

C H A P T E R V I

FAMILY LIFE IN TULE LAKE

Introduction to Chapter VI

There was no doubt in the minds of the high school Nisei that the institution of the family remained central in their lives even in a Relocation Center. For these Nisei the solidarity of the family remained an imperative. This is abundantly clear from their essays. Despite their yearning for a greater measure of personal autonomy, according to family patterns they observed in general American society, they sought to avoid weakening the Japanese-American family.

The Nisei writers were aware that the War and the particular character of the Relocation Center milieu, along with the circumstances of daily camp life, worked to alter the structure and functioning of the family unit. The essays included in this section are not so much a presentation of the main characteristics of Japanese family life in America as they are observations concerning changes in their own family and in the families of other Japanese-Americans at Tule Lake. Under the circumstances produced by an unceremonious displacement from home and community, it is not surprising that in the balance they should find the observed changes weighted negatively. Questions obviously arise in their minds as to how pervasive the changes are, how threatening they are to valued practices and relationships, and how enduring they are likely to be. They are also concerned with the kinds of responses that might be made to avoid long-term erosion of values and family practices.

The physical conditions of camp life seemed to be largely responsible for the changes they perceived. In their essays on

"Family Life at Tule Lake," the Nisei students assigned considerable importance to the fact that the families were crowded into smaller dwelling units than they had ever lived in before; the spatial density, many believed, had the effect of altering the relationships of family members. A few of the students speculated that, perhaps, by the very force of necessity, people living under such conditions would feel impelled to be more tolerant, sympathetic, and helpful than they would have been under more normal housing conditions. They suggest a rational response which would encourage more self-discipline and personal restraint than usual, all in the interest of family harmony. A far larger number of students, however, point to the tensions created by crowding: the lack of privacy, the embarrassment of male and female siblings, the inconvenience of children and parents undressing in the presence of other family members, the conflicting rounds of activities by individual family members, the limitations imposed upon general sociability with friends and relatives. Such strains as these produced seemed to have the potentiality of accumulating until they reached serious dimensions.

Most of the Nisei essays point to the two great changes in family patterns that were to have an immense effect upon the relationship of family members. In Relocation Centers, occupational opportunities and work roles were greatly contrasted from those which had characterized their previous life. Although many Issei parents did indeed continue to work in the camp, as they had worked before the evacuation, the basic requirements of family life were provided by the War Relocation Authority. Moreover, while the administrative machinery of the Relocation Center itself required many skills, including linguistic skills, these were more generally

present among Nisei than Issei. In short, families were not as directly dependent upon the occupation of the father and upon his income for the maintenance of the family as they had been before. Some of the Nisei writers note that the evacuation, coming when it did in the lives of many Issei males, particularly many of the older Issei, seemed to threaten any possibility of their returning to their professions or occupations after the war--at least on the same level as before. The father remained the head of the family, deserving of the measure of deference widely characteristic of Japanese-American families, but he was no longer the provider for the family as he had been before the evacuation. A few perceptive writers saw in this phenomenon an acceleration of a generational shift in occupational roles and responsibilities that, without the evacuation, might well have taken many years to match.

The change in the nature of parental roles lent further strength to Nisei aspirations for a larger measure of authority and independence. It also made many Nisei more aware of their need to move directly and constructively toward career planning. Unfortunately for the Nisei this occurred at a time when the immediate conditions provided great difficulties in effecting such planning. It was not easy for them to talk with their parents about career interests at this time.

Over and over again in the essays, the writers record a pervasive sense of defeat or an apathy born of the uncertainty about what the future would be like for the Nisei. Almost everyone seemed to be marking time. While a number of the Nisei essayist acknowledge "the dark and hard days ahead," and forecast that "after the

war is over, our lives will be a hard one. . ." the call for positive response, for preparation, and for mobilization of personal resources is often repeated. We must, they say, fight apathy, dependence, and the insidious laziness born of the dull environment.

A second change of substantial magnitude was the provision of food by the W.R.A. which meant that the mother of the family was removed from her traditional role as preparer of family meals; the functions of planning, budgeting, catering to the likes and dislikes of family members, serving and all the related tasks were thus stripped from her. The people in each block ate food provided by the W.R.A. and prepared by mess hall personnel. Some families made a point of eating together as a unit. Very often, however, children went off with their peers to eat together in their own or their friends' mess hall. Husbands and wives often ate at different times. Even when family members did eat together at a mess hall table, the usual kind of family communication was difficult to sustain; the noise, the foot traffic, the austerity of the serving of food all made mealtime a different kind of occasion than had generally been characteristic before.

