

I Remember Seabrook: The Bookmobile and Other Memories

As a teenager growing up in Seabrook, I remember the Bookmobile coming every fourteen days in front of the Community House. I've forgotten on what day--was it Tuesdays or Thursdays? All I remember was that I used to go inside this mobile library each time it came around and spend perhaps a half-hour browsing through books. How difficult it was to choose the three that each person was allowed to take out! Somehow the kind man who drove the movable library must have noticed my problem, and he allowed me to borrow an added book or two. I never used to mistreat these books. No, I treated them as they were my own. I remember the art books from Skira. What beautiful colored prints of the Impressionists! And also the latest best-seller authors, too. My Auntie Ellen would usually borrow books, too. It was a good occasion to chat with her. Since she moved to Elmer (about twenty minutes from Seabrook), I did not see her every day as I used to. We would usually leave the Bookmobile laden down with our choices. What a welcome change from the hum-drum life in Seabrook with its single traffic light! But through these books, I traveled the world, could learn about interesting people, and would just read and read and read. Whether it was mysteries or art books, novels, or just reading biographies of famous painters, my night light was burning deep into the night after the Bookmobile had made its stop in Seabrook. How my mother used to scold me for burning the light all night...

One of the lasting memories of my mother is seeing her come over the hill to the nursery school to take me home. Mama, in her blue uniform, coming over the slope after working overtime at the frozen-food factory, to take me home. Mama, who, though born in the United States, had been sent to Japan at the tender age of two to live with her grandmother, with the hope that family members who had earlier immigrated to the United States would also someday return. While in Japan, she led a sheltered life as an only child, although she had two brothers and two sisters in America. I remember the end of the day at nursery school. I would be the last child to be picked up and used to sit at the window and wait. What a safe feeling it was to see my mother finally coming.... Not that I didn't like nursery school. No, that wasn't the problem. It was eating those hamburgers with the half-raw chopped onions. Once I took a bite of a hamburger and threw it under the table, far enough away that they wouldn't think it was me who threw half-chewed hamburgers under the table. Oh, no, I thought they would never find out who was doing this. But I just couldn't eat raw onions. To this day I cannot eat raw onions! I remember the teacher led me into an office, and I was supposed to eat my entire hamburger, but I didn't because I couldn't. Honestly, I just couldn't. After telling my mother about this incident, I didn't have to attend nursery school again! I remember each child at nursery school had an open locker with a tiny picture of an animal or some other similar figure. Each was framed with a metal lining. I thought that this was a great idea. I knew exactly where „my place“ was because of this picture. I do remember the taste of pineapple and grapefruit juice mixed together. This was served in tiny paper cups which filled several trays. The large, empty juice cans were used in the sand boxes to build castles and buildings.

When it was tomato season on my uncle Kiyomi and Auntie Ellen's farm in Elmer, I remember seeing many workers to help with the harvest. My grandfather owned an old pickup truck and, on it, the bushel baskets would be loaded in masterly pyramid style. Whatever the season--strawberry or tomato, cucumber, squash, eggplant, okra, or green pepper--I knew the names of all the vegetables. My grandmother would cook stewed tomatoes which was so tasty that I've never tasted better stewed tomatoes to this day. I remember once my grandfather grew wheat as an experiment. The climate did not suit grain so he discarded this idea. I remember this „mugibatake“ and how the wind used to make waves over the fields of wheat...

Our Thanksgiving dinners were also a great event to look forward to each year. Each family from our clan brought what he or she could make best. My father would make fresh fruit salad; my mother, her famous rolls; Auntie Mutsu would bring her delicious pumpkin pies and cranberry sauce; and there were at least three kinds of vegetables. My Uncle Kiyomi and Auntie Ellen would be in charge of everything else, including taped music, home movies (the old 16-millimeter films)! I remember the darkened room, the ray of light from the projector, the sound of the projector. I remember the beautiful set table usually with candle sticks. The table was so long that no table cloth would fully cover it, so a white sheet was used. Auntie's best silverware was also set in place. The stuffed turkey was so large that it did not fit into a common household baking oven. This problem was solved by taking the stuffed turkey usually to a bakery or a restaurant to be roasted.

After this feast, the children were asked to go upstairs to play. We were so noisy that one adult would come up and try to quiet us. The stillness would last for a short period and, as we grew louder again, another adult would come up to see what the excitement was about. That was exciting on the farm. We could be as loud as we wanted to because the neighbors were not in hearing distance! We seldom argued because we were so enthralled over a new game.

These are the treasured memories of my childhood. This feeling of being together was perhaps the most vivid remembrance. It will never be the same as it was then, but still alive are the memories--the Seabrook days and the people who are so important to me.

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