

## I REMEMBER HOOVER VILLAGE

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Hoover Village was my first home after leaving Poston, Arizona. It was just like camp - with its tar-paper roof and prefabricated units of 16' by 48' with three units in each barrack. There were four rows of these homes interspersed by laundry/shower buildings set apart for communal use. These homes were built in a hurry to accommodate the overflow of workers who had filled the Federal Housing Units.

We arrived in Seabrook, via 30th Street Station in Philadelphia. Mr. Kaoru Kamikawa greeted us at the train station and drove us in the transport bus (all packed in like cattle going to the slaughter) to our new home. Jim and Suzie rode in the baggage truck because they felt claustrophobic in the "green bus." When we passed in front of the plant, we were awed at the brightness of the front platform ablaze in lights like an amusement center. We saw the working women, who wore little white caps, which were stiffly starched, and attired in blue uniforms.

Mr. Kamikawa took us beyond the plant and the apartments we thought would be our homes to a place very much like the barracks we left in Arizona. Given our barrack number, we were told to fill our bed ticking with the straw set aside just for that purpose. After the mattresses were filled, we placed them on our double bunk beds, and literally "hit the hay." My mother, Suzie and Jim were told to report to work in the plant the next day.

I went to look for the others who had come from Poston on the train with us the next day. The Henry Gotos, our man in charge, the Mansuke Yamamotos, the Kiyoshi Oharas, and Mark Asada and his parents. Mark in the second row next to the Yamamotos (with Hitoshi and Frank and his mother, Asae) and the Henry Goto family (Jeanette, Ellen, May and Adrene, plus mom, Margaret - Kenny was not born yet). The Ohara family (Shiz, Tadashi, Yoshiko, Osam, Barbara, Kuni and Yuki, and mamma, Noki) were our next door neighbor living in barrack #3025. We were a rowdy bunch, with all those children in the neighborhood. Our immediate next door neighbor (building #3024) was the very dignified Ryoza and Yo Yeya with their two very polite, quiet, sophisticated daughters, Kazuko and Sue who lived in the "A" of the 3 apartment building. (They soon moved to the apartments and we were able to have access to the whole building.)

While venturing the village, I found Naozo and Asaye Yamamoto family (Esther, Nancy, Frances, Alice, Grace and Mae) who came at a later date from Poston living next to the Ohara family. Other Postonians were the Toyoichi Nakata family (Jeanette, Alva, Gene, Spencer, Margie and Hanako and mama, Midori). Tom and Shige Kazaoka with Grandma Kazaoka, Fusa, Kat-chan, Mousey, Mits, Iku, Sada, Kiku and Hide. Others in Hoover Village with whom I made a lasting friendship included the Kodama family (Rose, Leo, Fumi, Aki, Michi, Mutsu and a younger brother named Seiji), the Yoshiharu Nagahiro family (Yosh, Grace, George, Richard, Marie and Judy and mother Chika). Also living in Hoover Village were the Yoshizaki family (whom we fondly called the "Fly Man" as he worked in the sanitation department and was Mr. Terminator of the insects and bugs in the plant) with his wife and three daughters.

Our barrack was sparsely furnished - only beds and a pop belly stove in the middle of the room for heat. With only cold running water in the kitchen sink, our toilet and laundry facilities were at the bathhouse building which was placed in a centralized area with a maintenance man in charge of the hot water. The bathroom facility was rather primitive, the entrance for the women on the east side, the men from the west. The laundry room was in one section of the building, the group shower stalls in another corner, and the lavatories lined up with no partition for privacy. Little by little, the lavatories had curtains put up by the ladies, to separate each compartment. We were given a few boxes which were used as make-shift chairs and tables until we were able to purchase real ones. But, Mr. Seabrook did not charge us room or board for six months, until we were able to stand on our own two feet. We ate all our meals free at the cafeteria. The food at the plant was also free to its workers.

We had a Recreational Building on the western side of the village (a white building situated near the foot bridge which crossed over the open sewer, the only access from the apartments and the Community House). This was an all purpose building. It was used by the church organizations for their services, weddings and funerals. Club meetings were held there, dances were also held there. These dances were always chaperoned by Mr. Pal Simpkins who lived in the large farm house at the end of Hoover Road with his wife and family. He was a great guy! He was a kid at heart! He really was a PAL!

Next to the Simpkins house were rows and rows of plots of gardens. The housing Corporation gave out a little space of land to those who wished to make a "victory garden." Many were farmers

pre-camp days, and these plots were green with a variety of flowers and vegetables. The vegetables were consumed by the "farmers" and also given to their friends along with the flowers for their home altars. Also, this became the "gossip corner" of Hoover Village as those who could not work at the plant because of age or health, or were working the fields during their off time from the plant, added to the economy of their household with the harvest of their crops. They were "arm chair quarterbacks" of what happened at the plant, per hearsay, who grew the best vegetables (or the worst), and what store to go in Bridgeton for the best sales, or which T.V. show to watch.

This was my first encounter with the cold temperatures - the frigid, cold ice and snow, the beautiful snowflakes drifting slowly downward (sticking my tongue out to catch the flakes), the icicles hanging from the eaves of the buildings, the slow drips as the sun warmed the roofs of the houses and icicles beginning to melt. One evening, we heard strange noises outside.....pop, crack.....pop, crack! What could that be? When we looked outside, we saw all the soda bottles cracking from the expansion of the frozen soda in the bottles. We left the cases of soda outside thinking it would be a good refrigerator. What a mess!

I have fond memories of Hoover Village. I made good lasting friends. This was where I met the challenges of facing a new world - of going to a real high school, Bridgeton High School, and integrating with people other than Japanese.

