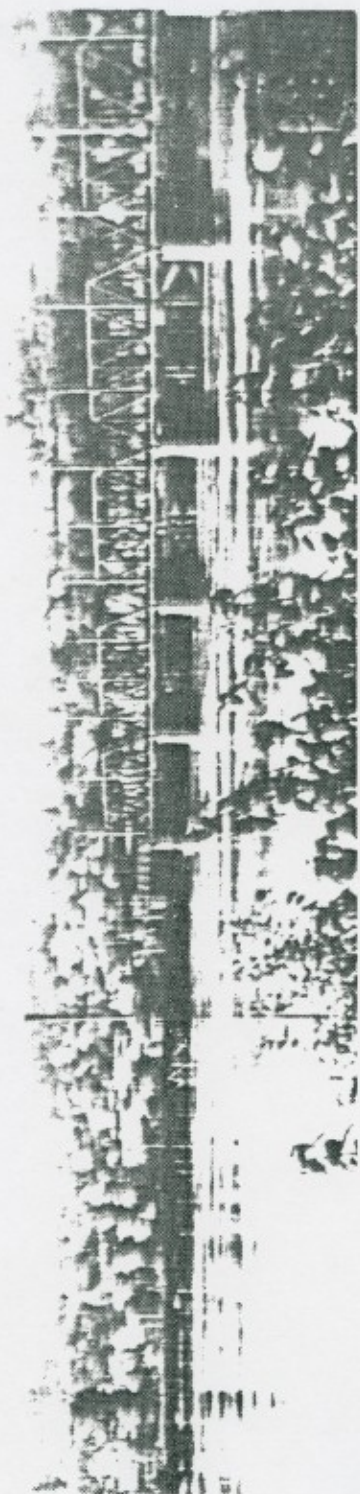
WACHAPON TRAIN
April, 1942, Mission, E. C.
Photo by Frank Ohno.

school at night, the happy times, the sad times, place where all of our youthfull memories were tied to. The pemanence of our departure duely confirmed by future events.

Why were we leaving our home anyways, why us? After Pearl Harbour, December 7, 1941, there was great hue and cry, "Get the Japs out of B.C.!". With our radios confiscated, Japanese newspaper shut down, with all sort of rumour flying around, it was a most distressful time. We were hearing that Japanese people living on the coast and in Vancouver were being rounded up and interned in the cattle and horse barns of Hasting Park, that their cars and boats were sized. We were subjected to nightly curfew and were forbidden assembly without police's permission and in their presence. The curfew caused us high school students problem because during the depth of winter, it was still dark in the morning when we had to leave home to catch the school bus to Maple Ridge High School in Haney. I had to sneak out through pitch dark trails in the wood, not even daring to use a flashlight.

At that time, those of us that lived away from immediate costal area were offered a choice of going to work on the sugar beet farms on the prairie. The alternative was to be interned in the euphonically labelled Interior Housing centers. But just old men, women and children though. Younger men were to be shipped to Road Camps and Internament Camps all across Canada. So in order to stay together as a family, Dad chose to go to the sugar beet farm. At first, people in our area chose to go to Manitoba but there was rumour that mosquitoes there were huge and terrible so the people in our contingent changed their mind and decided to go to Alberta instead. Later, talking to some of the people that did go to Manitoba, I think that for us, it turned out to be the better choice.

It took almost till noon to get sorted out, baggages loaded, and be herded aboard the waiting train, old dirty obsolete rail cars that must have been taken out of storage just to transport us evacuees. Were the regular train too good for us? It was dusty and dirty, the windows almost opaque with grime! The womenfolks, as soon as we were assigned our seats, were busy trying to clean it up, task made most difficult without even a broom or source of water.



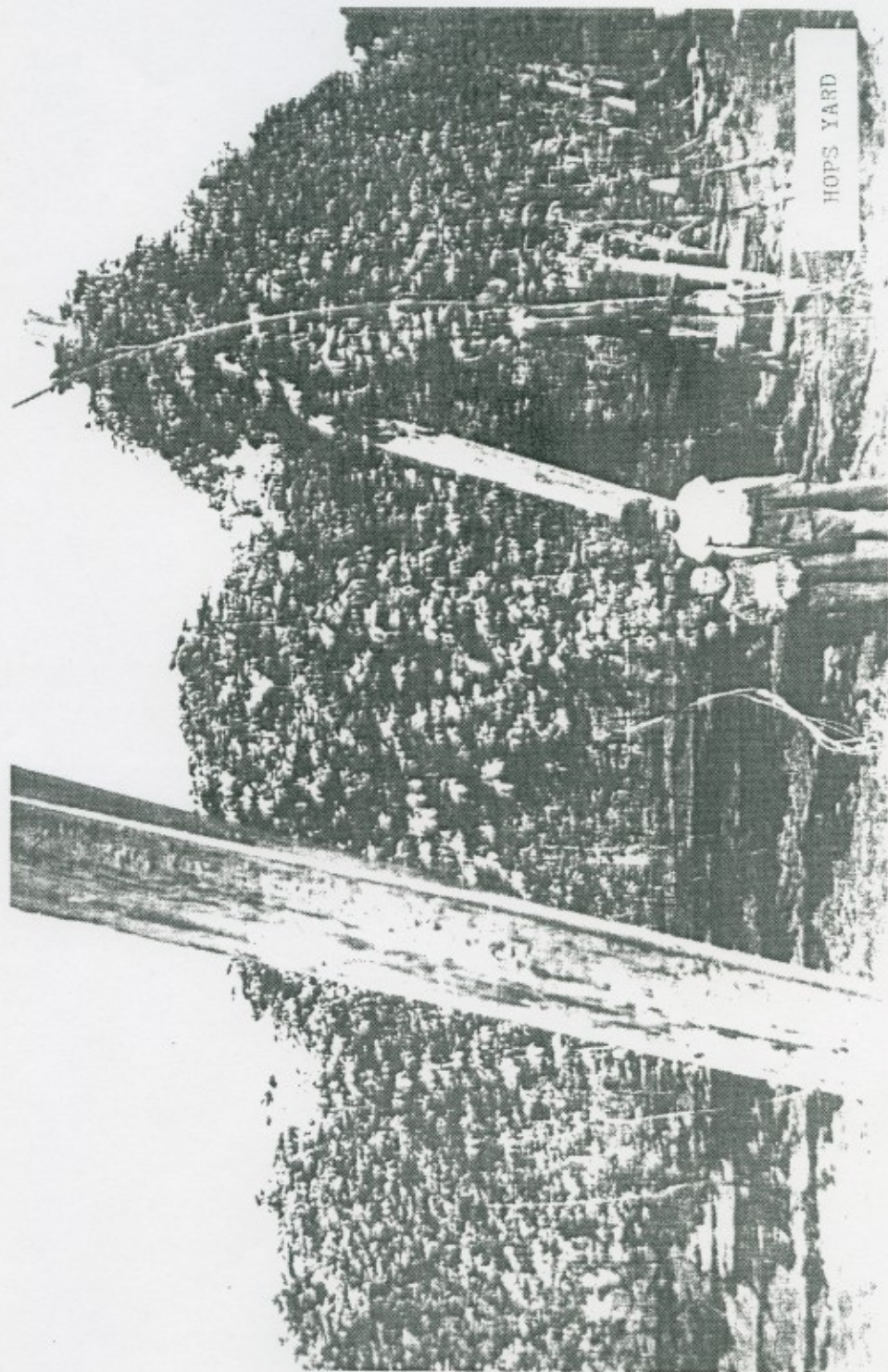
THE MISSION RAIL & TRAFFIC BRIDGE,
OUR "EUERICON".

