

worked.”⁶⁵ These experiences with job discrimination began bit by bit to challenge Yuri’s idyllic world.

Even before the United States entered World War II, life for Japanese Americans had become increasingly difficult. Yuri found herself being asked to leave one organization after another as problems between the United States and Japan escalated. About a year before Pearl Harbor, Yuri’s friends, White girls a little younger than herself, invited her to join the Women’s Ambulance and Defense Corps of America (WADCA), which later became the Women’s Auxiliary Corps. Thinking about the excitement of learning to drive an ambulance, Yuri began attending WADCA classes on motor mechanics, first aid, and Morse code. She recalled: “I have to admit, at times, the training was hilarious. We’d meet on the high school athletic field and march into the neighborhood, right where we lived. When officers would yell the command to turn left or right, and we’d make a mistake, everyone watching would roar out in laughter; even dogs were barking. We were so embarrassed, but still we were serious about the WADCA training.” Yuri noted that everyone in WADCA treated her nicely, except for one teacher, himself German, who objected to having any Japanese in his class. Even before the bombing of Pearl Harbor, a captain in WADCA told them, “I’m sorry, but some feel a little uneasy because you’re Japanese.” In a move that typified Yuri’s acquiescence in a period of growing anti-Japanese hostility, she explained: “We [four Nisei women] got together to figure out what we should do. As much as we wanted to stay in WADCA, we decided, ‘Let’s not make a lot of noise. Let’s exit gracefully.’ So we wrote a nice letter saying we understand that our Japanese background makes us suspect. We wished all the women good luck and thanked them for our short-lived experience in WADCA.”⁶⁶

Although Yuri did not know it at the time, war was imminent. Her life was about to change.

Concentration Camps and a Growing Awareness of Race

The fears of the Japanese American community were realized when the U.S. government ordered their forced removal from the West Coast in the spring of 1942. Two months after Yuri’s father’s death, her family found themselves moving from their well-appointed house to a horse stable at the Santa Anita racetrack. Yuri recalled: “We got our evacuation notices at the end of March. After seeing the Terminal Island people leave, we figured we’d have to leave at some point. But it was hard when it actually happened.”¹

Across the bay from San Pedro, Terminal Island was a fishing colony of some five hundred Japanese American families who had built a fishing industry from almost nothing. They owned their own radio-equipped tuna fishing boats, which cruised as far as Panama. Because of their knowledge of the waters, fantastic and erroneous tales of subversive acts by Japanese American fisherfolk circulated after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. As unfounded rumors spread that these fisherfolk might guide Japanese naval vessels through Pacific waters, the U.S. government and private industry targeted this community. Banks froze their accounts and law enforcement officers restricted their movements. Cash ran out, businesses collapsed, and their fishing fleet was paralyzed. The people were in a dire state. Then, on February 9, 1942, a swarm of FBI and local police descended on Terminal Island and arrested all Issei who had commercial fishing licenses. Without warrants, the agents ransacked drawers and closets and recklessly disheveled family homes. Because many community leaders had already been apprehended following the bombing of Pearl Harbor,

this latest round of mass arrests meant that virtually all the Issei men were now gone. On February 14, the government sent a letter to all Japanese American families living on Terminal Island, notifying them that they had one month to pack and leave. Suddenly, with only forty-eight hours' notice, new signs were posted telling them to leave by February 27. Panic ensued as predatory neighbors flooded the island community looking for easy buys on large appliances, cars, and fishing equipment. The quick removal of the Terminal Island Nikkei was an ominous sign for the greater Japanese American community.²

In the two months since the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the highest political and military officials had strategized about how to remove the Japanese Americans, including the U.S.-born Nisei, from the West Coast. Their quandary was a legal one: In the absence of martial law, how does one bypass due process to incarcerate U.S. citizens? Their answer came in the form of Executive Order 9066, signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942. The order set in motion the procedures for the forced elimination of Japanese Americans through the establishment of "military areas" from which "any or all persons may be excluded." The order was insidious in that it never mentioned any ethnic or racial group, though it was designed with the Japanese in mind. In fact, when Public Law 503, imposing criminal penalties for anyone violating Executive Order 9066, was introduced before Congress in late March, the only member who questioned it, Republican Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, declared it "the 'sloppiest' criminal law I have ever read or seen anywhere. . . . It does not apply only to the Pacific coast. It applies anywhere in the United States where there is any possible reason for declaring a military zone. . . . I have no doubt that in peacetime no man could ever be convicted under it, because the court would find that it was so indefinite and so uncertain that it could not be enforced under the Constitution." But since Taft understood that the law was to apply only to Japanese Americans, it passed in both houses without a single dissenting vote.³

By then, Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt, head of the newly created Western Defense Command, had already designated military areas in Washington, Oregon, California, and Arizona, suggesting the locations from which the Japanese would be excluded. He also identified the targeted groups: "Japanese, German, and Italian aliens"

and "any person of Japanese ancestry." In the end, although the war was also being fought against Germany and Italy, only persons of Japanese descent suffered mass dislocation. Three days after Congress passed Public Law 503, DeWitt issued the first of 108 Civilian Exclusion Orders, each for a particular geographic location, which gave the Japanese one week to pack and vacate their homes. Japanese Americans were first moved to fifteen temporary, euphemistically named "assembly centers" and later to ten more permanent concentration camps.⁴ By fall 1942, the U.S. government had succeeded in removing 120,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast.⁵

