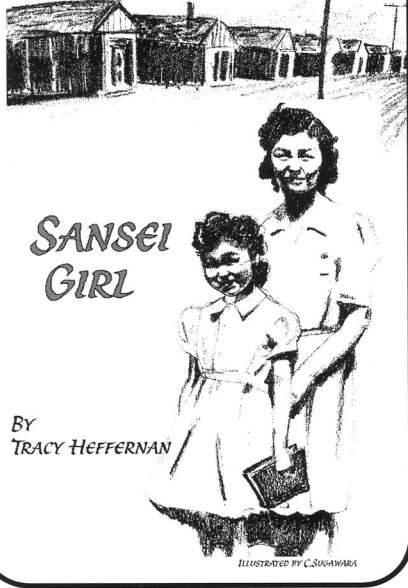


# Home Deferred

By Tracy Heffernan



What is home?  
Where is home?  
What constitutes  
feeling "at home?"  
To paraphrase  
Langston Hughes,  
"What happens to  
a home deferred?"  
When 120,000  
Japanese Ameri-  
cans were removed  
from their homes  
and interned for the  
duration of World  
War II, the notion of  
"home" changed  
forever in the Nikkei  
community.  
Thousands lost their  
homes in the move  
to the camps. Every  
family lost the years  
in that home and

their family's memories and experiences there. Family structure and history were altered forever, and the reverberations continue to this day.

One family who shared in this experience was that of Nancy Yoshihara Mayeda, former principal of Rooftop Elementary School in San Francisco. As a young girl, Mayeda and her family were interned first at the assembly center in Puyallup, Washington and then at Minidoka, Idaho for the duration of the war. While there, Nancy's mother Helen did all she could to clean and create "home" from untenable quarters, such as the former

horse stalls at

Puyallup. Nancy's father, Minoru Yoshihara, was particularly adept at creating extra space where there was none. She remembers during their first Christmas in Minidoka, her father brought a tree branch inside to their corner of the barracks, where the children and Helen decorated it with paper chains and natural adornment. Resilience and creativity helped create the sense of home in these temporary surroundings.

"Home" is more than the four physical walls surrounding us in our day-to-day existence. Home also connotes the familial life happening within. To create the feeling of security and a familiar ease in the conditions of internment required monumental energies. "*Shigata ga nai*"—it cannot be helped, so make the best of it—certainly was a precept in the Yoshihara household. In one of the few references Helen shared regarding the family's time in camp, she reflected that they had lost less than many as their house previous to internment had been rented, so their property was not forfeited. While true, it does not reveal the sense of devastation shared by every interned family in leaving the home of their choice and arbitrarily being housed in a substandard way for no reason other than race.

Privacy was always an issue. Much of the daily discourse previously enjoyed by families was often squelched in the

desire to keep one's family's affairs private. Simple pleasures such as holidays became camp-wide events with precious little to support individual family rituals. Mealtimes, a centralizing ritual in one's own home, often became a war of wills as teenagers chose to eat with their peers, at separate tables from their families.

The notion of home was painfully tested with the Loyalty Questionnaire, which concluded with the query: "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America...and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?" It forced internees to ask themselves: Is your country your home? Does it deserve your allegiance if it is violating your civil rights? By forswearing allegiance to foreign governments, do you imply you previously had such allegiance, and so implicate yourself further? What about the Issei, not allowed to be citizens of America, yet asked to forswear allegiance to Japan? What does the answer say about where "home" is and how you wish to conduct your life there?

Upon their release from Minidoka, the Yoshihara family moved on to segregated company housing while Minoru helped construct Anderson Dam, also in Idaho. There, he used his skills to build an extra room on the tiny company house, and even built Nancy's brother Arthur a tricycle. When they returned to the Bay Area after internment, the Yoshiharas, like many other returning families, lived with relatives who had returned earlier and secured housing. Many of these early returnees were housed in community churches while they sought more permanent arrangements. Homes were shared like the precious commodity they were. Extended families gathered together, then one by one found their own homes to once again create a nuclear family structure. To this day, Nancy cannot bring herself to sell her father's house. It represents something monu-

mental,  
personal,  
inviolable.

**Her father's house represents something monumental, personal, inviolable.**

In Nancy's family, her father encouraged his children to use adversity to "elevate themselves." While certainly true in his case, he, like many Kibei, Issei and Nisei, spoke very little if at all about their time in the camps (for example, relocation resister Fred Korematsu's own children learned of his important place in the reparations story in a history class in school). A code of silence seemed to shroud this familial experience. He spoke of it once to his granddaughter to inform a report she was writing for school. The home as the center of one's experience, knowledge, and the basis for developing a world view is supplanted when a huge area of shared experience is shattered. Our current political climate warns us the lessons of the past, hard won, certainly can be repeated without diligence in reflecting and sharing the knowledge of the stories of silence. Home, the center of all—family, history, unconditional acceptance—can open the doors to truth. ✨

Sources: *When Justice Failed: The Fred Korematsu Story* (S. Chin, Dialog Systems, Inc., 1993)

Tracy Heffernan is the author of *Sansei Girl*, an unpublished biography of Nancy Yoshihara Mayeda, premiere California educator who began her education in the camp at Minidoka, Idaho.