Finally with crashes and bangs, the train slowly moved out around noon to immediately rumble over the Ruskin railway bridge that crossed the Stave River, the bridge that us kids used to fish from, and on westward to the uncertain fate and destination in the far away place across the Rocky Mountain, to places where no one of my acquaintance had ever been to nor I have ever heard of.

Like kids always, noon ment food and I was hungry. Thanks to foresight of our mother and the generosity of our well-wishers, we were soon into our first meal of this almost week long train ride as our dusty train rolled through Mission City and then across the long Mission Railway bridge that spanned the wide and muddy Fraser River, over to the southern bank and again westward towards Abbotsford. Soon we were passing the hops-yards around Sardis where I spent a rather idyllic summer about six years ago just minding Shigeto and Mutsuko while playing with scores of other children of my own age who were also minding their younger brothers and sisters while our parents picked hops. The summer that baby Mustuko spent strapped onto my back, Japanese fashion.

The monotony of the clicity-clack, clicity-clack of the wheels, rolling motion of the train, the emotional drain of parting, weeks of worrying, now started to take its toll on the unwilling passengers and lassitude deepen through out the train as the afternoon wore on, and soon even the active smaller children, my younger brother too, were asleep on the uncomfortable wooden slat benches of the train. My sister though, was comfortably cuddled up on her mother's laps. I too was soon asleep.

When I wake up stiff from my uncomfortable bench, the train had already passed Hope and was deep in the rugged Fraser Canyon now bathed in the warm glow of the setting sun. I tried to clean a circle in a window next to my seat to enjoy the view but found that most of the grime was on the outside of it and found that the window would not budge when I tried to raise it to get at its outside. But since it was now getting dark anyways, I wasn't too concerned about it just then. Presently an elderly conductor came through the car lighting the gas lamps which gave off surprising amount of light, bright enough to



read by. Unfortunately there wasn't much reading material around. When I mentioned my problem with the dirty windows, the conductor tried several and managed to free one close by my seat and promised to bring me some water and rag later, which promise he kept next morning when he came around to extinguish the gas lamps.

Following morning broke out bright and sunny and now with a clear window to gaze through, I had my first view of the dry savanna with nothing decernable growing on it except for few scraggly conifererous trees struggling up the hill-sides. Quite a shocking change in scenery from the lush greenery we left only yesterday. Mile after mile the train chugged through that drearily dry barren country-side all that day, following the diminishing but still large Fraser River, its water now running swiftly and clear. The only interesting memory of that day was the discovery of a large dark-haired dog that Katakami family of Whonnock had some how managed to smuggle aboard and kept hidden on the train. Soon it was the object of attention of most of the children in the car and it was in full view when the accompanying young RCMP officer happened to come into our section of the train. I think we all held our collective breath fearful of the consequence of his discovery of this stowaway. But he just ignored the dog's presence and carried on without any comment. Everybody liked him after that. In fact he turned out to be a decent and helpful person and together with the kindly elderly conductor, did their best to make our enforced trip as comfortable as they could.

The train continue to chug uneventfully through, to me a rather drearily vacant landscape, that day and through the night. It was a slow jerky trip as the freight train that were hooked-up to its end seem to stop at every little town along the way, following the ever diminishing river. first the Fraser then its tributary, the Thompson. As the night fell, the darkness was dotted once in a while by a light or two in the distance as if trying to prove that seeming barren land did have some human habitation. So passed the second night on the constantly rocking train.