Like other Japanese American families, the Nakaharas would have found out about the government's plan by seeing evacuation notices posted on telephone poles and store windows. Yuri's brother Art and a friend also took the initiative to inform the local community. Because the authorities instructed the Japanese to "take only what you can carry," they had the difficult task of deciding what to pack. The selection was made more difficult by the lack of information about their destination and length of stay. Yuri recounted: "All we knew was to be prepared for rough living. They told us to bring hardy clothes like jeans and comfortable shoes like sneakers. We weren't allowed to bring radios and anything that could be interpreted as a weapon, not even baseball bats or knives. People brought their own plates and bedding. So Mom, Art, and I began packing and trying to decide what was most important for us to take." Yuri's choices are revealing of her priorities: "I took pictures of all my friends to remember them by. I also took stationery, envelopes, and stamps so I could stay in touch with my friends. This may seem corny, but my WADCA uniform was really important to me, so I packed it though we really had so little space. The hardest part for me was leaving my friends. San Pedro meant so much to me."⁶

Yuri's priorities, at the age of twenty, reflect the value she placed on friendships. Before leaving, she compiled a scrapbook filled with photos, inspirational poetry, and little sketches she drew to decorate the album. In the introduction, written after her departure from San Pedro, she wrote: "This album is a conglomeration of snapshots and pictures, haphazardly and hurriedly scrambled together in the last week before evacuation. . . . Lack of time and space prevented me from carrying more. . . . However, the fellows and girls in these shots

represent the town that meant so much to me when I lived there, and even more so when I left. . . . These pictures have been a source of comfort and pleasure. They gave me something to look back on, something to look forward to, and something to cherish." In addition, Yuri responded to suspicions about her American loyalty in a way that paralleled the reaction of many Nisei: she held on to a symbol of U.S. patriotism—her WADCA uniform. Responding through ultra-Americanism enabled the Nisei not only to ward off accusations of disloyalty but also to maintain the hope for their future acceptance into the dominant society.⁷

On Friday, April 3, 1942, Yuri, Art, and Mrs. Nakahara left San Pedro for the Santa Anita Assembly Center. "Before we left, friends stopped by to say good-bye; it was so good seeing them, but this also left me feeling a little sorrowful," wrote Yuri in a diary she began on this day. Recorded in two volumes (notebooks), "The Bordered World," as she titled her diary, covers her seven-month stay at Santa Anita, with her last lengthy entry in mid-October 1942, as she arrived in the Jerome, Arkansas, concentration camp. Although rich in narrative and subtextual information, there were views, especially negative ones, that Yuri intentionally omitted from her diary. On the cover page she wrote: "Daily Diary of how I think and feel, but may I never put in writing that which would hurt, humiliate, look down, blame, or show dislike for any person, nation, race, religion, or station in life." Not only was she concerned about the feelings of others, she may well have feared, given the circumstances, that her diary would be read by others.⁸

Yuri also documented in her diary the names of each person who visited before she left or whom she saw en route to the Santa Anita Assembly Center. She may have wanted to remember the names of her friends whom she might not see for a long time, or if she allowed herself to consider it, that she might never see again. Still, this record-keeping behavior began before this period—she recorded the names of her classmates in a notebook each year—and has continued throughout her life. The Nakaharas traveled by car caravan to Santa Anita. Along the way, Yuri stayed psychologically connected to her hometown by writing postcards to four friends, which she mailed as soon as they made a stop.⁹

Santa Anita was a shock. Yuri had been excited about seeing the

famous racetrack, but her enthusiasm was negated by the presence of armed guards: "Flanked on both sides of us were the soldiers, with gun in hand. . . . We thought they were going to help us unload, but we soon saw they were there to guard us." The soldiers proceeded to inspect their bags. As she watched them confiscate knives, sharp equipment, alcoholic drinks, and even some uniforms, Yuri became alarmed that they might take her WADCA uniform and was greatly relieved when they allowed her to keep it. The Nakaharas turned their attention to their accommodations and learned they were to live in the stables. In avenue 8, barrack 48, room 11, their new home was one large room divided by a partition, with two collapsible cots on each side. Mrs. Nakahara and Yuri slept on one side and Art on the other.¹⁰

Yuri's diary entries reveal an optimistic naïveté that helped her cope with the uncertainty of their predicament. She saw the world through rose-tinted glasses, constructing a more positive view than existed in reality. While others saw difficulty and aversion in their situation, Yuri saw only the good. She recorded in her diary that first day: "I thought it was pretty good, but it seemed as though most of the people were quite disappointed. My mother complained it smelled like horses were still living in it." Feeling hunger pangs, they rushed to the mess hall where they were served a meal of beans, fish, bread, and water. "I thought the meal was swell, but again there were those who made unfavorable comments," wrote Yuri. They soon discovered that their lifestyle would be communal, eating in army-style mess halls and using community latrines and washrooms. After filling their mattresses with hay, which exacerbated Art's asthma, Yuri finally had time to write letters to friends. The only thing she acknowledged that bothered her was the lack of privacy, but even here she put a positive spin on the situation: "We could hear everything going on in the rooms or apartments next to us. Every word, every move can be heard, even whispers. Around 8:30, the little girl to the right of us yelled out, 'Good-Night everybody over there!' It was cute. We yelled back, 'Good-Night to you too.'"¹¹

