

CHIYE MORI: MONOLOG

CHIYE MORI- Age 28-30. Hair worn pulled back in a bun. Wears pencils in her hair. Glasses. Men's pressed shirts, tails out. Men's khaki pants. High topped shoes such as worn by farmers. Chain smokes Lucky Strikes.

CHIYE MORI

I'm Chiye Mori. I was an editor of the Los Angeles Rafu Shimpo, on December 7, 1941. I worked on the last edition of the RAFU, under the head editor Togo Tanaka. The Japanese of Los Angeles were evacuated to Manzanar in California and Poston in Arizona. I was part of the Manzanar group.

When Togo Tanaka refused the editorship of the Manzanar FREE PRESS, because the press inside Manzanar, as he said, "was not free," I became the first editor.

I admit that the FREE PRESS was not free. Every word we ran in the paper had to be approved by the Reports Officer. Tanaka did not accept Caucasian suspicion of the Nisei. The JACL did. I resented being removed to a large barbed wire enclosure, because of Caucasian suspicion, but I accepted it, because the JACL accepted it, and I thought I could work with it.

I tried to be fair and objective, but there were forces working against journalistic ethics that I should have been aware of, but I wasn't.

I didn't last a year. The edition of the paper that I printed without censorship was confiscated and destroyed. No one knows what I really felt about

camp. What happened at Manzanar was plain and simple until the WRA had to protect itself from the petty scandal of pilfering and selling foodstuffs from camp, and the JACL had to have its "Pro-Axis" enemies.

"Pro-Axis" made their enemies more important than ordinary Nisei angry at being first, betrayed into camp, once in camp, being given to the draft.

I published my first FREE PRESS editorial, on July 4, 1942:

EDITORIAL
. INDEPENDENCE DAY-1942

Fourth of July this year will have poignant meaning and value for an America gripped in a death struggle for the very principles of affirmed in the Declaration of Independence.

For American citizens of Japanese ancestry herded into camps and guarded by the bayoneted sentries of their own country, it will be a doubly strange and bewildering day. For they remember, too well, the carefree Fourth of last year, when they stood along Broadway to cheer the nisei soldiers who marched shoulder to shoulder with American soldiers of all races.

But let us think twice, lest in our understandable and human bitterness, we dismiss this day with an ironic shrug and a customary wisecrack.

It is too late to argue on the injustice of this gigantic upheaval that finds us today in Manzanar. Our leaders had repeatedly reiterated our willingness to evacuate our homes should it ever be considered a military necessity. Now we are here.

Let us stop living in a dreamy, nostalgic past. Let us stop wallowing in a mire of self-pity and work out our destinies in practical manner.

We, nisei, have temporarily put our individual freedoms on ice so that national morale might remain sound, and the fight for world democracy might continue unfettered. Of all diverse American groups, we are in the best position to appreciate the blessings of liberty.

For those whose faith in America burned bright-- who were eager to give their blood to prove that faith--this is a difficult test, a Valley Forge.

On the day that the gates of Manzanar open wide for us again, let us step out into a victorious America, more vigilant and jealous of the independence we have regained through patient cooperation and waiting.

The FREE PRESS was the voice of the community abuilding, it was the glue that held it together. Why not movies? So on Saturday October 24, 1942:

Do we want motion pictures?-

It seems several lifetimes ago since we have gone stumbling down a dark aisle clutching ticket stubs in our hands, wiggled into a comfortable theatre chair and watched the trials and tribulations of Hero Jones reeling by at a terrific clip. What we want to know is when do we get our "Loew's State?"

The pros and cons of the educational, cultural, social and economic significance of the motion picture have been firmly established and accepted. There is no argument here on this score, we believe Both nisei and issei should welcome a theatre if the right type of pictures are shown at a cost that will not strain the sixteen and nineteen dollar pay.