Some of the Nisei essayists, like Rev. Kitagawa, viewed the new patterns with grave misgivings. "What is set on the family table is nothing other than a visible and tangible sign of the invisible and imponderable love and care of her who is at the center of the family. The family table and family kitchen are thus sacramental means by which children feed on their parents' love and by which all the members grow together to solidify their mutual relationship."¹

¹Kitagawa, op. cit., 87.

The mess halls exerted a centrifugal force upon members of the family and hence weakened family life. So Father Kitagawa added, "When night came, [family members] were all crammed into one room regardless of generation, age, or sex, as one family; but when morning came, everybody was on his own."²

In the essays one quickly perceives the concern of the high school-aged Nisei about the affect of all this upon the younger children. They saw their younger siblings sitting with their peers in the mess halls, eating without parental supervision. Parents were in most instances unable to discipline children effectively enough to ensure proper table manners and etiquette. They were embarrassed to have to acknowledge their children's deficiencies and to have to correct them publicly--that is, when any kind of discipline was possible at all. The children themselves, moreover, were highly sensitive to parental disciplining when it occurred in the presence of their friends. Over and over again the Nisei writers point to the negative consequences of such neglect. The problems were not confined to the meal-time behavior of children, however; it was possible for school-aged children to spend most of their waking hours outside the family in the company of their friends. There are numerous lamentations in the essays of the fact that the children were not choosing their company wisely and were increasingly given to wasting time; rowdyism, gang activity, and gambling were increasing in a measure that distressed many students. Even instances of shop-lifting occurred. All of this seemed to bode ill for the future of the children when ultimately they would re-

¹Ibid., 86.

turn to communities in general society. So it was noted that children are growing wilder, more unrestrained, rougher. They talk back to parents. They are drifting away from their families. Being together in groups gives them the strength to defy parents and older siblings. The Nisei high school youths are here making comparisons, perhaps, largely in terms of what they remembered of their own behavior a few years earlier at home. They were not very much aware of the conditions and changes that were occurring in general American society in the war period. But articles in the Tulean Dispatch and the Tulean Dispatch Magazine give abundant indication that the concern about manners, discipline, even delinquent behavior was widespread.

Mothers, that is to say those who were not working outside the family at W.R.A. jobs, tended to absorb the major portion of household tasks in order to keep themselves busy. Children were left without substantial family responsibilities or specific, regular tasks. They are "getting very little training," it was lamented; they are given "no sense of responsibility."

"What does all this family life situation mean for the future?" one writer asks. "First of all, we should try to improve ourselves. Whether we will be able to take our places in normal American society and become useful citizens after we get out of here is a great question. It is going to require a tremendous change in the psychology of niseis. For these little children especially, the responsibility of training them to meet this requirement lies in the family."

The Issei family members in general had more leisure than they

had ever had before. Many of them were engaged in arts and crafts activities in which they were able to display some tangible personal accomplishment. Sometimes, indeed, they showed remarkable talent as was abundantly clear from the products in display in their homes. Very often Nisei expressed surprise and pleasure at the fruits of their parents' activities. This was one of the more positive aspects of family life in the Relocation Center. For the Issei, of course, these activities represented something much deeper than the expression of personal artistic interests and skills. They represented a reaffirmation of the individual's sensitivity to the interests, tastes, and values of other Issei with whom they worked and socialized. The meaning of the activities was primarily social in the sense of reaffirming the act of sharing.