When I awoke next morning, something was missing! To my still sleepy mind, it took a

moment or two to realize what was so different in my world. The noise and the motion of the moving train wasn't there! The train was stopped! The quick look out the window confirmed this. We were in a marshalling yard of a fairly large city. I was ready to immediately get off the train and find out where we were, but Mom, who had been up for some time informed me that the RCMP constable had been around earlier to remind everyone to stay on aboard as the train will be shunted around the yard and it will be very dangerous for anyone to be off the train. That he would let us know as soon as he knew that it would be safe to do so. Sure enough with the attendant crashes and bangs of starting and stopping, our train was pulled this way and that without seemingly any rhyme or reason. The harsh jerking motions much worse than the constant rhythm of the steadily moving train. Till finally the train stopped on the track next to the station platform and we were allowed off after being sternally admonished to be back on the train by certain time or be left behind. Mom and Mutsuko got off the train with most of the other but only to stretch their legs and didn't venture off the station's platform while Dad took Shigeto and me into the town to look around and to replenish our supplies. Box-lunches were also being sold on the platform which we bought. I think the place was Kamloops and remember that we had no problem purchasing what we required.

Safely back aboard our now familiar train, we resumed our slow journey with the now expected crashes and bangs of the train starting up. The scenery this day was much improved in my opinion with thick green forest covering much of the mountain side and the river we were following, running swift and clear. Unfortunately all Japanese cameras, including the several that Dad had owned and I had learned to use, had been confiscated by police earlier in the year so I wasn't able to record any of this journey photographically but I seem to recall that I kept a diary of the trip as I was wont to do, but to date, cannot remember where it went.

Next day we stopped at Revelstoke, just long enough for me to hop off the train to a store across the tracks and a road and managed to buy a big twenty-five cent carton of ice-cream, just like the ones I used to buy at Wonnock general store and had to run the three

hot summer miles home before it would melt. It was good then and a especially welcomed treat there on the train. The stop I believe was to hook on another locomotive in preparation to climb over the Rocky Mountain, the almost impassable barrier that I only knew was there from my geography lessons.

This day was the high point of the trip. Now accustomed to the train by several days of constant travel on it, most people were gazing out the windows (which had been all cleaned by now) oohing and aahing the majestic towering snow covered mountains such as I have never dreampt of ever seeing, young kids screaming as we went through some long dark tunnels, then fearfully peering down the dizzying height to the sparkling streams hundreds of feet far below us as the train steadily climbed higher up the mountain. I learned about the Spiral Tunnel later but don't recall the actual travel through it.

Then slowly we clanked pass a sign announcing the "Continental Divide". Now from here on, the rain falling on the mountain will be flowing east to the Atlantic Ocean instead of to the Pacific Ocean like the rain which would fall only a little ways back. After many more miles of breath-taking views of the mountains, pass Banff and its famous Mount Rundle, by the Castle Mountain mirrored on the sparkling Bow River, the vista almost exploded open ahead of us.

The Prairie! What a wonderful sight and a grand feeling for me. I fell in love with it immediately! It was so different from the drab barrenness of of the interior B.C. It was space and freedom! The sky was so intensely blue, the horizon so vast. The herds of cattle grazing close by the railway gave life to the countryside. We rode through the vast open prairie the rest of the day till in the evening we stopped in Calgary where the train parked overnight and we were strictly confined on it.

Next day our train was attached to an end of another freight train which took its time to make its slow, stop and go, day long trip south, to Lethbridge. I really enjoyed this part of the trip, soaking in the vast prairie vista, the strange sights of the grain elevators standing sentinel at each small towns, the sparkling snow-capped Rocky Mountain gracing the western horizon. We

finally reached Lethbridge in the late afternoon where we were again parked overnight. But this time we were allowed to disembark and were free to do as we wished till next morning, so with Shigeto and Dad we explored the few blocks that was then downtown Lethbridge. One thing I particularly remember, at now defunct Royal Grocery Store then located on the corner of sixth street and third avenue south, across from the Galt Garden. I bought a bag of big yellow bananas at three pounds for a quarter, fifty cents worth. Most of which Shigeto and I devoured. Wonder we didn't get sick.

Our last day on the train! We have been on its rolling cranking cars for almost a week. (To think that this same distance can now be traversed in twelve to fourteen hours by car, about an hour in a jet!). Again attached to the end of another freight train, we left Lethbridge for our final destination, Picture Butte. Slowly the train moved out over the swaying High Level Bridge, and believe me, it swayed! I heard later that it can sway as much as three to four feet. Then another very slow four hour trip northwards, past Diamond City, Shaughnessy, and finally arriving at Picture Butte. The trip we now do in twenty minutes by car.

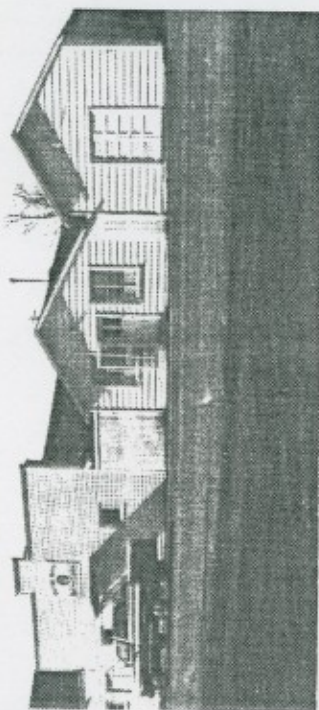
THE SUGAR BEETS.

The sight that greeted us at Picture Butte was something right out from a western movie. Across the wide field from the railway track was the main street of the town, false-fronted stores facing us, looking just like many of the western towns pictured in the cowboy movies Dad used take me when we lived in Vancouver. The large field between it and the railway was filled with great assembly of horses and wagons, with odd trucks mixed in. We all wondered what was going on with all these horses and people and were soon informed that these people were farmers to whom we will to be assigned to work on their sugar-beet field.

