

# Making a Difference

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## Joy Kogawa b. 1935

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

'We have within us the political person and at times I think that person is yanked out of silence to speak,' said Joy Kogawa in 1989. For her, it is not so much a matter of balancing the tension between political action and silence, but rather a matter of recognizing the source from which language stems. Following her first collection of lyric poems, *The Splintered Moon* (1967), Kogawa shifted her ground in both thematic and writerly ways. Her second poetry collection, *A Choice of Dreams* (1974), marked the beginning of her exploration of her ancestral origins: the poems are a powerful articulation of the sensibilities and sentiments she 'discovered' as a Canadian when she visited Japan. Her exploration of what this double legacy of origins entails was eloquently expressed in her first novel, *Obasan* (1981).

This novel, inspired in part by Muriel Kitagawa's letters, which Kogawa happened upon while doing research at the National Archives, is based on Kogawa's experiences as a child born in Vancouver and who lived there until the Second World War, when her family, like all other Japanese Canadians, was uprooted. Her characters follow the route that Kogawa's father, an Anglican minister, was forced to take. The family was sent to Slocan, one of the internment camps in the interior of British Columbia. They subsequently moved to Coaldale, Alberta, in 1945, where Kogawa finished school, and eventually to Toronto, where she studied music and theology. She moved back to Vancouver where she married, but returned to Toronto in the late 1970s after her separation.

As the excerpt from the novel included here illustrates, much of the impetus in *Obasan* revolves around the first-person narrator, Naomi, and her maternal aunt, Emily. The two women, although profoundly aware of what the labelling of their community as 'enemy aliens' means, have different ways of articulating their pain and revisiting their past. Naomi embraces

the passive silence of her elderly aunt Obasan, who has become a surrogate mother to her, while Emily dedicates her entire life to unearthing all the documents necessary to demonstrate what is already apparent to all the Japanese Canadians, namely the racism directed against them. As Kogawa has said, Naomi 'doesn't say anything, she doesn't do anything. . . . Whereas Aunt Emily acts. I think that we have within us the Aunt Emily and the Naomi.' The novel has played a considerable role in alerting Canadians to past injustices committed against the Japanese Canadians, and contributed, along with Kogawa's own activism, to the redress sought by them from the Canadian government. Its sequel, *Isuka* (1992), meaning 'someday', offers a fictionalized version of those events. *Obasan* received many awards, including the *Books in Canada* First Novel Award, the Canadian Authors Association Book of the Year Award, and the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award. A third novel, *The Rain Ascends* (1995), about the sexual abuse of children by a Japanese Canadian Anglican minister, reveals more clearly the humanistic and Christian values that inform Kogawa's personal and political views. In the fall of 2005, after initial resistance from the Vancouver City Council, the Save the Kogawa House Committee—supported by a large number of associations and many individuals—was successful in delaying the demolition of the house (West 64th Avenue) where Kogawa lived before her family's internment and where part of *Obasan* takes place, in the hope that it will become a writer-in-residence centre.

Kogawa's other books include three poetry collections, *Jericho Road* (1977), *Woman in the Woods* (1985), and *A Song of Lilith* (2001), which includes artwork by Lilian Broca, as well as an adaptation of *Obasan* for children, *Naomi's Road* (1986). A translation of the latter has appeared in Japanese, and an expansion of it ('Obasan without Aunt Emily') has been

adopted as a textbook for Japanese junior high schools. It has also been adapted (libretto by Ann Hodges) as an opera by Vancouver Opera (2005), composed by Ramona Leungen. Kogawa's accomplishments and contributions to Japanese Canadian culture in particular and Canadian culture in general have been acknowledged by many awards, including her induction into the Order of Canada (1986), the

Urban Alliance Race Relations Award (1994), the National Association of Japanese Canadians National Award (2001), the Lifetime Achievement Award (Association of Asian American Studies, 2001), and honorary degrees from the University of Lethbridge (1991), University of Guelph (1992), Simon Fraser University (1993), the University of Toronto (1999), and the University of British Columbia (2001).

### from *Obasan*

The ball I found under the cot that day was never lost again. Obasan keeps it in a box with Stephen's toy cars on the bottom shelf in the bathroom. The rubber is cracked and scored with a black lacy design, and the colours are dull, but it still bounces a little.

Sick Bay, I learned eventually, was not a beach at all. And the place they called the Pool was not a pool of water, but a prison at the exhibition grounds called Hastings Park in Vancouver. Men, women, and children outside Vancouver, from the 'protected area'—a hundred-mile strip along the coast—were herded into the grounds and kept there like animals until they were shipped off to road-work camps and concentration camps in the interior of the province. From our family, it was only Grandma and Grandpa Nakane who were imprisoned at the Pool.

Some families were able to leave on their own and found homes in British Columbia's interior and elsewhere in Canada. Ghost towns such as Slocan—those old mining settlements, sometimes abandoned, sometimes with a remnant community—were reopened, and row upon row of two-family wooden huts were erected. Eventually the whole coast was cleared and everyone of the Japanese race in Vancouver was sent away.

The tension everywhere was not clear to me then and is not much clearer today. Time has solved few mysteries. Wars and rumours of wars, racial hatreds and fears are with us still.

The reality of today is that Uncle is dead and Obasan is left alone. Weariness has invaded her and settled in her bones. Is it possible that her hearing could deteriorate so rapidly in just one month? The phone is ringing but she does not respond at all.

Aunt Emily is calling from the airport in Calgary where she's waiting for Stephen's flight from Montreal. They'll rent a car and drive down together this afternoon.

'Did you get my parcel?' she asks.

The airport sounds in the background are so loud she can hardly hear me. I shout into the receiver but it's obvious she doesn't know what I'm saying.

'Is Obasan all right? Did she sleep last night?' she asks.

It's such a relief to feel her sharing my concern.

Obasan has gone into the bathroom and is sweeping behind the toilet with a whisk made from a toy broom.

'Would you like to take a bath?' I ask.

She continues sweeping the imaginary dust.

'Ofuro?' I repeat. 'Bath?'

'Orai,' she replies at last, in a meek voice. 'All right.'

I run the water the way she prefers it, straight from the hot-water tap. It's been a while since we bathed together. After this, perhaps she'll rest. Piece by piece she removes her layers of underclothes, rags held together with safety pins. The new ones I've bought for her are left unused in boxes under the bed. She is small and naked and bent in the bathroom, the skin of her buttocks loose and drooping in a fold.

'Aah,' she exhales deeply in a half groan as she sinks into the hot water and closes her eyes.

I rub the washcloth over her legs and feet, the thin purple veins a scribbled maze, a skin map, her thick toenails, ancient rock formations. I am reminded of long-extinct volcanoes, the crust and rivulets of lava scars, criss-crossing down the bony hillside. Naked as prehistory, we lie together, the steam from the bath heavily misting the room.

