

I REMEMBER FARM CENTER

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Life as an immigrant to the new country was not easy, but far better than the prospect of the possible ill fate that could have befallen those who fled East Germany due to the Russian invasion.

In April of 1952, C.F. Seabrook sent a representative to the refugee camp in Wiesau, West Germany, to recruit workers for the food processing plant, Seabrook Farms. My mother, Emma, father, Robert and older brother, Franz, and myself were among those to venture for a new life.

At sea for 10 days on the military transport ship, General Stewart, the several hundred German refugees braved the voyage. Many were malnourished, and, although grateful, became ill as they were not accustomed to having such good food, nor having 3 meals a day.

My family arrived in New York on April 20, 1952. From there we were transported by a farm labor bus to a facility at Park where we stayed for approximately 5 months. We moved to another facility called Hoover Annex in Seabrook, New Jersey, where we stayed for approximately one year and then were moved again to Farm Center, a group of approximately 12 small wooden buildings which were located adjacent to the Seabrook Farms processing plant.

The buildings at Farm Center were divided into 4 units each. The only partitions were wooden walls. There were no ceilings, so privacy was limited. Each living unit consisted of one kitchen and two small rooms for sleeping. The kitchens were furnished with a sink, a small stove and a small refrigerator. Small bunk-type beds were furnished, with one of the kitchen that served as a sofa during the day. Also provided was a chest of drawers. The radiator heaters caused many a sleepless night during the cold winters with their perpetual clanking. The common toilet and shower facilities were located in separate buildings with the complex.

Since the growing season had not yet begun, work was not available right away in the processing plant. My father began working by planting pepper seedlings in the nearby greenhouses for \$.79 per hour. My mother did not begin to work until one year later, after my younger brother, Robert, was born. My parents worked opposite shifts so that one could be with the children while the other was at work. My mother spoke of the many fellow employees which she made friends with during the years following. Many were the Japanese who came from the evacuation centers in recent prior years

who were familiar with the hardships of leaving their home and the uncertainty of the future. Yuri Takata, among many others, was of utmost help in the transition. The experiences that were shared and the friendly laughter at trivial jokes gave comfort to all who were new to this country and created a bond that would last throughout their lives.

I remember taking walks with my mother past the greenhouses, some of which held some of the most beautiful rose I had ever seen. A favorite spot of mine was near the water tower where I remember sitting on the lawn and eating my first ice cream. I also remember walks along the nearby country roads and getting such pleasure from throwing stones down a small hole in what may have been an old abandoned covered well. We would sometimes venture to the Community House (now the main office of Seabrook Housing Corp.), where we would have soda in the "soda shop." In this same building was a small library.

For recreation, there was the clubhouse of the volunteer fire company, located behind the Farm Center complex, which was furnished with pool tables and other games. On many occasions, the volunteer firemen would supervise activities for the children.

Seabrook was truly a "melting pot" of many different nationalities and everyone got along although work was hard and the hours were long, but I think this created a dignity that deserves much credit.

Note:

Franz, older brother, deceased. He died in a drowning accident at Silver Lake in 1955.