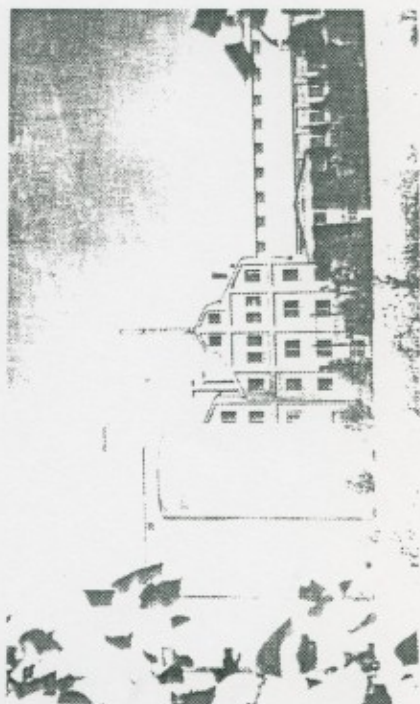
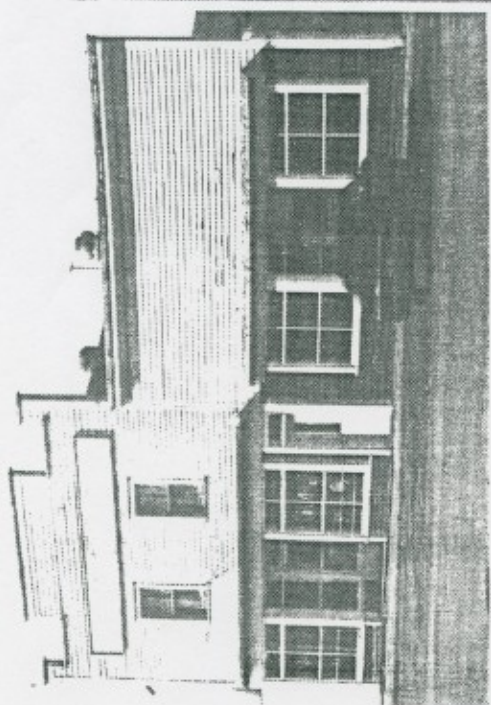
What a shock! That was not what we were told in B. C. We were told that we will be working for a large sugar-beet factory and will be housed in a large comfortable communal housing that brought to my mind the happy times of hops-yard where everyone worked together and the younger workers having parties every night. Another big lie! I think that the government authorities were telling us whatever that was convenient to them to get us to move out from the coastal area quietly and passively as possible.

As shocked and angry as we were at first, our eternal Japanese optimism and our "shikata ga nai" philosophy over came our anger and realizing that the farmers were not to be blamed for our predicament, we all sort of entered in a guessing game, wondering who would be our farmer, all hoping that he would be one with a truck. How we were assigned to whom, I don't know, but I certainly felt like a slave on an auction block waiting to be "bought". As it turned out, much to our disappointment, we were assigned to a farmer with a horse drawn wagon, Mr. O. S. Been of Shaughnessy. He turned out to be a rather poor farmer but a gentleman in every sense of the word. He and his family belonged to the Seventh Day Adventist church, a branch of Christianity that I have never heard of before.

The wagon had rubber tires so it rode rather well over the three and a half miles of gravel road to the farm. But it was windy and from the west. When we commented on how windy it was, the local people all laughed. "This



Admission Building, A.C. 1904





Confused Evacuee from B. C.
and their luggage at
Picture Butte Railway station
April, 1942

Photo by Rev. Y. Kawamura

Galt Museum Archive

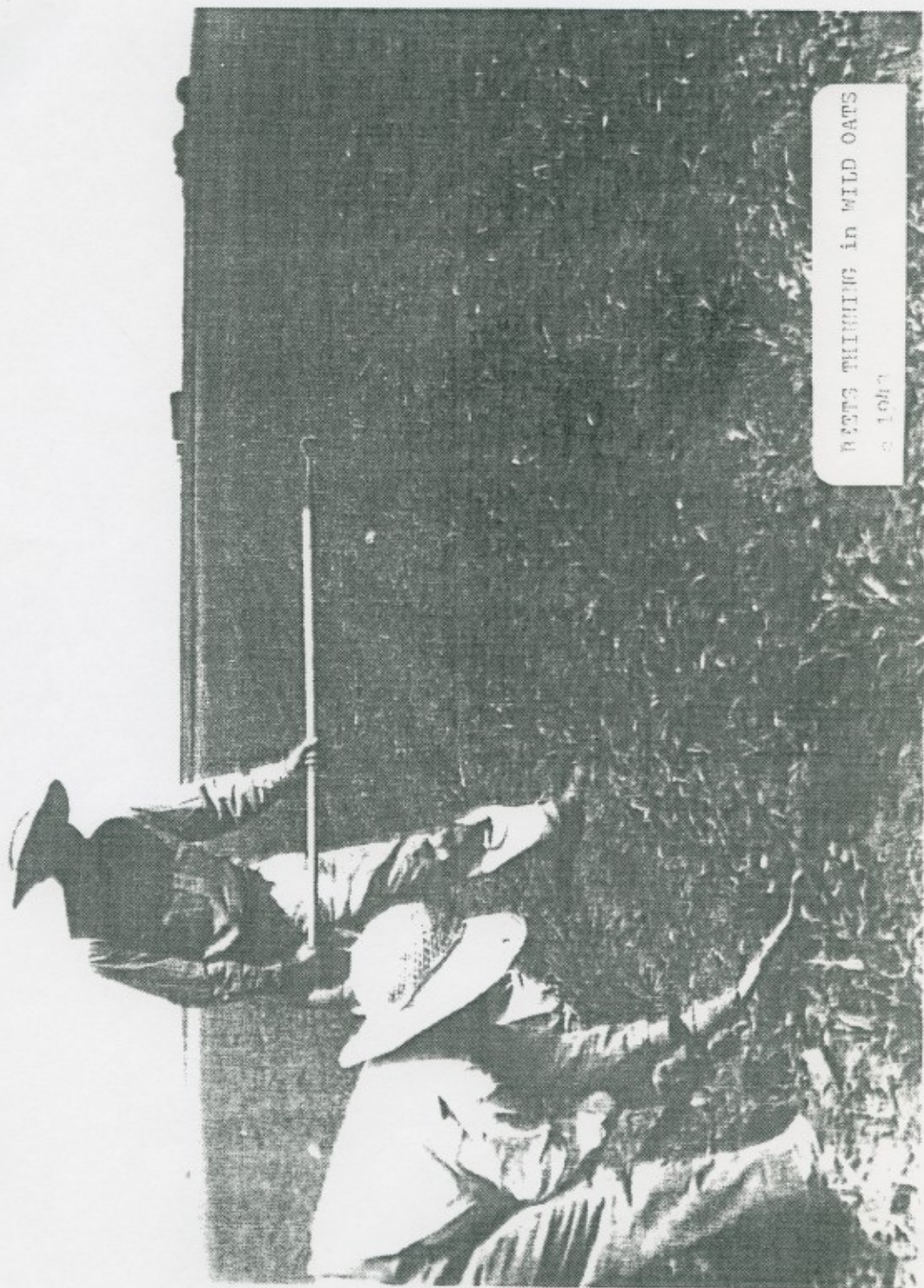
is just a breeze, wait till it does blow!". They were so right, the eternal and famous Chinook. One thing that I was able to bring was my bicycle that I bought the summer before with part of the money I earned picking strawberries, the bicycle that was to become our sole means of transportation other than walking the long prairie miles. I rode it to the farm along-side the wagon.