'Any day now is all right,' she says. 'The work is finished.' She is falling asleep in the water.

'It will be good to lie down,' I shout, rousing her and draining the tub. I help her to stand and she moves to her room, her feet barely leaving the floor. Almost before I pull the covers over her, she is asleep.

I am feeling a bit dizzy from the heat myself.

Aunt Emily said she and Stephen would be here by four this afternoon. I should clear up the place as much as I can before they arrive. Find a safe place for all the papers.

This diary of Aunt Emily's is the largest I have ever seen. The hard cover is grey with a black border and 'Journal' is written in fancy script in the middle. What a crackling sound old paper makes.

It has no page numbers and most of the entries begin 'Dear Nesan'. It's a journal of letters to my mother. 'Merry Christmas, Dearest Nesan, 1941' is printed in a rectangular decorated box on the first page.

Should I be reading this? Why not? Why else would she send it here?

The handwriting in blue-black ink is firm and regular in the first few pages, but is a rapid scrawl later on. I feel like a burglar as I read, breaking into a private house only to discover it's my childhood house filled with corners and rooms I've never seen. Aunt Emily's Christmas 1941 is not the Christmas I remember.

The people she mentions would be my age, or younger than I am now: her good friends, Eiko and Fumi, the student nurses; Tom Shoyama, the editor of the *New Canadian*; Kunio Shimizu, the social worker; my father, Tadashi Mark; Father's good friend, Uncle Dan; and Father's older brother, Isamu, Sam for short, or Uncle as we called him. Obasan is fifty years old in 1941.

In the face of growing bewilderment and distress, Aunt Emily roamed the landscape like an aircraft in a fog, looking for a place to land—a safe and sane strip of justice and reason. Not seeing these, she did not crash into the oblivion of either bitterness or futility but remained airborne.

The first entry is dated December 25, 1941.

Dearest Nesan,

In all my 25 years, this is the first Christmas without you and Mother. I wonder what you are doing today in Japan. Is it cold where you are? Do your neighbours treat you as enemies? Is Obaa-chan still alive?

When you come back, Nesan, when I see you again, I will give you this journal. It will be my Christmas present to you. Isn't it a sturdy book? It's one of Dan's Christmas gifts to me.

I'm sitting in the library, writing at the desk which has the picture of you and me beside the ink bottle. There are so many things to tell you. How different the world is now! The whole continent is in shock about the Pearl Harbor bombing. Some Issei are feeling betrayed and ashamed.

It's too early yet to know how the war will affect us. On the whole, I'd say we're taking things in our stride. We're used to the prejudice by now after all these long years, though it's been intensified into hoodlumism. A torch was thrown into a rooming-house and some plate-glass windows were broken in the west end—things like that.

The blackouts frighten the children. Nomi had a crying bout a few nights ago. I don't tell you this to worry you, Nesan, but I know you will want to know. There was a big storm during the last blackout. Nomi woke up. That peach tree is too close to her window. When the wind blows, it sways and swings around like a giant octopus trying to break in. Aya had the spare bed in Nomi's room just as you arranged before you left, but since she's had to stay so much longer, she's moved in the main bedroom and Mark sleeps in the study downstairs. Aya slept through the whole storm but Mark woke up to find Nomi sitting on his pillow, hitting the Japanese doll you gave her. He tried to take the doll away from her and she started to cry and wouldn't stop. He said it's the first time she's ever really cried. She doesn't understand what's going on at all. Stephen does, of course. He went through a phase of being too good to be true but now he's being surly. He told Aya to 'talk properly'.

All three Japanese newspapers have been closed down. That's fine as far as I'm concerned. Never needed so many anyway. It's good for the *New Canadian* which is now our only source of information and can go ahead with all the responsibility. Our December 12 headline is 'Have Faith in Canada'. Thank God we live in a democracy and not under an officially racist regime. All of us Nisei are intent on keeping faith and standing by. We were turned down for the Home Defense training plan but we're doing Red Cross work, buying War Savings bonds, logging for the war industries and shipyards, benefit concerts—the regular stuff.

There have been the usual letters to the editor in the papers. Rank nonsense, some of them. The majority are decent however. The RCMP are on our side. More than anyone else, they know how blameless we are. When the City Fathers proposed cancelling all our business licences they said we did not rate such harsh treatment. Isn't that encouraging? But now the North Vancouver Board of Trade has gone on record to demand that all our autos be confiscated.

What would doctors like Dad and the businessmen do? If they take something that essential away from 23,000 people the rest of British Columbia will feel some of the bad side effects. Remember the boat that Sam and Mark finished last winter with all the hand carvings? It was seized along with all the fishing boats from up and down the coast, and the whole lot are tied up in New Westminster. Fishing licences were suspended a couple of weeks ago as well. The dog-salmon industry, I hear, is short-handed because the Japanese cannot fish any more. But the white fishermen are confident that they can make up the lack in the next season, if they can use the Japanese fishing boats.

There was one friendly letter in the *Province* protesting the taking away of the right to earn a living from 1,800 people. Said it wasn't democracy. But then there was another letter by a woman saying she didn't want her own precious daughter to have to go to school with the you-know-whos. Strange how these protesters are so much more vehement about Canadian-born Japanese than they are about German-born Germans. I guess it's because we look different. What it boils down to is an undemocratic racial antagonism—which is exactly what our democratic country is supposed to be fighting against. Oh well. The egg-man told me not to worry.

It's the small businesses that are most affected—the dressmakers, the corner store etc.—because the clientele are shy of patronising such places in public. Lots of people have been fired from their jobs. Business on Powell Street is up slightly since most of us who usually go to the big department stores like Woodward's don't any more.

A couple of Sundays ago the National President of the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire, who obviously doesn't know the first thing about us, made a deliberate attempt to create fear and ill-will among her dominion-wide members. Said we were all spies and saboteurs, and that in 1931 there were 55,000 of us and that number has doubled in the last ten years. A biological absurdity. Trouble is, lots of women would rather believe their president than actual RCMP records. It's illogical that women, who are the bearers and nurturers of the human race, should go all out for ill-will like this.

Are you interested in all this, Nesan?

I've knit Dad and Mark a couple of warm sweaters. Dad is back in full-time service in spite of his heart. When gas rationing starts he won't be able to use the car so much. It's so sleek it's an affront to everyone he passes. I wish he'd bought something more modest, but you know Dad.

He has to report every month to the RCMP just because he didn't take time to be naturalized, and didn't look far enough ahead to know how important it was. Politics doesn't seem to mean a thing to him. I feel so irritated at him.

But worse than my irritation there's this horrible feeling whenever I turn on the radio, or see a headline with the word 'Japs' screaming at us. So long as they designate the enemy by that term and not us, it doesn't matter. But over here, they say 'Once a Jap always a Jap', and that means us. We're the enemy. And what about you over there? Have they arrested you because you're

a Canadian? If only you'd been able to get out before all this started. Oh, if there were some way of getting news.

