

## BEAN-PICKING AT SEABROOK

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Seabrook Resident 1945 - 1963  
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I remember the excitement of getting my working papers to join the ranks of my playmates to work in the bean fields which surrounded the Seabrook area.

I remember getting up early in the morning to catch the bus at the Community House. Most of my Japanese American friends and classmates were present as were the Estonians, Germans, and Latvians.

I remember the anticipation of whether the sun would be hot or whether it would be cloudy. I remember how uncomfortable it was after a rainfall because the plants were all wet and our clothes became soaked.

I remember wearing the oldest pair of pants I could find to take part in earning some money for school clothes. The going rate was forty cents a basket - a figure that never seemed to change for the many years I participated.

I remember that we were assigned cards which were punched as we submitted baskets of beans to be weighed - somewhere around twenty-three pounds. I recall some of my co-workers pouring water from the water truck on their baskets so that they would weigh more when checked. Every once in a while a checker would slip a friend a "free punch." A mysterious quota was set up each day and if a worker did not meet up to the standard, he or she was asked not to return the next day. I cannot recall that anyone was ever asked to stay home.

I remember that the all-time record was held by Eisuke Murono - something like thirty baskets.

I remember the good-natured Puerto Rican and Jamaican workers who were always willing to add their "overs" if we came up a bit short at weighing time.

I remember the infamous "One Bean Johnny" who called you back to the area in which you had just picked if you had not picked the one bean that remained on the plant. I also recall that the humdrum of the day was sometimes interrupted by a group of Jamaicans trying to catch rabbits that raced through the fields.

I remember one of my Estonian friends saying, "I can't pick beans - the wind blows." He was feeling lazy and tried to make up an excuse for not working. I remember eating my first paper plate of beans and rice which was served from a truck, but I recall that we

never paid for these meals. Group singing often made the day go faster for the Jamaicans.

I remember a feeling of accomplishments when I reached the daily quota, but I always tried to surpass it.

I remember going to the payroll office and picking up with great pride a weekly check. There I saw the smiling face of Itty Asada in the back office and marveled at the sounds of the typewriter caused by the incredible speed at which she typed. I suppose the real lessons I learned from my bean picking days is about the value of money and the meaning of hard work and discipline. These lessons I try to impart to my two daughters who often respond with "Not another bean-picking story!"