The day after arriving, Yuri met up with several young women, some she knew from before, others she just met. They decided to welcome new arrivals at the camp's entrance through song, such as this one to the tune of "Yankee Doodle":

*We are here to welcome you, as you come here to join us.
We know that you'll cooperate, instead of making fu-uss;
With your friendly attitudes,
With your happy moods,
With your hopes to do your bit,
Let's show our hearty spi—rit!*¹²

These words, written by Yuri and her friends, show a youthful simplicity as well as the cooperative spirit of many Nisei. In an environment of intense hostility and in an era before the social movements of the 1960s aroused a consciousness of resistance, many Nisei coped with racism by demonstrating strong American loyalties. These behaviors coincided with the Japanese cultural value of *shikataganai* (it can't be helped), which promoted adjusting to circumstances rather than working for change. Moreover, by focusing on others, Yuri did not have to deal with her own feelings of loss, abandonment, and betrayal. She needed to maintain her faith in America because she had no other belief system with which to replace her notions of a just society. For Yuri, the uncertainty accompanying these changes, on the heels of her father's unexpected death, were magnified by suddenly finding herself in an all-Japanese community. Even today, though certainly more mature and politically astute, Yuri relies on this optimistic, other-focused style. When asked to reflect on the personal impact of incarceration, she stated: "Being the right age for change—young, healthy, excited, and searching—adjustment was not difficult. But I certainly admired my mother, who had just lost her husband and the security of a nice home. She took everything in stride."¹³

Former internees, all Yuri's peers, remember Mrs. Nakahara as being exceptionally supportive of her daughter. Mrs. Nakahara participated in Yuri's letter-writing campaign to Nisei soldiers and volunteered as a chaperon when Yuri was active at the Jerome USO. In fact, Yuri credits her mother with easing the tensions of camp life and crowded living conditions for her family: "Mom instilled in us the need to be mindful of those around us. She impressed on us the need to work together, to sink or swim together as a team. My mother never preached this, but this was how she lived her life. She did a lot for us and always treated everyone who came to our place so nicely." In conversations with Yuri today, it seems that she demonstrated her

concern for her mother according to the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Rather than considering the particular needs of Mrs. Nakahara, Yuri supported her mother through her own coping mechanism: by keeping her busy.¹⁴

It is difficult to uncover Yuri's relationship with her mother, beyond Mrs. Nakahara's support for her activities, and with her brother Art during their confinement. Yuri discloses little about her family, other than standard stories rehearsed for public consumption, and rarely mentioned them in her camp diary. Peter, who was away in the military during the war, was not aware of the details of his family's camp life. And Mrs. Nakahara, Art, and other relatives are no longer living. Yuri's camp friends remember little about Art or Mrs. Nakahara. It appears that Yuri's life in camp, as in San Pedro, centered on her friends and activities. Hanging out and eating meals with friends, rather than family, was common among teenagers and young adults in the concentration camps. Beyond the teenage developmental task of fostering friendships, these conditions were facilitated by the erosion of the Issei family structure, including the loss of the paternal breadwinner role, the communal lifestyle, the removal of some fathers who were incarcerated in separate camps, and the War Relocation Authority's practice of seeking advice from English-speaking youth over their immigrant parents. Yuri recalled that Art too focused on friends and work, though he may well have spent more time than Yuri with their recently widowed mother. But Art was with his family in the Santa Anita and Jerome camps for only fourteen months before he left to work in Chicago in June 1943.¹⁵

Yuri's community service activities did not go unnoticed. Sumi (Seo) Seki of San Pedro had known Yuri only by reputation—by her service work, friendliness, and popularity. Inside Santa Anita, the seventeen-year-old Seki found Yuri (Mary) to be a source of encouragement: "We were so lonely and so disgusted. We just didn't know what to do with ourselves. But here comes Mary trying to cheer you up. She already knew, 'Don't look back, look forward. Try to do the best you can.' She would start a club and get you going. Then you'd forget about that loneliness."¹⁶

The group that helped to ease Seki's loneliness was Yuri's Sunday school class of teenage girls, self-named the Crusaders. Like other

organizations, the Crusaders met under the grandstands previously filled with horse-racing spectators. Yuri's class was unique in organizing a letter-writing campaign to Nisei soldiers. One of the Crusaders, Rinko Shimasaki, wrote a brief history of the group in August 1942: "The Crusader Club originally began with just five eager girls and a very capable advisor. The group was originally a Sunday School class at the Santa Anita Assembly Center. These girls wanted to do something in the way of service so they organized a club called 'The Crusaders.' This was a voluntary club open to all girls." Yuri's memories of the Crusaders, relayed more than fifty years later, coincided with Shimasaki's history: "Our class started off small, only about five or six girls, but after we started our letter writing, we grew to about ninety. They were just a terrific bunch of enthusiastic, outgoing, inquiring minds; they asked questions like: 'What do we do now?' 'What will our lives be like?' and 'What shall we focus on?' The kids wanted to do something of service. I asked, 'What do you want to do?' They felt there wasn't much they could do. Then one girl said, 'Maybe we should write to our Nisei soldiers. My brother's in the service.'" Many of the girls had a brother or relative in the service, as was Yuri's brother Peter. The Crusaders began by writing to half a dozen soldiers, but their campaign quickly expanded. Yuri recounted: "When the word got around that we were writing to our Nisei soldiers, many girls started pouring into our Sunday school class saying, 'Oh, I want to do that too because I have a brother, cousin, friend in the service.' A lot of Nisei soldiers were only eighteen or nineteen and a lot of the girls were fifteen or sixteen, and they wanted to write to a guy a few years older. Each Sunday, the girls would come with new names and addresses obtained from people in our camp." The Crusaders were soon writing to hundreds of soldiers as well as to Japanese American orphans and tuberculosis patients.¹⁷