By the time we arrived at our destination, it must have been close to supper time. How or what we ate that night I have no recollection but I will never forget the gut-wrenching disappointment when faced with the shack we were supposed to live in. Mom said later that it was all she could do to not break down and cry. Our big fire-wood shed back in B.C. would have been a palace in comparison. It was a small two-roomed shack with its walls so full of holes and cracks that we couldn't keep the indoor home type coal-oil lamp lit for the wind blowing through the room. We had to use a wind-proof out-door type lantern. No furniture in the place either. I wonder how Mom prepared meals without utensils or how we slept. I do believe that young Mrs. Been did bring us some cooked food, her kindness much appreciated. It turned out that most of us evacuees were to taken to similar or worst shacks. Some of the peoples were obliged to clean out the manure before they could enter their assigned shack! It was as I found out later that until our arrival, beet labour was supplied by transient workers that stayed only few weeks at a time and therefore the existing housing was adequate for their need and most farmers had not anticipate the housing requirement of families. Also most farmers were quite poor, hence the scarcity of trucks. Next morning we learnt of a daily bus service to Lethbridge, Kotch Bus Line, which Dad and I took and bought home couple of cotton mattresses and necessary household goods to get us by for the immediate existance. It was a little while before we could find a truck to hire to go and buy the larger items such as beds and other furnitures. Dad also bought some lumber and made the ketchen table, benches and such. All this at our own expense. The government did not provide us with money or anything else to finance or ease our forced evacuation from the coast. Dad even had to pay for the tar-paper necessary to make our shack some what habitable.

Even at that though, we were the luckier family as Mom and Dad were in good health, Dad had some money and he was very resourceful. Also we were able to find work right away, cleaning out a cattle corral that was foot deep in manure. Dad and I shoveled and loaded while Shigeto alternately drove the two manure-wagons that were pulled by a team of horses. Considering that he probably never seen horses before, quite an achievement for an eleven year old boy. And at twenty-five cents a load, working as a team, we didn't do too badly financially. In fact Japanese soon got such a good reputation as being excellent worker, anybody able to work quickly found jobs.

Towards end of May, the thinning of the sugar-beet plants began. They looked very much like young spinach plant and grew in tight clumps which had to be thinned so that there was a single plant every ten inches. One had to block the plants with a hoe to as small as clump as possible then bend down and thin that block into a single plant. If one was lucky, he might find a single plant that he could just hoe around but that was a rare occurrence way back then before the advent of the modern segmented-pelletized seeds. It was hard back breaking work having to bend up and down all day. Dad's back bothered him no end therefore Dad and Shegeto teamed up so that Dad did the blocking and Shigeto crawled after him thinning out the plants. How he ever managed to crawl all day long, thinking back now, a fantastic feat. However, that was how very many of the young Japanese evcueue kids had to thin beets that first spring in the beet-field.

Serven year old Mutsuko worked out in the field all day long too. thinning beets along side Mom. Me, being ambidixtrous, learned to use the short handled hoe the "Hungarian Way." The hoe handle was only about ten inches long so I could block with one hand and thin with the other without having to stand and bend all day long. In another words, I worked bent over all the time. I used to make a game of it trying to do the whole row without standing up before finishing it. Took a bit of doing when some of the rows were as much as half a mile long. I had to hold my breath and grit my teeth in determination in order to finish sometimes. In subsequent years, Shigeto became very proficient with the long hoe and could very easily keep up with me with the



short hoe and seemingly with considerable less effort. I used to tease him that he must be missing a lot of beets but of course this was never the case. His beet stand was just as good as mine if not better. Dad with his precise carpenter sight, blocked the beets every ten inches. We tried to do the same. Much to Mr. Been's amusement, we even transplanted the small beet plant to maintain the precise spacing, getting 120 % stand. The reason, Mr. Been later attributed to harvesting the largest beet crop of his farming career.

Of course such carefull thinning took a grat deal of time. And the weather that spring was unusually wet for Alberta, so we learnt later. Almost every afternoon, big dark clouds would form in the northern sky and sure enough, a heavy thunder shower would soon descend upon us, usually soaking us before we could reach home. And talk about gumbo! Something we were not prepared for. Compared to the sandy soil back in B. C., the heavy clay soil of Alberta when it got wet formed into heavy clinging mud that stuck to everything, our boot of course but especially annoying was that it clogged up our hoes. Somedays we seem to spend more time scraping the mud off our hoe than using it. And when it dried, it harden like brick.