The things that go on in wartime! Think of Hitler ship-loading people into Poland or Germany proper to work for nothing in fields and factories far from home and children—stealing food from conquered people—captive labour—shooting hundreds of people in reprisal for one. I'm glad to hear that the Russian army is taking some of the stuffing out of Hitler's troops. War breeds utter insanity. Here at home there's mass hatred of us simply because we're of Japanese origin. I hope fervently it will not affect the lives of the little ones like Stephen and Nomi. After all they are so thoroughly Canadian. Stephen and the Sugimoto boy are the only non-white kids in their classes. Mark says Nomi thinks she's the same as the neighbours, but Stephen knows the difference. Came crying home the other day because some kid on the block broke his violin. Children can be such savages.

There is a lapse of over a month until the next entry.

February 15, 1942.

Dearest Nesan,

I thought I would write to you every day but, as you see, I haven't managed that. I felt so sad thinking about what the children are having to experience I didn't want to keep writing. But today I must tell you what's happening.

Things are changing so fast. First, all the Japanese men—the ones who were born in Japan and haven't been able to get their citizenship yet—are being rounded up, one hundred or so at a time. A few days ago, Mark told me he felt sure Sam had been carted off. I took the interurban down as soon as I could. Isamu couldn't have been gone too long because not all the plants were parched though some of the delicate ones had turned to skeletons in the front window. I tried to find the dog but she's just nowhere. I looked and called all through the woods and behind the house.

Grandma and Grandpa Nakane will be so upset and confused when they find out he's gone. You know how dependent they are on him. They went to Salt Spring Island a couple of weeks ago and haven't come back yet. I know they're with friends so they must be all right.

We know some people who have left Vancouver. Dad says we should look around and get out too, but we just don't know any other place. When we look at the map it's hard to think about all those unknown places. We were thinking of going to Kamloops, but that may be too close to the boundary of the 'protected area'.

It's becoming frightening here, with the agitation mounting higher. It isn't just a matter of fear of sabotage or military necessity any more, it's outright race persecution. Groups like the 'Sons of Canada' are petitioning Ottawa against us and the newspapers are printing outright lies. There was a

picture of a young Nisei boy with a metal lunch box and it said he was a spy with a radio transmitter. When the reporting was protested the error was admitted in a tiny line in the classified section at the back where you couldn't see it unless you looked very hard.

March 2, 1942.

Everyone is distressed here, Nesan. Eiko and Fumi came over this morning, crying. All student nurses have been fired from the General.

Our beautiful radios are gone. We had to give them up or suffer the humiliation of having them taken forcibly by the RCMP. Our cameras—even Stephen's toy one that he brought out to show them when they came—all are confiscated. They can search our homes without warrant.

But the great shock is this: we are all being forced to leave. All of us. Not a single person of the Japanese race who lives in the 'protected area' will escape. There is something called a Civilian Labour Corps and Mark and Dan were going to join—you know how they do everything together—but now will not go near it as it smells of a demonic roundabout way of getting rid of us. There is a very suspicious clause 'within and without' Canada, that has all the fellows leery.

Who knows where we will be tomorrow, next week. It isn't as if we Nisei were aliens—technically or not. It breaks my heart to think of leaving this house and the little things that we've gathered through the years—all those irreplaceable mementoes—our books and paintings—the azalea plants, my white iris.

Oh Nesan, the Nisei are bitter. Too bitter for their own good or for Canada. How can cool heads like Tom's prevail, when the general feeling is to stand up and fight? He needs all his level-headedness and diplomacy, as editor of the *New Canadian*, since that's the only paper left to us now.

A curfew that applies only to us was started a few days ago. If we're caught out after sundown, we're thrown in jail. People who have been fired—and there's a scramble on to be the first to kick us out of jobs—sit at home without even being able to go out for a consoling cup of coffee. For many, home is just a bed. Kunio is working like mad with the Welfare society to look after the women and children who were left when the men were forced to 'volunteer' to go to the work camps. And where are those men? Sitting in unheated bunk-cars, no latrines, no water, snow fifteen feet deep, no work, little food if any. They were shunted off with such inhuman speed that they got there before any facilities were prepared. Now other men are afraid to go because they think they'll be going to certain disaster. If the snow is that deep, there is no work. If there is no work, there is no pay. If there is no pay, no one eats. Their families suffer. *The Daily Province* reports that work on frames with tent coverings is progressing to house the 2,000 expected. Tent coverings where the snow is so deep? You should see the faces here—all pinched, grey, uncertain. Signs have been posted on all highways—'Japs Keep Out'.

Mind you, you can't compare this sort of thing to anything that happens in Germany. That country is openly totalitarian. But Canada is supposed to be a democracy.

All Nisei are liable to imprisonment if we refuse to volunteer to leave. At least that is the likeliest interpretation of Ian Mackenzie's 'Volunteer or else' statement. He's the Minister of Pensions and National Health. Why do they consider us to be wartime prisoners? Can you wonder that there is a deep bitterness among the Nisei who believed in democracy?

And the horrors that some of the young girls are facing—outraged by men in uniform. You wouldn't believe it, Nesan. You have to be right here in the middle of it to really know. The men are afraid to go and leave their wives behind.

How can the Hakujin not feel ashamed for their treachery? My butcher told me he knew he could trust me more than he could most whites. But kind people like him are betrayed by the outright racists and opportunists like Alderman Wilson, God damn his soul. And there are others who, although they wouldn't persecute us, are ignorant and indifferent and believe we're being very well treated for the 'class' of people we are. One letter in the papers says that in order to preserve the 'British way of life', they should send us all away. We're a 'lower order of people'. In one breath we are damned for being 'inassimilable' and the next there's fear that we'll assimilate. One reporter points to those among us who are living in poverty and says 'No British subject would live in such conditions.' Then if we improve our lot, another says 'There is danger that they will enter our better neighbourhoods.' If we are educated the complaint is that we will cease being the 'ideal servant'. It makes me choke. The diseases, the crippling, the twisting of our souls is still to come.

March 12.

Honest Nesan, I'm just in a daze this morning. The last ruling forbids any of us—even Nisei—to go anywhere in this wide dominion without a permit from the Minister of Justice, St Laurent, through Austin C. Taylor of the Commission here. We go where they send us.

Nothing affects me much just now except rather detachedly. Everything is like a bad dream. I keep telling myself to wake up. There's no sadness when friends of long standing disappear overnight—either to Camp or somewhere in the Interior. No farewells—no promise at all of future meetings or correspondence—or anything. We just disperse. It's as if we never existed. We're hit so many ways at one time that if I wasn't past feeling I think I would crumble.

