



1942

**"Jimmie, who was sent to a Japanese Relocation Center", n.d.
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12 pages
Letters from Readers

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JIMMIE, WHO WAS SENT TO A JAPANESE RELOCATION CENTER

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I was busy in the kitchen making candied grapefruit rind for the girls in the office when the door bell interrupted my cooking. What a pleasant interruption it turned out to be! When I answered the door I was greeted by a Japanese-American man who smiled and said, "You don't remember me--but--I'm Jimmie one of your former pupils." In a moment I knew him. How delighted I was to see him again! and how he had changed from a small bewildered boy to this self-assured man.

I invited him in, and he told me of some of his plans for his future and also related some of his past experiences, while living in a Relocation Camp in Arizona during World War II. Then, all too soon, he left for his job and his home in Los Angeles.

That night, as I lay in bed, I could not sleep. I relived the emotional strain of World War II times when Jimmie had been in my class and Pearl Harbor had been attacked by the Japanese.

Our school was located in a delta farming area where sixty percent of the pupils were of Japanese decent. When World War II was declared, all Japanese were interred in Relocation Camps in California and other states. 20,000 were housed at Tule Lake in Modoc County, California. Some of the families from San Francisco were housed temporarily in the large Tan Foran Race Track south of San Francisco. The families from our area were sent at first to the Fair Grounds on Charter Way in Stockton.

They were housed in army type barracks. They left behind them their homes, their farms, their animals, their cars
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and trucks, their toys and their friends and neighbors.

As in all wars, children pay a high price of suffering. The most difficult experience of my pupils seemed to be the realization that they had to leave their pets behind when they were sent to the Relocation Camps.

Every morning at school we all assembled outdoors on the playground and I led the school in a flag salute and a few songs. Usually, the songs were of a patriotic nature: America, Star Spangled Banner and Glory Glory Halleluja. The favorite songs were American the Beautiful and God Bless America. Simple rounds were also enjoyed. The popular ones were Row, Row, Row Your Boat and Frere Jacques.

As soon as the teachers learned our pupils were to be evacuated, we decided to do our best to try to find homes for the children's pets.

Every morning, at the out door sing, we held a sort of auction with no money exchanged but much love and sympathy. The Japanese-American pupils ere invited to bring their pets to school. Each morning they would take turns standing on the outdoor platform and holding up the pet for all to see. The pupil would give his pet's name, age and good qualities. Soon a hand would be raised and a voice would call out, "I'll mind your kitty until you return," or "We have room for your bird in our kitchen."

One day, one of my pupils, Jimmie, lingered at my desk after school. In his quiet, gentle manner, he said softly, "I don't want to bring my dog to school, no one will want him. He is old and blind." I was choked with my emotions, but I managed to put my arm around Jimmie and say "We all want your dog and he'll get good care until you come back to us." The next day I found a farmer who was willing to add the dog to some other animals in his large barn.

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Much too soon, our pupils left for their new temporary homes. I tried to reassure my pupils that before too long they'd be back with us again. While they were at the County Fair Grounds we teachers visited them regularly and brought them school books and assignments and a few "goodies" for treats. We often shopped for the parents. I always looked for Jimmie and reassured him that his dog was well cared for and happy in that big old barn that was now his dog's home.

After some months, these Japanese-American families were moved to more permanent quarters in California and in other states. I didn't see any of my pupils again until World War II was over, but the children wrote me many letters. Most of my pupils were housed in camps in Arizona.

In the many months to come I often remembered by my Japanese pupils who were in other states. I missed their quiet manners and industrious habits. Our classes now were small in size.

We instructed our pupils in air-raid drills. We showed them how to quickly drop to the floor and duck under their desks at a given signal. I felt too clumsy to duck under my desk so I never tried that exercise. When the Air-raid siren would shriek I always hoped it was just a practice one. Fortunately, we never experienced the real raid. The children brought small cushions from home and kept them in their desks for use during the air-raid drills. It was better to sit on a cushion and keep their clothes clean than on the dusty floor in this farming area. We had drills often.

We practiced evacuation drills and were instructed about the best routes for cars to take us out of the city in case we were threatened with a bomb. The radio had practice-alert signals at regular intervals.

When I left for work in the morning I always checked

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to see that my own children had money and told them how to proceed if we should be separated. In such a case, I would have to remain with my school pupils. After the war ended, my younger son handed me a folded dollar bill that he had carried in his shoe during the war period.

Teachers had many extra responsibilities during those war years. We worked on rations boards, issuing tickets for sugar, tires, gasoline, bacon, butter, white flour, shoes and many other items that were scarce. We took courses in First Aid and took our turns watching in tents for any stray air plane in the sky. It was a long working day for us. On Sundays we worked in the U.S.O. office and tried to find housing for families of service men who were stationed in this area. Jobs were plentiful and housing was at a premium at this time.

This was a time of emotional stress for all. There was hard feeling against anyone who was of Japanese ancestry. I had great concern for my older son who was fighting the Japanese in the South Pacific as an Infantry Soldier.

But through it all, I never lost my love for my small Japanese-American pupils and God took care of my own brave son, who came home to me, safely after the war.

To-day I was happy that Jimmie, too, had returned and he had remembered my concern for his old, blind dog that he left behind when he was evacuated from California to Arizona and a Relocation Camp for the War's duration.

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