One emotion I recall quite vividly was as very depressing feeling to start on twenty-five, thirty acre field of beets. I used to wonder if it was ever possible to complete it. Coming from a place where most of the farms were less that ten aces, it was very intimidating. But slowly, plant by plant, row by row, acre by acre we progressed.

All through June we thinned and thinned and thinned, every day that weather permitted. From dawn to dusk, no Sundays or holidays although I remember being ill once and having to stay in bed for couple of days. Young Mutsuko and Shigeto uncomplaining, Dad despite his sore back always leading us out to the field. As early as I got up to be in the field by sunrise, Mom was up even earlier to cook our breakfast and ready the lunchen meal and at night, she would stay up much later than me to get ready for the next day. It wasn't many more years before Mustuko was doing the same.

Then to make our task more difficult, the weeds, stink-weed and wild oats, started to out-grow the beets so that by July we could hardly find the beet and had to carefully hoe and block out the weeds before we could find and thin the beet. But finally, the seemingly never ending task of thinning did finish. What we did to celebrate the occasion, I can't now remember. I probably slept all day.

Then the hoeing. While it was not as back breaking chore as was the thinning, but non-the-less, with the heat and the long hours, it was hard work. I got off easier though. While Mom with Mutsuko and Shigeto toiled with the hoeing, I went with Dad on carpentry jobs in Picture Butte and as consequence, I learnt to be a fair carpenter under Dad's stern tutoredge.

Oh, the wind! Every day it seemed that, although calm in the morning, it would come up during the day and by evening it would be blowing a gale, always from the west. Picture butte was three and a half miles east of us so of course we would have to battle the wind home. How I used to wish that we lived on the east side of the town so that we could have the benefit of the wind pushing us home. Many evenings I had to push my bicycle home instead of being able to ride it.

The carpentry work wasn't particulary physically hard and was quite enjoyable except for Dad's exacting stardard when it came to carpentry. Of course I could never approch his standard of excellence but I did learn a lot and got quite good at it. Even today, I can do as well or better than many journeyman carpenters. Dad also hired Mr. Nishi who lived on King's farm a mile east of us who was a fisherman from Steveston. He was quite good with carpentry. It sometimes got my goat though when Dad would bawl me out for something that I didn't do as well as he expected although it was done better that what Mr. Nishi had done. I remember the one time I got so frustrated that I walked of the job for the afternoon. Another incident while working at carpentry, on one of the job while demolishing a building prior to building another in its place, I found a diamond ring hidden in a wall cavity. I turned out to be a good ring and Mom wore it till she died and was buried wearing it.

The few odd leisure moments we had,

Shigeto and I used to lie on the grassy bank in front of our place watching the cars go by, wondering out loud if we would ever be able to own one, would the war ever end, were we doomed to work in the beet field the rest of our lives. We also had fun letting our imagination run wild, naming the shapes of the bellowing ever changing cumulous clouds overhead.

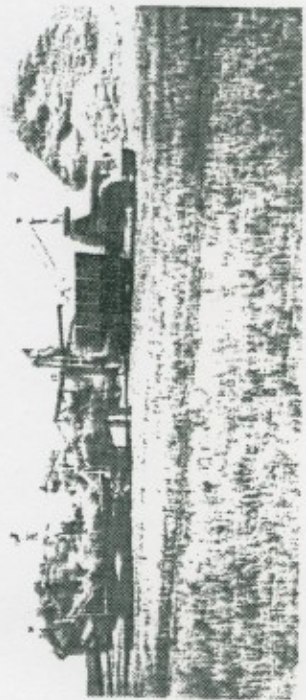
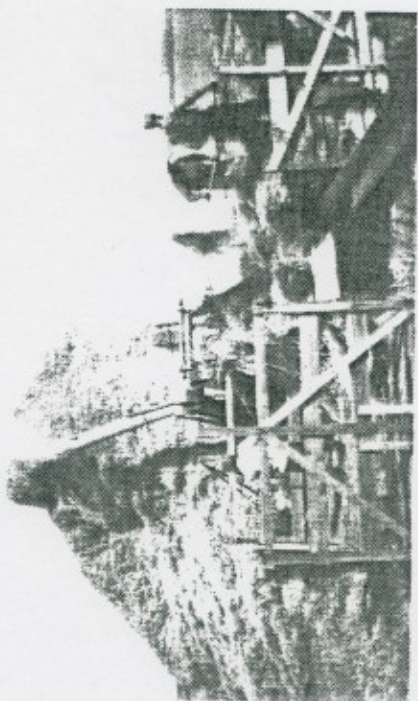
Mutsuko had her pets, a big cat, three jack rabbits and a huge gopher. I don't recall where the cat came from but the three jack rabbits were found in the beet field while we were thinning and the gopher in the near by field. The jack rabbits were just small fuffs of furs when she found them and she raised them by feeding them with an eye dropper till soon they were so imprinted on her that they were always following her around the house. They were surprisngly aggressive creatures, especailly the smallest one. It was constantly chasing the cat that was several times its size and would even attack me if I teased it. The gopher, she would put a light golden chain on it and take it for a walk with three rabbits hopping after her. If the gopher got free though, it would come streaking for home and the three rabbits were never far from home. They were so tame that they would drink up their milk first then chase the cat away from its dish and drink up its milk too. I don't know if they ever followed her out to the field while she was hoeing though, must remember to ask her. But being wild creatures, as fall deepen, they started to stay away bit at a time, each time a little longer till finally when the winter arrived, they went away for good. There were often a jack rabbit near our home but despite Mutsuko's calls, they never came home again. Same with the gopher. It got big and fat and it too started to dissappear till finally one day, it too failed to come home. Gopher hibernate. Wither it returned the following spring I don't know as we had moved to another farm by then. There she found and raised a flock of wild ducks that used to fly out to meet her as she returned from school. But they too went south with the wild migrating flock when the time came. After that, she stuck to raising pet chicken.