This curfew business is horrible. At sundown we scuttle into our holes like furtive creatures. We look in the papers for the time of next morning's sunrise when we may venture forth.

The government has requisitioned the Livestock Building at Hastings Park, and the Women's Building, to house 2,000 'Japs pending removal'.

White men are pictured in the newspaper filling ticks with bales of straw for mattresses, putting up makeshift partitions for toilets—etc. Here the lowly Jap will be bedded down like livestock in stalls—perhaps closed around under police guard—I don't know. The Nisei will be 'compelled' (news report) to volunteer in Labour Gangs. The worse the news from the Eastern Front, the more ghoulis the public becomes. We are the billygoats and nannygoats and kids—all the scapegoats to appease this blindness. Is this a Christian country? Do you know that Alderman Wilson, the man who says such damning things about us, has a father who is an Anglican clergyman?

I can't imagine how the government is going to clothe and educate our young when they can't even get started on feeding or housing 22,000 removees. Yet the deadline for clearing us out seems to be July 1st or 31st—I'm not sure which. Seems to me that either there are no fifth columnists or else the Secret Service men can't find them. If the FBI in the States have rounded up a lot of them you'd think the RCMP could too and let the innocent ones alone. I wish to goodness they'd catch them all. I don't feel safe if there are any on the loose. But I like to think there aren't any.

March 20.

Dearest Nesan,

Stephen has been developing a slight limp. Dad's not sure what's wrong with the leg. He suspects that the fall he had last year never healed properly and there's some new aggravation at the hip. Stephen spends a lot of time making up tunes on the new violin Dad got him. The old one, I told you, was broken. It's lucky our houses are so close as I can get to see the children fairly often, even with the miserable curfew.

Your friend Mina Sugimoto takes her boys to play with Stephen a fair amount but she's acting like a chicken flapping about with her head cut off since her husband left.

Last night over a hundred boys entrained for a road camp at Schreiber, Ontario. A hundred and fifty are going to another camp at Jasper. The Council (United Nisei) has been working like mad talking to the boys. The first batch of a hundred refused to go. They got arrested and imprisoned in that Immigration building. The next batch refused too and were arrested. Then on Saturday they were released on the promise that they would report back to the Pool. There was every indication they wouldn't but the Council persuaded them to keep their word. They went finally. That was a tough hurdle and the Commission cabled Ralston to come and do something.

On Thursday night, the confinees in the Hastings Park Pool came down with terrible stomach pains. Ptomaine, I gather. A wholesale company or some-thing is contracted to feed them and there's profiteering. There are no partitions of any kind whatsoever and the people are treated worse than livestock, which at least had their own pens and special food when they were there. No plumbing of any kind. They can't take a bath. They don't even take

their clothes off. Two weeks now. Lord! Can you imagine a better breeding ground for typhus? They're cold (Vancouver has a fuel shortage), they're undernourished, they're unwashed. One of the men who came out to buy food said it was pitiful the way the kids scramble for food and the slow ones go empty. God damn those politicians who brought this tragedy on us.

Dan has to report tomorrow and will most likely be told when to go and where. A day's notice at most. When will we see him again? Until all this happened I didn't realize how close a member of the family he had become. He's just like a brother to me. Nesan, I don't know what to do.

The Youth Congress protested at the ill treatment but since then the daily papers are not printing a word about us. One baby was born at the Park. Premature, I think.

If all this sounds like a bird's eye view to you, Nesan, it's the reportage of a caged bird. I can't really see what's happening. We're like a bunch of rabbits being chased by hounds.

You remember Mr Morii, the man who was teaching judo to the RCMP? He receives orders from the Mounties to get 'a hundred to the station or else and here's a list of names'. Any who are rich enough, or who are desperate about not going immediately because of family concerns, pay Morii hundreds of dollars and get placed conveniently on a committee. There are nearly two hundred on that 'committee' now. Some people say he's distributing the money to needy families but who knows?

There's a three-way split in the community—three general camps: the Morii gang, us—the Council group—and all the rest, who don't know what to do. The Council group is just a handful. It's gruelling uphill work for us. Some people want to fight. Others say our only chance is to co-operate with the government. Whichever way we decide there's a terrible feeling of underlying treachery.

March 22, 1942.

Dear Diary,

I don't know if Nesan will ever see any of this. I don't know anything any more. Things are swiftly getting worse here. Vancouver—the water, the weather, the beauty, this paradise—is filled up and overflowing with hatred now. If we stick around too long we'll all be chucked into Hastings Park. Fumi and Eiko are helping the women there and they say the crowding, the noise, the confusion is chaos. Mothers are prostrate in nervous exhaustion—the babies crying endlessly—the fathers torn from them without farewell—everyone crammed into two buildings like so many pigs—children taken out of school with no provision for future education—more and more people pouring into the Park—forbidden to step outside the barbed wire gates and fence—the men can't even leave the building—police guards around them—some of them fight their way out to come to town to see what they can do about their families. Babies and motherless children totally stranded—their fathers taken

to camp. It isn't as if this place had been bombed and *everyone* was suffering. *Then* our morale would be high because we'd be *together*.

Eiko says the women are going to be mental cases.

Rev. Kabayama and family got thrown in too. It's going to be an ugly fight to survive among us. They're making (they say) accommodation for 1,200–1,300 women and children in that little Park! Bureaucrats find it so simple on paper and it's translated willy-nilly into action—and the pure hell that results is kept 'hush hush' from the public, who are already kicking about the 'luxury' given to Japs.

I'm consulting with Dad and Mark and Aya about going to Toronto. We could all stay together if we could find someone in Toronto to sponsor us. People are stranded here and there all over the BC interior. I want to leave this poisoned province. But Aya wants to stay in BC to be closer to Sam. I'm going to write to a doctor in Toronto that Dad knows.

March 27.

Dan's been arrested. The boys refused to go to Ontario. Both trainloads. So they're all arrested. Dan had a road map friends drew for him so they suspected him of being a 'spy' and now he's in the Pool.

Nisei are called 'enemy aliens'. Minister of War, or Defense, or something flying here to take drastic steps.

April 2, 1942.

Dearest Nesan,

If only you and Mother could come home! Dad's sick in bed. The long months of steady work. Since the evacuation started he's had no let-up at all. Two nights ago, one of his patients was dying. He tried to arrange to have the daughter go to the old man's bedside but couldn't. Dad stayed up all night with the man, and now he's sick himself.

I'm afraid that those kept in the Hastings Park will be held as hostages or something. Perhaps to ensure the good behaviour of the men in the work camps. Dan was cleared of that idiotic spying charge and is helping at the Pool. The cop who arrested him was drunk and took a few jabs at him but Dan didn't retaliate, thank heavens. I'm applying for a pass so I can get to see him.