As they left Santa Anita, the Crusaders tried to organize letter-writing campaigns at the various concentration camps to which they were dispersed. Some succeeded in establishing Crusader groups, including the camps at Poston, Arizona; Heart Mountain, Wyoming; Topaz, Utah; and Rohwer, Arkansas. That Shimasaki attributed the inability to establish Crusader groups at every concentration camp to the "lack of advisors" hints at the important role Yuri played in organizing the letter-writing campaign. Yuri got people excited about writing letters, gathered names and addresses of soldiers, wrote form let-

ters and poetry that the teenage Crusaders could copy, wrote countless personal letters, and contributed money to cover postage and other expenses; in short, she provided leadership to this campaign. Predictably enough, the camp to which Yuri was sent—Jerome, Arkansas—had the largest Crusader group. As is typical of Yuri today, she did not exert a controlling leadership style with the Crusaders, but rather led by example through her hard work, dedication, and enthusiasm. "The Crusader group from each camp became autonomous," recalled Yuri. "Because we had so many GIs' names, it was too hard to coordinate our efforts." Still the various Crusader groups did send greetings to one another and shared information about their activities.¹⁸

As more and more internees of varying ages expressed interest in the letter-writing campaign, Yuri organized the junior high schoolers into the Junior Crusaders and the grammar school kids into the Junior Junior Crusaders. Yuri recounted: "The young ones loved to use their crayons to spice up the cards with their artwork. We gave the older teenage girls a list of addresses to write on the postcards because their handwriting was neater." In time, adults also got involved. Yuri said, "Everyone on my block was so supportive, even my mother got into it." Mrs. Nakahara wrote letters to the soldiers and also assisted Yuri in meticulously recording the names and addresses of each soldier. They were soon sending cards five times a year, at Valentine's, Easter, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas/New Year's. The following "Thanksgiving Greeting," reprinted in part, is representative of the poetry that was handwritten or typed and copied and sent to hundreds of soldiers. Although the author is not identified, the poetry style and use of shortened words (e.g., "thru") closely match Yuri's writings:

*And as the days grow nearer to
that great Thanksgiving Day,
We cannot help but think of you,
And try but to convey
That we are grateful for the "stuff"
That Nisei boys like you
Have shown thru your endeavors
To see your duties thru.*¹⁹

In time, the Crusaders and soldiers began writing personal letters to one another. The Crusaders relayed news about camp life, provided

words of encouragement, and at times, sent chocolate candies, dried shrimp, and other goodies, particularly at Christmastime. The letters from the soldiers contained information about military life and news about the war. In one letter, Pvt. Bill Kochiyama explained everyday life, including what they ate and how they got free cigarettes. Yuri printed excerpts from the soldiers' letters in her column, "Nisei in Khaki," published in the Jerome camp newspaper, the *Denson Tribune*. One soldier expressed his appreciation for letters from the Crusaders: "That note came at an opportune moment, in the midst of our fighting somewhere in Italy and to think that you are all back of us and boosting, means a terrible lot to us." Other soldiers' letters conveyed how the connectedness to family and community enhanced their sense of patriotic duty: "Sure, we may grumble and gripe to ourselves at times, but we know that the status of our families back home in Hawaii, as well as you people on the mainland, depends a great deal on our showing here, so we take it and we like it," and "You can rest assured that with all your backing we won't fail you and the public in any way."²⁰

The theme of American patriotism runs through the words of the soldiers and Crusaders. Some may question how the Nisei could exhibit such loyalty to a country that unconstitutionally imprisoned their families and for years before that had discriminated against their community. But it was not unusual for a minority group to respond to racism by trying to assimilate into U.S. society, and most Americans of diverse backgrounds saw the war as a popular and just campaign. It is also important to recognize that some Japanese Americans protested their incarceration, just as some had resisted labor exploitation and race discrimination for decades preceding World War II. Still, the majority of Japanese Americans complied with the government's evacuation orders.²¹

There are a number of reasons for this accommodationist stance. Virtually every sector of American society, including the president, Congress, Supreme Court, military, mainstream media, and agribusiness, sanctioned the forced removal of Japanese Americans. The Issei, as immigrants ineligible for U.S. citizenship, were in a vulnerable position and lacked political power. Also, the arrests of Issei leaders immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, left the Nisei, most of whom were young and relatively inexperienced, to provide

direction in a period of crisis. Into this leadership vacuum stepped the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), a middle-class Nisei group that advocated cooperation with the U.S. government as a means of demonstrating patriotism. This view is exemplified in the words of JACL leader James Sakamoto: "Loyalty is shown by obedience to the laws, and we can best prove our loyalty by obeying the orders of those in authority." It was not just the JACL who accepted the notion of law and order. As Jere Takahashi observed, "Many Nisei who were interned said that their fellow Nisei generally accepted what Max Weber called legal-rational authority—respecting the validity of legal statutes and rational rules of behavior." In a period before the social movements of the 1960s promoted the questioning of authority, most Americans, including the Nisei, believed that the law was right. "Before [the war], everybody was a law abiding citizen. . . . Nobody including Whites questioned the 'status quo' and the authority of the FBI and military," explained one Nisei to Takahashi.²²