Usually, once a week on Thursday, I went to Shaughnessy on my trusty bike with a basket in front and a box tied to the rear carrier, for groceries, to Mrs. Kotch's Red & White

store. One thing that was usually on Mom's shopping list was pork tenderloin. I wonder why it was because it kept better than beef? We didn't have a refrigerator of course. No electricity, as this was long before rural electrification. But despite that Mom kept us well fed and healthy. The odd occasion that we went to Lethbridge, it had to be an all day affair because Kitch's bus only ran once a day each way. Therefore I can well emphasize with the Indians of today having to hang around Galt Gardens because that was about only place where we could go to await the bus time. But we didn't go there to get drunk though. So passed the summer of 1942.

With coming of fall, the grain harvest began and I got on Mr. Zumalt's thrashing crew that went from farm to farm, thrashing their grain. It had a big thrashing machine powered by a huge tractor called Oil-Pulled Rumley that sounded like a huge steam engine. It was almost a museum piece even back then. To haul the bundles of grain from the field to the thrashing machine, there were about six horse drawn wagons of which I was assigned one. At that time, I had very little knowledge of or experience with horses so didn't know that I was given a pair of barely broken-in young horses that nobody else would touch. They bit me, stomped on me, kicked me and I had a terrible time harnessing them in the morning. At first, I had to get to the barn half-hour before the rest of the crew because it used to take me that much longer to get the horses ready. At first I didn't realize that these were not a normal behavior of horses. I just thought that it was all due to my inexperience. But I quickly learned how to handle these horses and they turned out to be very smart and lovable, almost pets. They quickly learned the routine so well that all I had to do was call out to them to go left or right and when to stop and go. They turned out to be the best team on the outfit but only for me. I learnt later that they wouldn't obey anyone else and would viciously kick and bite anyone coming close to them. They never stopped doing that to me either, especially the first thing in the morning, but only in a playful manner and they never seriously injured me. Someone told me later that they were sold for horse-meat. I hope that wasn't true.

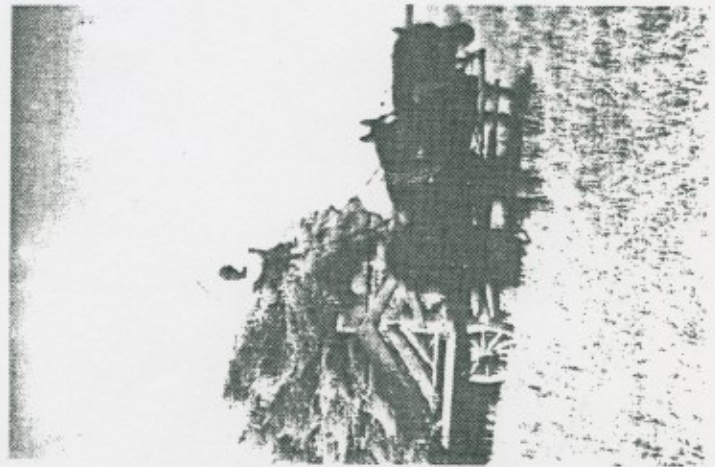
The beet harvest! What a back breaking



CAPII HAVVATUO

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Photos by Derek Dixon



toil that turned out to be. The hardest part was getting the beet out from the ground. Each beet had to be pulled up by hand and then two of them had to be knocked together to get as much of the mud off and then thrown into a pile to be topped. I bet some of the larger, muddier pair of beets weighed as much as Mutsuko herself. It was bad enough at the beginning of the harvest but it soon got cold and the mud froze onto the beets. Trying to get that off was something else again. Then it snowed. Every day we were soaked wet from waist down and just caked with mud. Yet I don't think any one of us even caught a cold.

Why did we put up with it? Because there wasn't much else we could do about it. We couldn't quit and go somewhere else even if there were some place where we could go to. Our movement was strictly controlled by the RCMP and without their travel permit, we were not allowed to travel more than fifty miles. Also without permission from the Sugar Factory, we couldn't even move to another farm! Also because all of Japanese evacuees in Alberta were in the same situation and at least we were able to stay together as a family.

The actual topping process to me was rather fun except for the big warts that developed on my right palm. Because of rubbing from the knife handle, it would bleed quite profusely and my glove used to be blood-soaked by end of the day. The topping was done with a special knife about a foot and a half long with a big hook on the end of it. The beet was hooked and pulled up to you and then with the blade, the green top was cut off from the beet. I was good at it and used to make a game out of it to see how cleanly I could cut the top off with a single stroke. The neighbour that worked on the farm just to the south of us once said that he used to marvel at how my knife flashed so evenly and continuously. Shigeto and Dad did equally well but for Mom and Mutsuko, it was a different matter. Many of the larger beets were too big and heavy for them to hook up with the knife so they would have to roll them around on the ground and chop off the top with many knife strokes and then carry the beet over to the pile in both hands.

As I mentioned earlier, we were one of the better off family. The family just to the







Yipoh & Lobb
MORIS EHT NI SAEER CHIDDOD

north of us was a young couple with three infant girls. They must have had a terrible time. As such, we were one of the earlier one to finish the beet harvest. At an average of twelve and a half tons of beets to an acre, which in those days was not a bad crop, it was the best beet harvest Mr. Been ever had. As soon as we finished our harvest, we went over to our neighbour and helped them to finish their's, then to the next neighbour and the next. Everyone helped till we were all finished. The last place we helped out was at Moriyama about three miles away and before we were finished, we were digging the beets out from under a foot of snow.

One thing I am very proud to remember is how we survived the very difficult time by all helping each other out. I beleive that on one rested till all the Japanese contracted beets were harvested. It did bring out the best in all of us.