In another editorial in these columns we pointed out the therapeutic value of movies as an "escape" medium. Today we stress the educational function of the celluloid product. Isolated as we are in this shabby Shangri-la, the best method of keeping our

fingers on the tumultuous pulse-beat of the world at war is through the medium of the motion picture. The tragedy of Bataan, the stark magnificence of the Solomons battle, the horror of frozen corpses piled high in Stalingrad... visual knowledge of these will prepare the nisei emotionally and give them a better perspective.

It will be relatively easy to construct an adequate theatre and bring in motion pictures, once the demand is definitely established. The Co-operative Enterprise can build and operate the theatre following the wishes of the people. Soon a public opinion poll on this important matter will be taken. Be sure to give your opinion at this time.

Movies would take our mind off of pressing matters, but the FREE PRESS should deal with those things that pressed the mind. I tried:

MONDAY, NOV. 9, 1942

CRYPTIC CONVERSATION

"Over there, over there

"The Yanks are coming the Yanks are coming..."

We were trudging down to work, and having exhausted all fertile conversation he started humming. After going through his entire repertoire... God Bless America, The Caissons Go Rolling Along, etc., he started:

"You're a Sap Mr. Jap!"

"Do you really think we are," we asked.

"No, they're not referring to us... Oh, I get it," grinning sheepishly. "Well, maybe I am a sap, but those songs get in your blood"

We started to make mental footnotes. The rabble rousers are wrong, we thought. (Cultural influences are stronger than blood ties.)

"But, " he continued, "when they started pushing me around it sure burned me up."

(A typical American reaction we noted. If we remember correctly was founded by a group of people that resented being pushed

around.)

"Well if you don't like it here you can go to Japan after the war," we ventured.

"Nah!" His answer was emphatic, "I've been there. Five years ago, when my grandfather died. They were plenty nice to me as long as I was spending money, but I know they were talking about me behind my back. I couldn't get their lingo, anyway. If I go there now they'd probably call me a "dirty Yank" just like they call me a 'dirty Jap' here. Some life!" An expressive shrug of the shoulders.

"What do you plan to do then?" we inquired.

"Well, I'm not so sure, but I think I'll learn some trade here and then try to relocate somewhere. At least it's better than being cooped up in here! I suppose there's still a little opportunity left for us."

"What if the draft board catches up with you after you leave here?"

"I'd hate to leave my family, but I wouldn't really mind otherwise. At least it shows that they still have some faith in us. It's being treated like a criminal that makes me mad."

"But," we countered, "we really can't say conclusively that the evacuation was uncalled for. Perhaps, the army did have some good reason which they aren't revealing until the war is over."

"They'll have to prove it to me," he muttered.

(Typical American cynicism, we thought.)

They'll have to prove it!

We wonder what America will do with this youth and thousands of other boys and girls like him now in relocation centers. They are bitter, confused, and pathetically anxious to be accepted. It is a staggering responsibility that America took upon herself when she evacuated these citizens together with the alien Japanese.

The atmosphere in camp was really bad. Seemingly normal, but really bad. People didn't talk about anything real anymore. They didn't talk to their children. They didn't trust the issei. They didn't trust each other. They pretended to talk to each other about nothing, and kept what they really thought to themselves. With the Reports

Officer reading over my shoulder I tried...

The Editor's

Cubbyhole

Out of the mouths of babes...

The younger generation continues to amaze us. The Small fry of our neighborhood no longer play cops and robbers, house, or even tag. Children's games keep step with the modern tempo. Just as children outside now play "war," our children here play "nightchecker" and "plasterboard."

Said one little small fry busily counting imaginary beds and blankets, "We're taking inventory!" Next these two little enterprising youngsters, aged 4 and 5, began playing "plasterboard." Huffing and puffing they picked up scrap pieces of plasterboard and went through elaborate motions of holding it up and nailing it on. Finally they came to a dead stop. "We can't finish it," they told us. "No more lumber--no more nails." Then they mumbled something about the "quartermaster." That's when we slunk off in shame.

But on second thought, it's no laughing matter. These little children, in their most impressionable years, will bear the marks of this physical and emotional upheaval, long after it has become an unpleasant memory for us older nisei. The parents and teachers have a sacred duty in keeping the children happy and preparing them for the new world that they must battle when they go outside again.