The erosion of family patterns and discipline feared by a number of the Nisei high school students did not produce any sharp break with the past. Nisei family relationships and the patterns of mealtime sociability as they emerged after the War were quite different from those which had been established by their Issei parents. But the intimate place that family meals has in the memory of the Nisei today is made clear by the fact that for many of them the family meal-time is more vividly remembered than any other aspect of their childhood.¹

In a study of Japanese-Americans made three decades after the Tule Lake essays were written, Christie Kiefer writes of the Nisei:

They remember their father's stern enforcement of order and quiet and his admonitions against wastefulness. They re-

¹ Christie W. Kiefer, Changing Cultures, Changing Lives: An Ethnographic Study of Three Generations of Japanese Americans (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1974) 214

member early feelings of ethnic self-consciousness over the kind of food they ate. But mostly they remember that their mother served their father first, then the children, and that she often spent the entire meal-time on her feet, serving and cooking. Many mothers would not eat until everyone else had his fill. If there was nothing left, they would go hungry or prepare themselves a bit of some inferior food. The fact that such scenes were absent in the relocation camps probably functioned to increase rather than decrease nisei guilt, since many must have perceived their flight from the family table as taking advantage of a situation that caused their parents to suffer. Even now, many nisei associate fundamental feelings of gratification--receiving warmth or love, being filled with pleasant sensations as with good food--with the image of their mother cheerfully slaving over a hot stove.¹

The transformation of this aspect of family life as the Nisei passed through their childrearing days proved to have been little influenced--contrary to the students fears at the time--by the circumstances of Relocation Center life.

¹Ibid.

(Male)

Family Life in Tule Lake

I. Advantages

A. One race of People

1. Absence of racial minority
2. Feeling of equality
 - a. Self-confidence
3. Participation in government
 - a. Valuable civic experience
 - b. Participation in post-war era

B. Personality edvelopment

1. Talkativeness and conversation
2. Good conduct at home
 - a. Consideration for others
 - b. Cooperative spirit

II. Disadvantages

A. Bad environment

1. Children
 - a. Excess of informal education
 - b. Bad associates
 - c. Examples of elders
 - d. Table manners
2. Punishment
 - a. Lack of freedom
 - b. Loss of parental respect

B. Older boys and girls

1. Conformity with others
2. Bad associates

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- 178
3. Infatuation
 - a. Lack of emotional control

4. Fiery disposition

- C. Unwise marriages

1. Lack of planning

III. Improvements

- A. Parental care

1. Close supervision of children
2. Dining in family group
 - a. Table manners
3. School teachers
 - a. Acting as parents
 - b. Good formal education

- B. Lectures and advice

1. Older boys and girls
2. Prevention of bad association

- C. Recreational program

1. Recreation department
 - a. Plays, entertainments
 - b. Limited availability
2. Extensive library
3. Gymnasium
 - a. Games, exercises, gymnastics
4. Theater
 - a. Impossible issue

- D. Limitations

1. Temporary abode
2. Bad economic status

Family Life in Tule Lake

When the war broke out and mass evacuation became necessary, it brought up a unique situation. Never before had the Japanese people been thrown together in this fashion, and the sudden change gives rise to many problems which affect the family most.

In a very limited sense, there are a few advantages of family life in a relocation center such as this. The entire camp is made up of one race of people. This fact removes much of the feeling of inferiority that the Japanese had while living outside. Whenever a minority group is living in a community, this group is more or less overshadowed by the majority; hence leading to an inferiority complex.

In this community there is no racial minority to speak of; everyone feels that he is just as good as the others. This feeling of self-confidence enables him to participate freely in the community government. They are learning what it is like to make use of civil rights, and they will learn to cherish them more than ever. For the first time in their lives, many people are actually participating in self-government. When these people return to the post-war world, they will be willing and able to contribute whatever they can toward the functioning of a community.

Looking from the personal side, there are also some advantages. Here, many families are living side by side, and everybody is meeting friends constantly. When anyone meets his friend, the proper thing to do is greet him. Since this is repeated again and again from day to day, we become more talkative and conversational. To be able to say right things at the right time is not only good manners but also a valuable asset of personality. An environment like this is a great help in improving such an asset.

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Camp life also fosters good conduct at home. Since the living quarters are congested, each individual must consider the rights of others. In normal homes, if any member of the family wants to sleep early, he does so without any hindrance. Here, the activity of the whole family centers in a single room. It is not easy to sleep early if the rest of the family is awake and moving about the room. That is only an example of the many problems that occur. To meet the situation it is necessary to come to a compromise. Every member of the family must give his full cooperation. How to solve problems and how to cooperate are two of the most important things to learn.