THE WINTER.

The winter of '42 was one of the coldest on record. The temperature often fell to forty degrees below F. Fortunately, immediately after the harvest, B.C. Security Commission supplied the evacuees with plywood and tar-paper to winterize the shacks we were housed in but it was still cold. We managed to survive by keeping our stoves red hot, roasting on one side, freezing on the other side. It was a miracle that none of the shacks didn't burn down that winter or that very few people were frost-bitten by the severe unaccustomed cold. Before the severe cold arrived, Dad who had some experience with the severe cold in the interior B.C. when he was young, bought us all leather jackets and together with the thick woollen sweaters Mom knitted us, I was usually quite comfortable except for my feet. Often I would have on three layers of stockings but still my feet got cold. I used to envy the local people who usually had boots with heavy felt lining in it, thinking how warm it must be. I don't know why we never got one ourselves because I don't think they could have been all that expensive.

Japanese evacuee's children were finally allowed to attend school that winter, after the beet harvest, for the first since coming to Alberta. Mutsuko and Shigeto had to wade through waist deep snow drifts in the coulee that was between our shack and the road to reach the bus stop half a mile away. That they survived the cold without serious frost-bites was a miracle because with the wind-chill factor, the temperature many times must have been near hundred degrees below zero.

During one of the coldest night of the winter, a car went off the road into the coulee about half a mile away and the driver was killed. The passenger, Mr Katakami, was badly injured but fortunately he saw the light of our house through the opening in the culvert and managed to crawl through it towards us. Having heard the loud crash, we were outside looking to see what had caused it and spotted Mr. Katakami almost right away and went to his assistance. He recovered fully and lived to a ripe old age.

I went back to school too and was doing

quite well at Picture Butte High School. My report card from Maple Ridge High School showed that I was promoted to grade eleven. However it turned out that I had already taken most of the required grade eleven courses for Alberta as my notes and test papers proved and since I had the required number of high school credits, I was promoted to grade twelve and was doing very well at the head of the class. Then came a letter from Edmonton demoting me back to grade nine because they would give me credit only for Health and PT, the two courses that I didn't even take! Despite the appeals by the principal and proof that I was doing very well in grade twelve, they refused to give me any credits for all the rest of the high school courses that I had already completed back in B.C. I was so disgusted that I quit the school and spent the rest of the winter completing my grade twelve by correspondence courses from Victoria while working in King's feed-lot feeding sheep,

SERVIVED; 1942.

The older people, almost as soon as the beet harvest was over, formally established the "Tonari Gumi" clubs, that had been tentatively thought off before the rush of beet thinning, with chapters throughout southern Alberta. It was mutual assistance and social organization that brought the evacuees very close together. Whatever were their status before the evacuation, we were now all in the same situation and mutual hardship and struggle did bring out the better characters in us Japanese and we all tried to help each other to the best of our ability as exemplified in us all pitching in to help finish everybody else's beet harvest even in the worst working condition possible. To this day, for the people that survived through those difficult years, the sprirt of mutual help and respect for each other still prevail. One of the positive aspect of the evacuation. During this time many Buddhist Churches were established in Southern Alberta, headed by Rev. Kawamura.

Another major change in our lives was the distance that separated us. At the closest, the nearest neighbour would be half-mile away instead of few hundred feet as was back in B. C. Any visiting required trudging miles and miles, often in the mud and snow. Picture Butte, the social center for the evacuees in our area was three and a half miles away for us and we were the closer ones. Many of the others would have to walk as far as ten miles just to visit friends. None of the evacuees had cars as they had been all confiscated back in B.C. and there were no telephones either except in towns.

The people of Alberta were rather suspicious of us at first which was not surprising with the vicious rumours that preceded us. But as soon as they got to know us, most of them turned out to be open-minded and helpful people. Many became our good and valued friends. And they were usually generous with their rides as we were often walking along the long prairie roads.

Christmas that year was without our usual fir tree that Shigeto and I used to go out and cut in B. C., there being no evergreen trees growing wild on the bald prairie. Other than that, I can't recall any special detail of the occassion. I imagine Mutsuko and Shigeto had

the usual Christmas parties at their schools and Mom probably cooked something special. Oh yes, I believe Stoney Nakano spent the holiday season with us that time.

Thus we survived the eventful year, 1942, the year that altered our lives so dramatically. Looking back from forty-five years in its future, I am amazed how little the Issei were discouraged by their devastating loss of their life saving and the products of their long hard work. How they all buckled down to rebuild their lives, how little resentment they bore towards the Canadian government and the society. The very young ones like my brother and sister were plunged into unthinkably hard and demanding labour they would not have had to bear had it not been for the evacuation. Following the examples of their parents, they pitched-in to everyone's benefit and most went on to be success in their chosen field of endeavor. Those of us that were in mid-teen and older were immediately saddled with the responsibility of having to help provide for the family so thus were denied our adolescence. Constantly pressured by necessity of earning enough for the family's survival, few of us were able to attain the higher education or training our younger brothers and sisters were usually able to enjoy later. However, most of us too managed to do quite well socially and financially, few spectacularly. And now today, the Sansei are reaping the benefits of the courage and determination exercised by their grandparents and hard work of their parents.

So how should the fateful evacuation be viewed? To Canada, it is a big black mark in its history. To us Japanese-Canadians though, it propelled us from being an unfranchised discriminated down-trodden minority into the mainstream of the Canadian society. However, the Canadian society must understand that our success is not due to the evacuation but despite it. The Isseis did not sit around mopeing and crying, blaming everyone, looking for government hand-outs, but gretted their teeth and proceeded to rebuild their shattered lives from scratch and meanwhile laying the foundation for the future by teaching their children the value of hard honest labour and the vital necessity of higher education and training, the seed now bearing fruit in the bright future facing the Sansei and their children.