# At Home in 1-9-B

By Amy Iwasaki Mass

1-9-B Heart Mountain, Wyoming. That was my address during my second, third, and fourth grades in elementary school.

I had always thought of home as a house: A place where a family lived together with a kitchen, bedrooms, living room, and bathrooms. But in 1994, when I located 1-9-B among the many barracks of the model replica of Heart Mountain at the American Concentration Camps exhibit at the Japanese American National Museum, I was overwhelmed with emotion and flooded with memories of my life in 1-9-B. I realized then that "home" did not have to be a house.

During World War II, home for me was one room where my family lived. It had a coal burning stove, six army cots, and furniture that my father made from scrap lumber. The living room and the bedroom were separated by sheets hung by my mother. The only kitchen I remembered was the coal-burning stove on which my father cooked fried rice and an egg for me when snow made it hard to get to the mess hall for breakfast. My mother worked at the mess hall on the early morning shift, and I wonder if that's how we had rice and eggs to cook in our room.

Looking back, I know now that home doesn't have to be a house. As a child, home is where you learn all the lessons about life that family members teach each other. Home is where my mother taught me not to lie. After spilling a bottle of ink on the rug, I steadfastly denied to my mother that I had done it. After grilling me for 20 minutes (it seemed more like 20 hours) my mother got me to admit the truth. I told myself I didn't ever want to go through that ordeal again!

Home is where we poured over the Montgomery Ward and Sears Roebuck catalogues and ordered snow suits for our first winter in Wyoming. Home is where my brother and sister sent me beautifully illustrated story books as presents from the "outside" when they went away to college

in Missouri. Home is where my father played solitaire at the table he built. When I asked him why he played cards so much, he said he did so while he figured out what to do about problems from his job at the camp administration office. Home is where my mother cried when she got a telegram from the International Red Cross notifying her that her father in Japan had died.

In camp my friends and I used to talk about the houses we lived in before the war, and how big they were. We yearned for the luxury and comfort of having a whole house for one family. As I look back now I can see that my single room home in Heart Mountain was just as important and meaningful to me as the four-bedroom house we had in Los Angeles. It's the people who live in the home and the significant things that happen there that make any dwelling a home. \*

Amy Mass is a member of the Nikkei Heritage editorial board.



Amy Mass, front, with her family, 1943.

## AFTER THE HOUSE, A HOME

by Chiori Santiago

"When you first come to a retirement home, no one tells you you'll need clothes," insists Fujie Wade. "A lot of people come to Keiro with old-fashion attire. In two months they're wearing bright colors. They change, because they become young."

Wade, 72, may be living in a "senior home," but you won't catch her sitting still. As president of Keiro Retirement Home Residents' Council, she's so busy she can barely find time to jam on her electronic keyboard and chat with friends online. She's one of the fastest-growing Japanese American demographic groups: those over the age of 65. Along with her Issei and Nisei peers, she's discovered a way to create "home" without homeownership, and enjoying every minute of it.

"Many people have never lived like this," she says. "They're used to living with their families. When they move here, it's more like high school."

Keiro Senior HealthCare, a non-profit organization with five facilities in southern California, is an example of the growing number of residential and health services designed for Nikkei retirees. Keiro has roots in the opening of the Japanese Hospital in

1929; in 1961 a group of Nisei leaders founded Japanese Community Health Enterprises to open a nursing home for Nikkei elders. It became Keiro Services. The enterprise now operates Wade's retirement home, an adult day center, an intermediate care facility and two nursing homes serving 2500 Nikkei each year in Los Angeles, Gardena and Santa Ana.

Keiro offers a Japanese-style environment (1 million bowls of *gohan* served annually) to a clientele that embraces old ways while bopping to the new, Wade says. Classes in *shamisen*, *ikebana*, *sumie* and ceramics respond to residents' nostalgia for traditional arts.

"In Japan, you would have basic training as a bride. For example, you would learn tea ceremony, flower arranging, cooking, manners, music—it was like a finishing school. But many people didn't have it. Issei were very poor, then World War II came, Nisei were in camp, it was an emergency time. No time for bridal school. Now we have an opportunity to learn all these things. It's just like we're going to get married again!"

Some retirees move in expecting

"they're going to sit around in pajamas," Wade

says. They soon learn that visits from Elvis impersonators, Japanese pop stars and even the Imperial Family get residents out of their chairs. Wade is a strong believer in activism as an antidote to lethargy. She invites local politicians to schmooze ("Altogether, we are 235 voices. Politicians want our vote, so I say, 'Come convince us.'") and encourages residents to get involved in quality-of-life issues. "I've spent two hard years building a good relationship between residents and administration," she says. "Before they used to treat us a little like kindergartners, but now we're comfortable. We have our dignity."

Life at Keiro, she says, is "first rate. The only thing we lack is a sense of humor. Many Japanese old people are very serious. So I hope more people get involved. When you get up and do something, it revives you psychologically. It's important to know you're not coming here to die. You are coming to relive your youth." \*



Fujie Wade