Up to three members of the Japanese-American Citizens League (JACL), traveled to Salt Lake City representing the ten camps at a meeting with officials of the War Relocation Authority, that took place on November 17 to 23, 1942. Fred Tayama, Joe Grant Masaoka and Kiyoshi Higashi traveled from Manzanar, but represented the JACL's increasing power over the camps. The men from Manzanar and

Tule Lake in California, and Gila and Poston in Arizona the four camps within the Western Defense Command military Zone Number One boasted of the importance the JACL had given them, how each of them had to be escorted by Caucasian guards like potentates to the state line. It was painfully obvious that the JACL no longer represented the nisei to the government. Rather the JACL represented the government and WRA to the Nisei.

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the problems of Nisei adjusting from the status of free citizens to a status not accounted for in the Constitution of resettled of evacuees. Also not accounted for in the Constitution was the agency put in charge of the (shhh) concentration camps, the newly created War Relocation Authority.

Fred Tayama and Joe Grant Masaoka and Kiyoshi Higashi were a part of the unanimous vote to reinstitute the drafting of the nisei, without any mention of restoring the nisei to their citizenship status, their rights or their homes. From the Salt Lake convention, the JACL sent this telegram to President Roosevelt:

"NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SPECIAL EMERGENCY MEETING OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE, CONVENED IN SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, THAT WE DO HEREBY REQUEST THE SELECTIVE SERVICE DIVISION OF THE WAR DEPARTMENT TO RECLASSIFY AMERICANS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY ON THE SAME BASIS

AS ALL OTHER AMERICANS"

Among the ten camps, that telegram was given a lot of publicity.

At Poston the reaction was swift.

On November 26, 1942 the Free Press finally ran this story after it was checked and approved by the Reports Officer. Of course the pro-Axis group was code, meaning a protest against the JACL:

Hinted 'disturbance' in Poston Revealed

"A defiant group of pro-Axis Japanese evacuees who overthrew their community government five days ago terrorized workers to bring about a complete shutdown of operations in the largest the three units at the Poston Relocation Center were quelled today," cries the lead on an AP story on the recent "disturbance" hinted in last week's paper.

The Los Angeles Times used the story of the Poston trouble as its lead story with an eight column banner on the front page last Tuesday morning.

Aid of the military police was enlisted in restoring order at Unit No. 1, it was reported, where the agitators had barricaded themselves before the jail in protest against the jailing of two men who had "participated in gang fights between aliens and American-born evacuees. They were charged with beating another resident of the camp."

Private sources alleged that several prominent JACL members were attacked. It is reported that the group entrance themselves before the jail doors to obstruct the normal machinery of justice.

Project Director W. Wade Head, in announcing the end of the disturbance did not reveal the method used in quieting the center. According to Wade, banner with Japanese characters and Japanese martial music featured the demonstration Sunday night. The trouble was traced to a "small but well-organized pro-

Axis group."

The trouble was localized in Unit No. 1 which has a normal population of 8600; and it was announced that 6500 workers most of them youths and women were forced into their jobs by a reign of organized terror.

"Taking advantage of the excitement thus created the recalcitrants seized the so-called city council, or local government normally made up of American born citizens," continues the dispatch.

Head explained that "The strategy of the pro-Axis group apparently was to deliberately attempt the destruction of the Americanism of the American-born Japanese." In this they have failed because the other two Poston units, which have a population of 4,000 and 5,000 respectively have had the situation under their control at all times, and have cooperated loyally with the administration.

Praising the loyal nisei, Head stated: "hundreds of the fine, loyal American-born Japanese have worked as a team in defeating all pro-Axis groups with bloodshed or loss of property."

Although it was denied that the military police had entered the center itself, it was revealed that additions have been made and all roads in the area are heavily patrolled.

At Manzanar reaction to the return of Tayama, Masaoka and Higashi boasting that all the nisei would be drafted because of the JACL, seemed to be indifference.