Dan has a lawyer working for him and his parents about their desire to stay together, especially since Dan's father is blind and his mother speaks no English at all. The lawyer went to the Security Commission's lawyers and reported back that he was told to let the matter drift because they were going to make sure the Japs suffered as much as possible. The Commission is responsible to the Federal Government through the Minister of Justice, St Laurent. It works in conjunction with the RCMP. The Commission has three members—Austin C. Taylor, to represent the Minister of Justice, Commissioner Mead of the RCMP, John Shirras of the Provincial Police.

Only Tommy and Kunio, as active members of the Council, know what's going on and they're too busy to talk to me. The *New Canadian* comes out so seldom we have no way of knowing much and I've been so busy helping Dad I can't get to Council meetings very often. There's so much veiling and soft pedalling because everything is censored by the RCMP. We can only get information verbally. The bulletins posted on Powell Street aren't available to most people. Besides, nobody can keep up with all the things that are happening. There's a terrible distrust of federal authorities and fear of the RCMP, but mostly there's a helpless panic. Not the hysterical kind, but the kind that churns round and round going nowhere.

My twenty-sixth birthday is coming up soon and I feel fifty. I've got lines under my eyes and my back is getting stooped, I noticed in a shop window today.

Mina Sugimoto heard from her husband. Why haven't we heard from Sam? Stephen asked me the other day 'Where's Uncle?' What could I say?

April 8, 1942.

Ye gods! The newspapers are saying that there are actually Japanese naval officers living on the coast. It must be a mistake. Maybe they're old retired men. I heard someone say it was just that they took courses when they were kids in school and that's the way schools are in Japan. I'd hate to think we couldn't tell a fisherman from a sailor. Maybe the articles are true. I wonder if there's a cover-up. Surely we'd know if there were any spies. But gosh—who can we trust? At times like this, all we have is our trust in one another. What happens when that breaks down?

A few days ago the newspaper reported Ian Mackenzie as saying 'The intention of the government is that every single Japanese—man, woman and child—shall be removed from Vancouver as speedily as possible.' He said we were all going to be out in three or four weeks and added it was his 'personal intention', as long as he was in public life, 'that these Japanese shall not come back here.'

It's all so frightening. Rumours are that we're going to be kept as prisoners and war hostages—but that's so ridiculous since we're Canadians. There was a headline in the paper yesterday that said half of our boats 'of many different kinds and sizes' have been released to the army, navy, air force, and to 'bona fide white fishermen'. I wonder who has Sam's beautiful little boat. It was such an ingenious design. They said they were hopeful about all the boats because one plywood boat passed all the tests. The reporter found someone he called a 'real fisherman', a man from Norway who had fished all his life and used to have a 110-foot steam fishing boat when he fished off Norway and Iceland 'close to home'. That's one man who's profiting by our misery. He's quoted as saying 'We can do without the Japanese', but he's not loath to take our boats. Obviously white Canadians feel more loyalty towards white foreigners than they do towards us Canadians.

All this worrying is very bad for Dad. He's feeling numbness on the left side. I'm trying to keep him still but he's a terrible patient. He's very worried about Stephen—the limp is not improving. Dad is so intense about that boy. He's also worried about Mark, says his coughing is a bad sign and he's losing weight too fast. A lot of his patients, especially the old ones, are in a state of collapse.

I hadn't been to meetings of the Council lately. Too occupied with the sick ones around me. But I'm trying to keep an eye on what's happening. The Nisei who were scheduled to leave last night balked. I don't know the details. We haven't heard whether they're in the jug or the Pool or on the train. It's horrible not being able to know.

April 9.

It seems that all the people who are conscientious enough to report when they have to, law-abiding enough not to kick about their treatment—these are the ones who go first. The ones on the loose, bucking the authorities, are single men, so the married ones have to go to fill the quota. Lots of the fellows are claiming they need more time to clear up family affairs for their parents who don't understand English well enough to cope with all the problems and regulations.

I had a talk with Tommy on the phone. He said they can't do much more than they're doing without injuring a lot more people. 'All we've got on our side,' he said, 'is time and the good faith of the Nisei.' At times I get fighting mad and think that the RCMP in using Morii are trusting the wrong man—the way he collects money for favours—but in the end, I can see how complaining would just work even more against us. What can we do? No witnesses will speak up against him any more. I'm told our letters aren't censored yet, but may be at any time.

April 11.

Dear Nesan,

Dad had a letter the other day from his friend Kawaguchi at Camp 406 in Princeton. It's cheered him up a lot. You remember Kawaguchi? His wife died a few years back. He left his kids with friends and he's asking us to see what we can do to keep Jack's education from being disrupted. He says 'I think we should always keep hope. Hope is life. Hopeless is lifeless. . . .'

This morning Dad got out of bed and went to the Pool bunkhouse for men (the former Women's Building). He was nauseated by the smell, the clouds of dust, the pitiful attempts at privacy. The Livestock Building (where the women and kids are) is worse. Plus manure smells. The straw ticks are damp and mouldy. There are no fresh fruits or vegetables. He ate there to see what it was like. Supper was two slices of bologna, bread and tea. That's all. Those who have extra money manage to get lettuce and tomatoes and fruit

from outside. Nothing for babies. He's asking for improvement and so is the Council.

Dad saw Dan. He earns about two dollars a day at the Pool helping out—minus board of course. There are a handful of others working there as well, getting from ten to twenty-five cents an hour for running errands and handling passes, etc. Dad, being a doctor, has a pass to come and go freely. The fact that he retired a few years ago because of his heart means the Commission is not pressing him into service in the ghost towns.

We'll have to rent our houses furnished. Have to leave the chesterfield suite, stove, refrig, rugs, etc. We aren't allowed to sell our furniture. Hits the dealers somehow. I don't understand it, but so they say.

It's an awfully unwieldy business, this evacuation. There's a wanted list of over a hundred Nisei who refuse to entrain. They're being chased all over town.

April 20.

I have gone numb today. Is all this real? Where do I begin? First I got my pass and saw Dan at last. He's going to Schreiber in two days. I didn't feel a thing when he told me. It didn't register at all. Maybe I'm crazy. When I left, I didn't say good-bye either. Now that I'm home I still can't feel. He was working in the Baggage—old Horse Show Building. Showed me his pay cheque as something he couldn't believe—\$11.75. He's been there an awfully long time.