As far as disadvantages go, there is an unlimited number, but we shall consider only the most vital ones. This camp life is doing much toward forming bad personality traits in children. So much of their time is spent among friends, that the influence of formal education is overshadowed by the influence of informal education. Small children cannot very well distinguish between right and wrong, nor can they choose between good and bad associates. Too often, children see the wrong doings of their elders and imitate them. There is a great gap between parents and children. Many of the children do things of which their parents know nothing. Any bad habit must be broken at the very start, but parents usually do not find out about the habit until it is well established.

Another problem about children is the trend of their table manners. It is not always convenient for parents to accompany their children to the dinner table, and if the child is old enough, he will go by himself or with his friends. Children feel uneasy when their parents are watching over them, and they prefer to be alone with friends. Without careful parental guidance, it is very easy for children to acquire bad manners.

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Punitive measures can be taken to stop bad conduct, but with neighbors on all four sides, it is not an easy matter. People complain if their neighbors' children wail incessantly. The main difficulty lies in the fact that the children are beginning to feel too independent. Their respect for parental authority has diminished considerably.

Not only among small children but among older boys and girls, this camp life is molding an unfavorable personality. The worst cause is bad associates. When a boy of high school age finds pleasure in any of the bad habits, it is hard to turn him away from it. A boy this age is not likely to listen attentively to his parents. If it's anything that the rest of the gang does, he too will do it if it kills him. The average boy is able to think correctly, but very often the surrounding influences prove a little too strong for his young mind.

In this respect, girls, too, are affected. The environment is a tumultuous one; most girls feel out of place if they don't act in conformity with others. Young girls are infatuated too easily, and some may even go as far as to consider marriage. Probably within the next few years the number of marriages will increase tremendously. Only by careful consideration and planning can the relation be successful.

To meet the many problems that arise, there are several steps that can be taken for improvement. To alter the conditions of the camp is impossible; the only way is to set up institutions that will neutralize or combat the forces that cause problems.

In children problems, probably the best thing to do is for parents to be in a close a touch as possible with their children. This can be done by assigning a table to each family and making it compulsory to eat

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as a family group. Another possibility is through the school. It is the great responsibility of school teacher to see that the children do not acquire bad habits. Lectures to small children can do little good, as they will not listen seriously.

For boys and girls of more advanced ages, advice and lectures can help a great deal. The parents should see to it that bad association is not allowed. Furthermore, any normal boy and girl of high school age should know the wisdom of their parents' counsel and react accordingly. A great deal depends upon the individual.

Another possibility is the furnishing of adequate recreational facilities. The recreation department has done a great deal in this matter by means of programs, stage presentations and the like, but in most instances these affairs have been available to a limited number of people. There is also the fact that some people do not care for this type of recreation. For these people there should be a more extensive library which is open on evenings. Undoubtedly, there are many who would like to spend quiet evenings reading books and magazines.

For the more athletic-minded people a gymnasium will be a great benefit. A large gymnasium with facilities for games, exercises, and gymnastics can contribute much toward sustaining a high morale.

A theater large enough to be practical is also a good investment, but this issue has already been cast out. The residents of this colony should have considered more carefully, the benefits of having a theater before they voted against it.

Those are some of the possible improvements, but in the last two plans lack of finance and material must be considered. This colony is

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not a permanent abode, and that makes matters doubly hard. To maintain anything permanent at the expense of the people is an injustice, especially when we are in the present economic status.

The well-being of an individual depends most heavily on the person himself. His affairs cannot be managed by someone else, whether he keeps himself in high moral standing or lets his mind decay is up to his own discretion and desire. Never should a person while in camp or outside think even for a minute that someone else is going to do everything for him.

Family Life in Tulelake

I. Introduction

A. Social changes

- 1. In accordance outside world
- 2. Rapid

B. Adjustments

- 1. Of normal family life
- 2. Of everyday living

II.

A. Good points

- 1. Opportunities for children to participate in family discussions
- 2. Frequent family meetings
- 3. Opportunities for parents to study children
- 4. Making family friends

B. Bad points

- 1. Revealing one's innermost character
- 2. Conducive to selfishness
- 3. Influence on children
- 4. Perceiving of parent's character on children's action

C. Democratic form of family

D. Marriages

- 1. Go-between marriages
- 2. Marriage of young people brought up in America
- 3. Statistics
- 4. More choice of mates here