The big issue that the FREE PRESS was forbidden to report, but everybody knew, was the Manzanar Sugar Scandal. A Project Director was hoarding and selling sugar from every camp kitchen.

Harry Ueno had the kitchen workers protesting against the administration's pilfering of sugar. So, of course, the administration jailed Harry Ueno. But the

Administration didn't see that their pilferage of sugar and the emotions against the JACL over their asking that the Nisei be drafted, were two different issues that happened to co-incide in time. They didn't separate them. They combined them under pro-Japan pro-Axis activities against the rules of camp.

I ran a cute and heroic story that should have relaxed the atmosphere building at Manzanar, I thought:

In the favorable limelight

VALET MAKES WINCHELL'S COLUMN

The significant part that a Japanese valet played in the life of George M. Cohan is little known to the public but the devoted servant received a just amount of publicity in a recent Walter Winchell column.

"George M. Cohan's greatest gift wasn't in his last will," the paragraph began. "With his passing, Chan's Japanese valet (for more than 25 years) need have no fear of being thrust upon an unfriendly America--for in valet Mike Hirano's possession is a letter written by the Yankee Doodle Dandy (after Dec. 7. 1941) which vouches for Hirano's patriotism, devotion and character."

NISEI SOLDIER IN ACTION

A dramatic story of a nisei soldier under fire in the front lines of New Guinea was related by Correspondent Murlin Spencer who is stationed with the Allied Forces near Buna, scene of furious action where two Allied travelers were sunk in last Wednesday.

Proof that Japanese-American soldiers are being sent into strategic battle areas was given in a delayed AP story which cite the heroic actions of the Allied defenders who were attacked by Japanese bombers. After citing how two Allied generals swam ashore after the sinking of their craft, the writer states"

"During the height of the attacks on the ground troops, as Robert Doyle the Milwaukee Journal and I lay flat, hugging the shelter of a tree, we heard a soldier say over and over:

"Damn them--bet we'll get them yet."

The soldier was Sgt. Fred Nishisugi, an American of Japanese descent from Los Angeles."

The JACL that we looked to for representation of our rights and in our every day problems between people, between, jobs, between generations. It took time, but it was becoming apparent that the JACL had joined the government as overseers and stood at a distance from the nisei. Tanaka had been right, the FREE PRESS was not carrying the news of camp to the nisei, but was a publicity vehicle for the JACL and the WRA to the "jingoists and race baiters" in congress. So much was happening in camp, moods were shifting towards violence and the paper was not providing an outlet, a safety valve for venting opinions. The clenched silences around camp were uglier than the polite releases of anger. My own opinions, what I really thought could not be expressed openly, and I was the editor. The paper was my fault. But in reality, it wasn't.

Manzanar Free Press.

November 26, 1942

"THANKS GIVING 1942. "

We have long dreaded this editorial as well as the one we wrote for the Fourth of July, and the one we must write on December 7. It is easy enough to sit back smugly and scribble a few pretty platitudes.

But whatever we say, be it an expression of solace in the many

things for which we can still be thankful, or cynical bitterness in the mockery of the word "thanksgiving" will not assuage the poignant desolation that assails the heart as all file into the mess hall for the slab of Thanksgiving turkey.

Lest the public think us "ungrateful," let us remind them that it is not the overloaded table we miss, but the warm coziness of home. Man is so quick to adapt himself that he soon accustoms himself to a new mode of life. But when the holiday season draws near, the nostalgia for the old remembered things again tugs at the heart strings.

On December 6th the pressures that had been building at Manzanar burst. Fred Tayama claimed that he had been assaulted by Harry Ueno. Harry Ueno was in the Manzanar jail at the time. But the JACL and the administration were one. The WRA report lied by omitting the fact that they had jailed Ueno. Fred Tayama and his wife were suddenly believable witnesses to Harry Ueno having assaulted Fred Tayama. Ueno was sent to Tule Lake which was being converted into a camp for enemies of the JACL.