Many of the Crusaders matured inside the camps through the process of corresponding with Nisei soldiers. Crusader Dollie (Nagai) Fukawa recalled that a letter she had written was returned with the word "deceased" across the envelope. The realities of life and death became much clearer to the Nisei, to those fighting in the war and those supporting the soldiers. With each GI death, Yuri would have had apprehensions about the safety of her brother Peter and later of her fiancé, Bill Kochiyama. This was another aspect of her growing up, of not living within the sterile cocoon of her hometown.²³

Yuri not only spent her time and energy on the letter-writing campaign, she also contributed her monthly salary:

What we did was send postcards to the Nisei GIs. Postcards cost only a penny each, so my monthly wage of eight dollars could buy eight hundred postcards. We didn't have to pay rent or buy food, so I really didn't need any of the eight dollars. And it certainly went to good use. We didn't start writing letters and needing money for envelopes for a couple of years. Some internees gave half their paychecks—that's four hundred more postcards. The soldiers themselves started donating money for stamps and crayons for the kids. My brother in the service sent me money for stamps.²⁴

In accordance with filial piety, Peter Nakahara sent the majority of his eighteen-dollar monthly wages to his family, withholding only four dollars to buy his favorite beverage, Coca-Cola. Peter and Yuri both acknowledge that this money, at least a good part of it, was being used to support the Crusaders' activities. Although Peter had not intended for his GI wages to be routed for this purpose, he was indifferent as to how the money was used. What was important to him was that he supported his family. Peter said: "At first I was giving the money to my mother. I don't know what she used it for. She might have turned it over to Yuri. I didn't care. It was up to her how she wanted to use that money. [At some point] I must have started sending money to Yuri for the Crusaders when I was overseas." Peter was among the first GIs to receive a Crusader card in those early days when the Crusaders knew few Nisei soldiers. He recalled that their letters wishing him well, inquiring about his health, and informing him about camp life helped to lift his spirits during his overseas tour.²⁵

The campaign grew as internees gave the Crusaders the names of more and more Nisei soldiers. Yuri explained: "At first we got them one by one through word of mouth. After we started the Nisei USO [United Service Organizations] in Jerome, the 442nd guys were coming to our USO, one, two, or three busloads every week. We hurriedly jotted down the names of every soldier that came through and even tried to obtain the names of their friends in other platoons. We even started to canvas various blocks, asking the head of the block for names of families who had members in the American service." What is amazing is that in eighteen months, in Jerome alone, the Crusaders and their supporters were writing to, according to Yuri, an astonishing thirteen thousand Nisei soldiers. The figure comes from the compilation of names and addresses she and her mother recorded for each incoming and outgoing letter. This letter-writing campaign served as a training ground for organizing. Yuri learned how to involve volunteers in a project, motivate others, and attend to details; she also experienced the power of collective effort. Years later, she would apply these same skills in her political work.²⁶

It is not surprising that Yuri's major service activity would take the form of letter writing. Inside the camps, correspondence became a critical means for internees to maintain contact with the outside world, but even more so for Yuri. She regularly skipped seeing mov-

ies and hanging out with friends so that she could write to her hometown friends or Nisei soldiers. Although Yuri had a history of boosting morale through letters and poems, it was in Santa Anita that she experienced firsthand the potent and uplifting impact of receiving letters: "There was mail for me. . . . Gosh! I was so happy. . . . I was just overcome. . . . I opened up Dorothy Hurley's letter first. She had sent Friday's sport pages and a note with it. Tears just came to my eyes. Letters can really bring happiness." "People said the two things you looked forward to were meals and mail. And maybe the other kind of 'male' too," remarked Yuri. Other young internees placed a similar importance on correspondence with hometown friends but many of their friends never wrote back. Sumi (Seo) Seki recounted: "You don't know the loneliness when you were in camp. You think you had friends back home, so you'd write them a postcard, but they never answered. But Mary, everyone was writing to her. I'd get so jealous. It was only years later that I found out that the postman had told them, 'If you write to [Seki], you're helping the enemy.'" Particularly for those in confined situations, Yuri observed, "It makes you think how happy, then, a soldier must become when he receives letters at some camp hundreds of miles from his home." A couple of decades later, these experiences motivated her writing to political prisoners.²⁷

Yuri's letter writing also reflected her strong Christian beliefs. Many of the Crusaders' notes contained Christian themes, as did this Easter message, copied and sent to many Nisei soldiers:

*May Easter seep within you
And give you strength to dare.
For when our Lord and Savior
Descended to the sky,
He left in body only,
His spirit is still high.*²⁸

Yuri's Christian beliefs motivated her community service: "At the time, being Christian really meant a lot to me. It meant that we were to fulfill the Gospel mission to be of service to our fellow human beings. The Christian messages also gave me inspiration and hope." The following excerpt from a creed written by Yuri in 1939 explains her life philosophy:

I will keep in mind first, that "what I am will speak louder than what I say." Therefore I will strive to live in such a way that what I do, how I think and what I say, will inspire them in a Christian faith [rather] than to destroy it. . . . I will try to make the girls realize, that no matter how much Bible Text-book learning and memorizing they may do, they must LIVE the life of a Christian, not merely STUDY it. They must be thoughtful and considerate of the feelings of others, be understanding of others' way of life; kindly to everyone, not just to a selected few; honest with themselves as well as with others; generous in what they possess; courageous when no one is about; and in short, "do unto others as they would have others do unto them."²⁹

"Mary's classes were wonderful," recalled Dollie (Nagai) Fukawa. "Everyone loved it. She didn't talk about the Bible. I don't know if we even opened the Bible. What she did was relate biblical concepts to how to live our lives as good Christians. She really made us believe in God. This was very important to me given all we went through. Mary also made us feel like life was not a waste of time, that every day counted. She kept us going, that we can each live up to our potential even in difficult times." While Yuri may not have taught in a traditional manner, her teachings were not merely generically humanitarian; they had a Christian base. She had attended weekly Bible studies back in San Pedro. And Fukawa herself noted that to this day when she gets frightened, she comforts herself by reciting the twenty-third psalm—a passage she attributes to having learned in Yuri's Sunday school class. Nonetheless, the primary lesson Yuri instilled in her students was to treat others humanely and to make the best of any situation. She continues to draw inspiration in times of hardship from a saying she learned during World War II: "When the great American evangelist E. Stanley Jones came to Santa Anita [during his tour of all the assembly centers], he said, 'It's not so important what happens to you as what happens *inside* you and what you do about it.'"³⁰

Living inside the Santa Anita Assembly Center, with its daily reminders of racial discrimination, posed a challenge to Yuri's color-blind worldview. For the first time, she was being forced to recognize her own racial identity, to see herself not just as an individual but as a member

of a targeted group. As it became increasingly difficult to deny discriminatory treatment, her philosophy gradually transformed into a racialized worldview. Yet it would take another two decades before Yuri developed a political understanding of the significance of race and racism in U.S. society.³¹

On her second day at Santa Anita, Yuri obtained a job as a nurse's aide after hearing an announcement over the loudspeaker. This experience contradicted some of her youthful naïveté and helped her mature as a person. Yuri observed: "Finally, I'm learning a few things I should have learned earlier—to be able to care for people in ill health. I didn't know what nursing really was. I had such a childish conception. I saw only the glamorized and clean side . . . women in neat white uniforms taking temperatures, reading to little boys and girls, feeding children. . . . I forgot to realize, a sick patient can't move . . . or even speak . . . that patients must always be kept clean everywhere or bed sores will result." She filled numerous pages in her diary with these new experiences: "For the first time in my life I got to ride on an ambulance, something I had been wanting to do since joining WADCA in San Pedro." Also, "I had the opportunity to observe the birth of a baby."³²

Although Yuri does not say so, it is possible that the chronic health problems of her father and older brother motivated her to seek a job in the health field. She had been unable to help her father, but perhaps she could help others. Watching that birth may have been a helpful reminder that death, like life, is part of a natural cycle. As Yuri gained an understanding about the suffering of the sick, she developed a more sympathetic understanding toward the sick in her own family, and her conflictual relationship with Art began to change.³³

Yuri admired the health professionals working at the camp hospital. "Dr. Norman Kobayashi headed a dedicated staff that went for months without anyone having a day off from a grueling schedule where each physician served an average of twelve hours per day, seven days a week, with twenty-four hour duty every fifth day," explained Anthony Lehman in his study of the Santa Anita Assembly Center. Yuri proudly relayed that two doctors came from her hometown, Drs. Abe and Fujikawa, whose sister is the artist, Gyo Fujikawa. The doctor Yuri most admired was a woman, Dr. Shigekawa: "Her conscientiousness as a health-care professional was extraordinary. Besides her

regular hours at the camp hospital, she went on house calls with the aid of an ambulance driver and a medical aide. I understand that years later, after the war, she opened a Japanese American Hospital in East Los Angeles." While internee wages were extremely low—sixteen to nineteen dollars per month for professionals, twelve dollars for skilled labor, and eight dollars for unskilled, according to Yuri—this did not bother Yuri, for whom money held little interest. But after listening to her coworkers talk, she noted: "I see now how important money can be and is. I used to think making money was for luxury, but I see now for many people, it is for *existence*. I also realize what an easy life I led."³⁴

It was through participating in many lengthy conversations, or more accurately, listening to the opinions of older internees, that Yuri began to change her outlook. As much as she struggled to hold on to her old color-blind philosophy, she also exhibited an openness to new perspectives. Six weeks after entering Santa Anita, in mid-May 1942, she wrote in her diary: "For the past hour and a half, I've been listening to . . . a conversation of opinions which is undoubtedly the voice of the majority of the people here. I'm slowly coming to understand the problems of the Japanese people; problems I never gave much thought to. . . . The evacuation itself . . . the property and homes that had to be sold at such disadvantageous costs; the unfair dealings by those who were prejudiced; the plans and hopes that are now shattered; . . . the darkness of the future to look forward to . . . and the freedom that is now limited." The ambivalent feelings Yuri experienced as she vacillated between her color-blind and her emerging racial worldviews is evident in her diary entry, recorded the next day: "It's strange. I never felt like this before. In fact, I never gave much thought to the Japanese people. I never thought of myself as being a part of a nation so prejudiced [against]. . . . [I never] thought of people according to their race, but just that they were individuals. I want to keep thinking that way; that we're all Americans here, if we feel it in our hearts; that we're all individuals." This revelation, that one could be discriminated against because of one's race—experienced before, but now in a more meaningful way—was deeply disturbing to Yuri: "Didn't write for three days because of the things that were on my mind. I didn't want my moodiness to write anything I would later regret. . . . I still want to abide by my own creed . . . never to write when my own feelings are rushed, because it is then that it is too easy to hurt someone else."³⁵