After I saw Dan, and delivered some medicine for Dad, I saw Eiko and Fumi. Eiko is working as a steno in the Commission office there, typing all the routine forms. She sleeps in a partitioned stall—being on the staff so to speak. The stall was the former home of a pair of stallions and boy oh boy did they leave their odour behind! The whole place is impregnated with the smell of ancient manure. Every other day it's swept with chloride of lime or something but you can't disguise horse smells, cow, sheep, pig, rabbit, and goat smells. And is it dusty! The toilets are just a sheet-metal trough and up till now they didn't have partitions or seats. The women complained so they put in partitions and a terribly makeshift seat. Twelve-year-old boys stay with the women too. The auto show building, where the Indian exhibits were, houses the new dining room and kitchens. Seats 3,000. Looks awfully permanent. Brick stoves—eight of them—shiny new mugs—very very barracky. As for the bunks, they were the most tragic things I saw there. Steel and wooden frames at three-foot intervals with thin lumpy straw ticks, bolsters, and three army blankets of army quality—no sheets unless you brought your own. These are the 'homes' of the women I saw. They wouldn't let me or any 'Jap females' into the men's building. There are constables at the doors—to prevent further propagation of the species', it said in the newspaper. The bunks were hung with sheets and blankets and clothes of every colour—a regular gypsy caravan—all in a pathetic attempt at privacy—here and there I saw a child's doll or teddy bear—I saw two babies lying beside a mother who was



too weary to get up—she had just thrown herself across the bed. I felt my throat thicken. I couldn't bear to look on their faces daring me to be curious or superior because I still lived outside. They're stripped of all privacy.

Some of the women were making the best of things, housecleaning around their stalls. One was scrubbing and scrubbing trying to get rid of the smell, but that wasn't possible. And then, Nesan, and then, I found Grandma Nakane there sitting like a little troll in all that crowd, with her chin on her chest. At first I couldn't believe it. She didn't recognize me. She just stared and stared. Then when I knelt down in front of her, she broke down and clung to me and cried and cried and said she'd rather have died than have come to such a place. Aya and Mark were sick when I told them. We all thought they were safe with friends in Saltspring. She has no idea of what's going on and I think she may not survive. I presumed Grandpa Nakane was in the men's area, but then I learned he was in the Sick Bay. I brought Eiko to meet Grandma but Grandma wouldn't look up. You know how yasashi Grandma is. This is too great a shock for her. She whispered to me that I should leave right away before they caught me too—then she wouldn't say any more. Nesan, maybe it's better where you are, even if they think you're an enemy.

Eiko has taken the woes of the confinees on her thin shoulders and she takes so much punishment. Fumi is worried sick about her. The place has got them both down. There are ten showers for 1,500 women. Hot and cold water. The men looked so terribly at loose ends, wandering around the grounds—sticking their noses through the fence watching the golfers. I felt so heavy I almost couldn't keep going. They are going to move the Vancouver women now and shove them into the Pool before sending them to the camps in the ghost towns.

The other day at the Pool, a visitor dropped his key before a stall in the Livestock Building, and he fished for it with a wire and brought to light manure and maggots. He called the nurse and then they moved all the bunks from the stalls and pried up the wooden floors, and it was the most stomach-turning nauseating thing. So they got fumigators and hoses and tried to wash it all away and got most of it into the drains. But maggots are still breeding and turning up here and there, so one woman with more guts than the others told the nurse (white) about it and protested. She replied: 'Well, there are worms in the garden, aren't there?' This particular nurse was a Jap-hater of the most virulent sort. She called them 'filthy Japs' to their faces and Fumi gave her what for and had a terrible scrap with her, saying 'What do you think we are? Are we cattle? Are we pigs?' You know how Fumi gets.

The night the first bunch of Nisei refused to go to Schreiber the women and children at the Pool milled around in front of their cage, and one very handsome Mountie came with his truncheon and started to hit them and yelled at them to 'Get the hell back in there.' Eiko's blood boiled over. She strode over to him and shouted 'You put that stick down. What do you think you're doing? Do you think these women and children are cows, that you can

beat them back?' Eiko was shaking. She's taken it on herself to fight and now she's on the blacklist and reputed to be a trouble-maker. It's people like us, Nesan—Eiko and Tommy and Dan and Fumi and the rest of us who have had faith in Canada, who have been more politically minded than the others—who are the most hurt. At one time, remember how I almost worshipped the Mounties? Remember the Curwood tales of the Northwest, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and how I'd go around saying their motto—*Maintiens le droit*—Maintain the right?

The other day there were a lot of people lined up on Heather Street to register at RCMP headquarters and so frightened by what was going on and afraid of the uniforms. You could feel their terror. I was going around telling them not to worry—the RCMP were our protectors and upholders of the law, etc. And there was this one officer tramping up and down that perfectly quiet line of people, holding his riding crop like a switch in his hand, smacking the palm of his other hand regularly—whack whack—as if he would just have loved to hit someone with it if they even so much as spoke or moved out of line. The glory of the Redcoats.

April 25.

Dearest Nesan,

Mark has gone.

The last night I spent with him and Aya and kids, he played the piano all night. He's terribly thin. Dad has been too ill to see him but he says Mark should not be going to the camps.

Is it true, Nesan, that you were pregnant just before you left? Mark said he wasn't sure. Oh, is there no way we can hear from you? I'm worried about the children. Nomi almost never talks or smiles. She is always carrying the doll you gave her and sleeps with it every night. I think, even though she doesn't talk, that she's quite bright. When I read to her from the picture books, I swear she's following the words with her eyes. Stephen spends his time reading war comics that he gets from the neighbourhood boys. All the Japs have mustard-coloured faces and buck teeth.

April 28.

We had our third letter from Sam—rather Aya did. All cards and letters are censored—even to the Nisei camps. Not a word from the camps makes the papers. Everything is hushed up. I haven't been to meetings for so long now that I don't know what's going on. Sam's camp is eight miles from the station, up in the hills. Men at the first camps all crowd down to the station every time a train passes with a new batch of men. They hang from the windows and ask about their families. Sam said he wept.

The men are luckier than the women. It's true they are forced to work on the roads, but at least they're fed, and they have no children to look after. Of

course the fathers are worried but it's the women who are burdened with all the responsibility of keeping what's left of the family together.

Mina Sugimoto is so hysterical. She heard about a place in Revelstoke, got word to her husband and he came to see her on a two-day pass. She wanted them to go to Revelstoke together but of course that wasn't possible. He wasn't able to make it back to road camp in the time limit so now they're threatening to intern him. In the meantime, Mina has gone off to Revelstoke, bag, baggage, and boys. I'll try to find out what happens to them for you, Nesan.

Eiko has heard that the town of Greenwood is worse than the Pool. They're propping up old shacks near the mine shaft. On top of that local people are complaining and the United Church parson there says to 'Kick all the Japs out'.

Eiko, Fumi, and I have gotten to be so profane that Tom and the rest have given up being surprised. Eiko says 'What the hell', and Fumi is even worse.

What a mess everything is. Some Nisei are out to save their own skins, others won't fight for any rights at all. The RCMP are happy to let us argue among ourselves. Those of us who are really conscientious and loyal—how will we ever get a chance to prove ourselves to this country? All we are fighting for inch by inch just goes down the drain. There are over 140 Nisei loose and many Japanese nationals (citizens of Japan). The Commission thinks the nationals are cleared out of Vancouver but oh boy, there are a lot of them who have greased enough palms and are let alone.