The old commandant with a sweet tooth, Coverly was gone. Ralph Merritt was in his place. The last edition of the FREE PRESS I edited was confiscated and I was removed from camp. Merritt secreted the officers of the JACL out of Manzanar to the protection of Cow Creek and restored order at Manzanar. The children of Manzanar stood on their side of the barbed wire, and sang Christmas carols to Ralph Merritt, inside his house. He wrote a letter to his Aunt Luella on Christmas day:

Manzanar, California

December 25, 1942

Dear Aunt Luella,

It is Christmas morning at Manzanar. The sun has not yet topped the Inyos, but its rays have turned the grey granite peaks of the Sierra to rose. Below is a white band of new snow. Still in the dark shadows are the rows of barracks that house our ten thousand Japanese evacuees.

The reality of this great drama is on my mind this Christmas morning because only thirty days ago the War Relocation Authority sent me here to Manzanar as Project Director with full administrative authority. It was like coming home to be back on the desert of Inyo that I have loved and once again to see the seven-mile shadow of Mt. Williamson. But Manzanar was a volcano about to erupt. I knew that too when I came. Evil work had been done by the slow boiling of many bitternesses. Some are old; some are as new as yesterday. These ten thousand people had no grudge in common. Many people were filled with many hates about many things--race hates, war hates, political hates, class hates such as those between Japanese born in America to whom Japan is a foreign country and Japanese born in American but educated in Japan who have become pro-Japanese and just the common kind of hates we all know too well.

On a Sunday morning not three weeks ago a mob gathered like the summer thunder storm that sweeps from the Sierra. As darkness came on mob violence grew and broke from the control of its leaders. As I walked in that mob at noon talking with people here and there and urging them to be calm and go home, I thought of many things. I thought of you and the happy ranch life here of years ago. I thought of the people now, in this Valley who now trusted me for their protection. I thought of our men overseas who might be more cruelly treated by Japan if tear gas failed to break up this mob. I thought of the innocent who might be killed while the guilty escaped if I had to turn to the military as a last resort. But after dark there was no other course. Soon there was the rattle of gun fire. Men fell

in the blackness.

For days we lived under the military; no Japanese were seen outside the barracks; none came to work and sullen defiance hung over the camp. What would break the tension? How could these ten thousand people be led to want to work and play again? Could the real spirit of America be made to live among them?

Last Monday we buried our dead. At the Buddhist funeral held in the woods, beyond the Lacey Ranch, we mourned with their families the death of the two boys, innocent of wrong doing, the victims of the riot. The only soldier present stood at the head of one of the coffins--the brother of the dead boy. This soldier of Japanese ancestry was on active duty at a distant point, but the Army granted my request to bring him home to his family. The Buddhist Priest prayed that the lives of these young men would be a sacrifice for the sins of the all the camp. May their God and our God hear that prayer!

The next day the Japanese workers, four thousand men and women, were back at work. On Wednesday I suggested that the tragedy should not rob little children of Christmas trees and presents or young people of singing carols.

Last evening we visited our Children's Village with its sixty-five orphans. They sang "Jingle Bells" and "Away in a Manger" and we helped them open packages that were greeted with the usual shrieks of joy while Santa Claus with a Japanese accent shouted greetings to all. Before the door of our home in the barracks there was no mob but a hundred young people singing "Oh Come All Ye Faithful."

The star was overhead and the ragged crest of the Sierra was shining in the moonlight of Christmas Eve. Peace and Good Will had come to Manzanar.

So we greet this Christmas morning. Shall the problems of keeping this peace and good will be solved by the military, or by being overtrustful of this show of goodness, or is there some safe middle course through which the ideals of peace and good will can mingle with the realities of race tolerance? If there is an answer, it will be the corner stone upon which a future peace of the world will rest.

This story of your old home is my Christmas present to you.

Affectionately,
Ralph P. Merritt

Ralph Merritt was a benevolent commandant of Manzanar Prison Camp. But how had the citizen Nisei become prisoners? Why did they accept the status of prisoners? America had shown me that it wasn't my and would not be my country.