Yuri's growing awareness of discrimination was reinforced by experiences taking place inside the "assembly center." One impactful event involved a police raid in August 1942, as documented in Yuri's diary:

Huge excitement!!! Some two hundred policemen from Pomona, unexpectedly came into the center and began a unit-to-unit search, confiscating stoves, knives, scissors, kitchen equipment, hand-tools, and even hair curlers, knitting needles, jewelry and money. Campers were suddenly thrown into hysteria—and then—to anger. Many of the locked units were broken into—and trunks carried out without the occupants knowing of what was taking place. . . . Many reported that even diaries were taken. . . . In one instance, a young girl who was sick in bed had her heating pad taken while in use. Many claimed their money had disappeared after the policemen left the units.

About 2:00 in the afternoon, the excitement reached its height when a hysterical mob of men and boys (numbering over 1,000) ganged up on a Korean [who was half Japanese] accused of being a stool pigeon. Several policemen were also mobbed. . . . Mob hysteria turned into a regular free-for-all riot. The army then took the matter into hand by sending in the soldiers on armored cars. Bayonets, machine guns, and tear-gas bombs ready, the soldiers rode through the camp, poised for action. Never saw anything like this before.³⁶

This incident must have heightened Yuri's feelings of vulnerability as an inmate inside Santa Anita and may have triggered some questioning about the role of the police. But, as with the police who detained her for posting alumni flyers in San Pedro, she was able to attribute this to a few bad apples rather than to the function of the police in a class-stratified society. This "few bad apples" explanation enabled her to maintain the belief that American institutions upheld the professed values of democracy and fairness. It also enabled her to support the U.S. military, which Yuri would later contend plays a similar role to that of the police in serving and protecting the interests of the ruling class and in suppressing dissent. While this incident was imprinted in Yuri's memory, at the time she was more absorbed in her own activities. As would be expected of an apolitical young person, when Santa Anita returned to normal functioning four days after the police

riot, Yuri's concerns were of a more personal nature. "Missed the mail service most of all," she wrote in her diary.³⁷

One other incident significantly impacted Yuri's understanding of prejudice and discrimination, perhaps because Yuri, working as a nurse's aide, could empathize with this woman. In September 1942, a friend told her about a young Nisei woman who had applied to fourteen nursing schools, but was rejected from all because of her racial background. Yuri responded with shock: "Could hardly believe that public sentiment could be so strong against Japanese Americans." This event was so noteworthy to Yuri that she recorded portions of each of the fourteen letters in her diary. A letter from a hospital in Idaho reflected the sentiment of the other rejection letters: "We are very sorry to tell you that we are not permitted to take Japanese girls in training for the duration of the war. Our staff, sisters, and nurses haven't anything against your people, but public sentiment is such that we dare not take that chance."³⁸

For Yuri to have spent so much time recording these letters probably helped her sort through her own feelings about being part of a targeted group. Still, the process of replacing her color-blind worldview with a race-conscious one was precarious and uneven. Not only did she acknowledge "clinging to the faith I once had," she also wrote, almost unbelievably, "But not until I myself actually come up against prejudice and discrimination will I really understand the problems of the Nisei."³⁹ It appears that Yuri minimized racism against herself, even as she was beginning to recognize the race problem in her community. It was scary to think that America might not be that land of "justice and liberty for all" as promised in the Pledge of Allegiance, especially at a time when that creed gave her hope that she too could be accepted on an equal footing into the only society she knew. Still, her experiences with race discrimination and the cogent perspectives of more mature internees were having an effect. A couple of days after recording the nursing school rejection letters, she wrote in her diary:

After listening to Maruyama, just had to write of the many things that are now racing through my mind. I'm getting to see her side of the story—and know darn well she knows what she's talking about. I still believe in my own way, clinging to the faith

I once had. Yet her statements were the feeling of perhaps a good three-fourths of the people here and not just statements made from bitterness, but from summarizing actuality.

Yes, it's true that the Japanese people from the time they came here have had raw deals, one after the other. And it's true that they've tried to fight for equality in chances for good positions, but lost out because of racial prejudice. Yet the Isseis saw to it that their children would be educated. Sacrifice meant nothing to them, and this thru the span of twenty and thirty years. . . . [The Nisei] made good grades in school. . . . Yet what happened when they got into the outside world? Racial prejudice and discrimination told them that the school world and the work world were two different hemispheres; that what Caucasian teachers tried to instill in every student was only meant for the Caucasians; that the black and orientals would be looked down upon; that obstacles would be many.⁴⁰

That Yuri, at least at the moment of her writing, would place Japanese in the same category as Blacks in the racial hierarchy, and both in contrast to Whites, was a marked change from her earlier assimilationist views. At some level, she was acknowledging the system of White supremacy. This newfound awareness of racism led her to want to struggle for justice, "even if it's just writing letters."