April 30.

We got another extension and are trying to get a place here in BC somewhere—somewhere on a farm with some fruit trees. We may have to go to some town in Alberta or Saskatchewan or Manitoba. I have to do some fast work, contacting all the people I think could help in some way. Dad doesn't want to leave BC. If we go too far, we may not be able to come back. With you in Japan and Mark in Camp, Dad feels we should stay with the kids—but everybody has the same worry about their kids.

Stephen's leg was put in a cast. Dad thinks that rest will heal it. He says Grandma Nakane's mind is failing fast. She didn't speak to him when he was there today. He thought she'd be all right if she could see Grandpa Nakane but he wasn't able to arrange it. Dad's worried about both of them. I'm trying to get them out of there but the red tape is so fierce.

May 1.

I have to work fast. The Commission put out a notice—everyone has to be ready for 24-hour notice. No more extensions. Everything piled on at once. We're trying to get into a farm or house around Salmon Arm or Chase or some other decent town in the Interior—anywhere that is livable and will still let us in. Need a place with a reasonable climate. Some place where we can

have a garden to grow enough vegetables for a year. Somewhere there's a school if possible. If there's nothing in BC, I think we should go east and take our chances in Toronto. Fumi and Eiko and I want to stick together.

Monday, May 4.

Got to get out in the next couple of weeks. Dad's had a relapse. The numbness is spreading. He doesn't think it's his heart.

There's another prospect. McGillivray Falls, twenty miles from Lillooet. Going there would eat up our savings since that's all we'd have to live on but at least it's close to Vancouver and just a few hours to get back. There's no school. I'd have to teach the children.

It's because so many towns have barred their doors that we are having such a heck of a time. The Commission made it clear to us that they would not permit us to go anywhere the City Councils didn't want us. Individuals who offer to help have to write letters saying they undertake to see that we won't be a burden on the public. Who among us wants to be a burden on anyone? It'd be better if, instead of writing letters to help one or two of us, they'd try to persuade their City Councils to let us in. After all we're Canadians.

Eiko and her mother might go to a ghost town to be closer to her father. Also most likely she'll have to teach grade-school. The pay is two dollars a day out of which she'd have to feed and clothe the four younger kids and try to keep them in a semblance of health. Honest, Nesan, I wonder if the whites think we are a special kind of low animal able to live on next to nothing—able to survive without clothing, shoes, medicine, decent food.

Aya just phoned that there's no electricity at McGillivray. What does one do without electricity? There are so many complex angles in this business my head aches.

Another thing that's bothering Aya is the cost of transportation and freight. We can take only our clothes, bedding, pots and pans, and dishes. We've sold our dining-room suite and piano. Mark didn't sell anything. Aya's house was looted. I haven't told her. It's in such an out-of-the-way place. When I took the interurban on Friday to see if the dog might have shown up, I was shocked. Almost all the hand-carved furnishings were gone—all the ornaments—just the dead plants left and some broken china on the floor. I saw one of the soup bowls from the set I gave them. The looting was thorough. The collection of old instruments Mark talked about was gone too and the scrolls. No one will understand the value of these things. I don't have the heart to tell Aya.

We're all walking around in a daze. It's really too late to do anything. If we go to the ghost towns, it's going to be one hell of a life. Waiting in line to wash, cook, bathe—

I've got to go to sleep. And I've got to pack. If we go to McGillivray, Fumi, Eiko, and family are coming with us. We have to go in a week or two. The Commission won't wait.

May 5.

Dearest Nesan,

We've heard from Mark: Crazy man. All he thinks about are Stephen's music lessons. He sent two pages of exercises and a melody which he thought up. He wrote about some flowers he found which he stuck on the end of his pick and says he thinks about you as he works. I read the letter three times to Dad. Dad says Stephen's health is more important than his music right now. Nomi is fine. She's so silent though. I've never seen such a serious child before.

I got a letter from Dan as well. His address is Mileage 101, Camp SW 5-3, Jackfish, Ontario.

We've had three different offers since yesterday. Mickey Maikawa wants us to go to his wife's brother's farm in Sicamous. We're considering it. Everything is confusion and bewilderment.

Eiko has heard awful things about the crowding and lack of sanitation in the ghost towns. People have been freezing in tents. She's dead set against them now. She and Fumi and I are still trying to stick together. But you never know when we'll have to go, or which way our luck's going to jump. Every day's a different story, from nowhere to go to several choices. I want to go east. Rent at McG. Falls was reduced to \$80.00 per year.

May 14.

Dear Nesan,

Aya, kids, Dad, and I have decided to go to Slocan. We hear that's one of the best of the ghost towns. It used to have a silver mine, or maybe a gold mine—I'm not sure. There are just abandoned old hotels there now and a few stores. I don't know the size of the white population but it's not very large.

The family—or what's left of it—intends to stick together one way or another, and after days and nights of discussion, chasing this elusive hope or that, worrying, figuring, going bats with indecision, with one door after another closing then opening again—we finally realize the only thing to do is give in and stay together wherever we go, and moving to Slocan is the easiest.

Rev. Nakayama, who's already in Slocan, wrote and told me about a small house that Dad and I can have to ourselves, close to the mountains and away from the crowding. It makes all the difference. I'm so glad I thought to ask him for help. We'll be able to manage something for the kids—build an addition if we have to.

Now that the decision is taken, I don't want to be upset all over again. I don't want to go through all the hopes and the uncertainty of trying to find a loophole to escape from. I'm resigned to Slocan—and anyway, Rev. Nakayama says it's a nice place. It even has a soda fountain. So I'll settle for that until they say it's okay for us to join Mark and Sam and Dan again somewhere. Grandma and Grandpa Nakane have orders to go to New Denver.

We've tried everything, I've cried my cry, I've said good-bye to this home. All fluttering for escape has died down. Just wish us luck, Nesan. We'll wait until that happy day when we can all be together again.

Now I must get to serious packing and selling and giving away and the same thing at your house.

I asked too much of God.

May 15, Friday.

There's too much to do. Dad's unable to help though he tries. After we get to Slocan things should calm down. The furor will die down when there are none of us left on the Coast. Then we can discuss moving to Ontario. It's time that defeated us for the present but we won't give up yet. Not by a long shot.

Dan's new address—Dalton Mills, c/o Austin Lumber Co., Dalton, Ontario.

We got a letter today from the doctor in Toronto offering us the top floor of his house. That would be wonderful, but heck! how I'd hate to impose on anyone. Imagine being dependent like that. I think it was fated for me to taste the dregs of this humiliation that I might know just what it is that all the women and children are enduring through no fault of their own.

Once we're in Slocan, chances of going east are better than here. The officials are terribly harassed with the whole thing and exasperated with individual demands for attention. So, Slocan City, here we come.

Goodness, I think I'll keep my golf clubs.

May 18, 1942.

Dear Nesan,

It's flabbergasting. I can't believe any of it. Here's what happened.

I was all packed for Slocan and Dad was reasonably okay. In the middle of helping Aya, I thought—just as a last gesture and more for my own assurance than out of any hope—that I'd write to Grant MacNeil, secretary of the Commission. So I wrote asking for written assurance that I could continue negotiations from Slocan about going to Toronto. That's all. Just the word that there was hope for us all to get to Ontario. No further aspirations. I was too tired to start all over again anyway. Mailed the letter around noon from the main post office on Friday. A little after three o'clock, Mrs Booth who works there phoned to say that they'd got the letter and I was to come right away. I couldn't believe it. I dropped everything and ran. Mrs Booth, speaking for Mr MacNeil, said they were not giving any special permits but they'd make this one exception and told me to return next day with bank accounts, references, etc. I was so excited and happy, I assumed that included Dad and Aya and the kids. Next day, Mrs Booth said the permit was only for the Kato family. One family only. I told her Stephen and Nomi are my sister's kids but she said something about Commission rulings and their name is Nakane and then she asked about the Nakane family and I had to say they were nationals

and I think that settled it. But she said she would look into the business of the kids. I was so frustrated not having Mark or Dad or Aya to confer with. It seemed to me at that point that I should opt for Toronto with Dad and then negotiate having everyone else come to join us.

Do you think I did the right thing, Nesan? Eiko says I did and that we should try to keep as many out of the ghost towns as possible. So I went back and told Dad and he didn't say anything one way or the other. Just kept nodding his head.

When I discussed it with Aya, she was adamant about the kids. She says you entrusted them to her and they're her kids now until you return and she won't part with them. It's true they're more used to her than to either me or Dad. And as for being so far away, Aya says ten miles or ten thousand miles makes no difference to a child.

The whole point of all our extensions was to find a way to keep together, but now at the last minute everything has exploded. Aya is being very calm and she doesn't want any discussion in front of the kids. All she's told them is that they're going for a train ride.

Fumi is resigned to not coming with us. Eiko's mother wants to go to Slocan, but I can tell Eiko wants out. I don't know what Fumi is going to do now. I think she's going to Kaslo with Rev. Shimizu's group.

I'm going to the Custodian tomorrow and then to the Commission again. Maybe the permit won't be given at the last minute. What if I transfer the Slocan papers to someone else and then don't get the Toronto permit? There could be trouble with all these forms and deferments.

Well, I'm going to go ahead, repack everything and hope. The mover, Crone, is sending our boxed goods, beds, and Japanese food supplies—shoyu, rice, canned mirinzuke, green tea. I'm taking the Japanese dishes, trays and bowls. Can't get any more miso now.

I'll just have to live on hope that Aya and kids will be all right till we can get them to Toronto. I tell myself that at least they'll have their own place till then.

What will it be like, I wonder, in the doctor's house? I'll wire them as soon as I get the permit and we'll head their way for the time being. Do we eat with the family? First thing I'll do when I get to Toronto is go out *at night*.

In Petawawa there are 130 Nisei interned for rioting and crying: 'Banzai', shaving their heads and carrying 'hino-maru' flags. Damn fools.

May 21.

Dearest Nesan,

Aya and kids are leaving with others bound for Slocan tomorrow. RCMP came in person to order Kunio off to camp. Rev. Shimizu and Rev. Akagawa had to leave immediately.

Yesterday I worked so hard—tied, labelled, ran to Commission, ran to bank, to Crone movers, to CPR, washed and cooked and scrubbed. Dad is

saying good-bye to the kids now. They're spending the night in the church hall at Kitsilano. I'm going over there too as soon as I pack this last item.

Merry Christmas, Nesan.

This is the last word in the journal. The following day, May 22, 1942, Stephen, Aya Obasan and I are on a train for Slocan. It is twelve years before we see Aunt Emily again.

## Claire Harris b. 1937

### PORT OF SPAIN, TRINIDAD

'I have always known that I was a writer,' Claire Harris has said. She began writing in 1974 during a year-long leave of absence from her teaching in the Separate Schools in Calgary, Alberta. She spent that year in Lagos, Nigeria, studying at the University of Nigeria, where she received a Diploma in Mass Media and Communications. Her stay and studies there proved to be a crucial experience: Nigeria's 'entirely different culture forced me to pay attention', she says, and to realize that her 'task' as a writer is 'to return Africa to its place at the centre, the heart of Western Civilization'. Her recognition of what her subject matter is comes from her painful awareness that 'Africans in North America, and of course, Europe, have suffered a traumatic loss. The nations which inflicted and continue to inflict that loss have never acknowledged their crime. . . . There can, of course, be no healing while one group continues to see the other as inherently less than acceptable. There is no acceptance of our joint inheritance, no recognition of the scar tissue embroiling it.'

Harris, who was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad, emigrated to Calgary in 1966, after completing her studies at the University College, Dublin, Ireland, where she received a BA Honours (with a major in English and a minor in Spanish), and at the University of the West Indies, Jamaica, where she received a post-graduate diploma in Education. Retired from her teaching career, Harris has been active in promoting Canadian literature to Canadians, especially through *Poetry Goes Public*, a project

that involved the circulation of poetry posters by major poets in public spaces, including buses, and through her work as a member of the Writers' Guild of Alberta, as poetry editor of *Dandelion* (1981-9), and as founding editor and manager of *blue buffalo* (1984-7), an all-Alberta literary magazine.

Appearing in numerous literary magazines and anthologies, her poetry includes *Fables from the Women's Quarters* (1984), which won the Commonwealth Award, Americas Region, in 1985; *Translation into Fiction* (1984); *Travelling to Find a Remedy* (1986), winner of the Writers' Guild of Alberta Award for poetry in 1987 and the Alberta Culture Poetry Prize; *The Conception of Winter* (1989), which received an Alberta Special Award in 1990; and *Drawing Down a Daughter* (1992), which was short-listed for the Governor General's Award in 1993. 'I write/ for us all we must change/the fictions before the fictions/play us out,' she writes in *Dipped in Shadow* (1996). Selections of her poetry as well as her essay 'Why Do I Write?' are included in *Grammar of Dissent* (1994), edited by Carol Morrell, which gathers together Harris's work and that of Dionne Brand and Marlene Nourbese Philip. Harris is also the co-editor, with Edna Alford, of *Kitchen Talk* (1992), an anthology of women's writing.

Her poetry is written in a variety of styles—short lyrics, long sequences, haiku, prose narratives, texts that often claim all the space of a page—that reflect, as Harris says, 'the different ways of approaching things': 'To mirror the profound disharmony' of our world,