And how natural then, that bitterness seeped into the hearts of the great percentage of Niseis long before the war broke out. . . . As I listened to [Maruyama], I'm sure something gripped me and touched me in such a way that I feel I want to fight, shoulder to shoulder with every Nisei for the right to the same opportunity as the Caucasian.⁴¹

As Yuri wrestled to integrate an increasingly racialized view of the world with her need to believe in American equality, she touched on a way to reconcile these seemingly contradictory views. Race discrimination existed, but as an aberrant glitch in a society committed to "liberty and justice for all." Such irregularities could be eradicated through reforms to the system. Through struggle, Japanese Americans, at least the American-born ones, could obtain "the same opportunity as the

Caucasian." These words are the earliest signs of Yuri's later development into a civil rights activist.⁴²

After several months in "assembly centers," the internees were again moved to one of ten more permanent concentration camps, located in the desert, swamps, or mountainous wastelands of Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Arkansas, and eastern California. "There, way out in no-man's land, invisible to mainstream America, the Japanese survived dust-storms, sand-storms, torrid summers, and freezing winters," said Yuri. Yuri and her mother left by train on October 12, 1942, and arrived in Jerome on October 16; Art, traveling on a different train, arrived three days later. By this time, most Santa Anita internees had been dispersed to different concentration camps such as Gila and Poston in Arizona and Heart Mountain in Wyoming. The first group left in August. As one of the last groups to depart, Yuri had to endure separating from more friends, not knowing whether she would see them again: "It was sad to see so many friends leave, especially after having just gotten reacquainted or having met new friends. We attended so many going-away parties and had so many tearful farewells." This poem, written by Yuri the night before she left, reveals her need to emphasize the positive:

*For each in turn must leave this camp
And part with those now near
And yet we'll take a bit of all
The things we once held dear. . . .
Though years and distance lies between
And paths may never cross
The richness of our memories
Will never bring a loss.*⁴³

Jerome and Rohwer, twenty miles away, were the only concentration camps in the South, in the swamplands of southeastern Arkansas. Racism directed against Black people transferred to the Japanese when they arrived in large numbers. The historian Linda Sue Parker has observed: "The social attitudes in Southeastern Arkansas were that of the Deep South. . . . Racism in Arkansas toward the Japanese was greater than that displayed in the other states." At their peak, Jerome and Rohwer each housed approximately 8,500 internees, a huge jump

from the previous statewide population of three Japanese Americans. Although every governor, with the exception of Ralph L. Carr of Colorado, objected to relocating Japanese Americans to their state, the governor of Arkansas expressed particularly vehement protest. For example, from 1942 until 1944, Governor Homer Adkins refused to allow the Japanese to work, relocate, or attend college in Arkansas outside of the concentration camps. There was also strong public fervor against Japanese Americans. The Arkansas public, in general, complained that internees were being coddled in the concentration camps. Some complained that the Japanese Americans ate extravagant food, led leisurely lives, and lived off the government. These accusations prompted several investigations by politicians and journalists, all of whom found no evidence of special treatment. These charges were also countered by Dillon Myer, War Relocation Authority director, who noted that the internees' food ration was the equivalent of Army "B" rations, costing forty-five cents or less per day. Partly as a result of Arkansas hostility, after the West Coast reopened to the Japanese, only 140 of the 17,000 internees in Jerome and Rohwer chose to set up residence in Arkansas.⁴⁴

To those inside the camp, Jerome was similar to Santa Anita in many ways. Communal living was the norm; each block had a mess hall, laundry facilities, bathhouse, and latrine. This meant waiting in long lines to eat, do laundry, even go to the bathroom. As an enclosed community, the camp also had a school, a hospital, Christian churches and Buddhist temples, recreation centers, and an athletic field. In Jerome, Yuri continued to teach Sunday school; to work with the Crusaders, the Junior Crusaders, and the Junior Junior Crusaders; and to supervise a girls' youth group called Twixteens. Children under eighteen were required to attend school, and adults eighteen and over were required to work. So, in addition to her volunteer activities, Yuri, now age twenty-one, worked full-time, first as a block mother, then as a block recreation leader, and finally as a waitress in the mess hall. She especially enjoyed her role as a block mother, which provided an opportunity to nurture children: "I loved it because I got to work with children and make formula for the babies. Whenever anyone was sick, they called us. I mean, we weren't doctors or nurses or anything, but if it was fairly minor, then the block mother would take their temperature and report it." Although War Relocation Authority records

indicate her monthly wage was twelve or sixteen dollars, depending on the job, Yuri remembers receiving eight dollars per month, the same as in Santa Anita.⁴⁵

Art, who had graduated with honors from UC Berkeley, worked as a schoolteacher in Jerome, as did other Nisei who had at least two years of college. In contrast to mainstream America, the concentration camps provided a space for Japanese Americans to work in jobs that matched their skills, training, and educational attainment. In the absence of race discrimination in hiring, those trained as doctors and nurses worked in the hospitals; others worked as social workers, teachers, cultural workers, and firefighters. Still others worked in the post office, in the mess hall as waitresses or kitchen crew, as custodians, as clerical workers, and in the war effort making camouflage nets.⁴⁶

In addition to paid work, everyone had to contribute to running the camp. During the freezing Arkansas winters, only the potbelly stove in each barracks kept the internees warm. Yuri relayed how every able-bodied man had to chop down trees for firewood, while women sawed or hacked the logs into usable sections and children counted and distributed the pieces. People helped dredge out a drainage system around the barracks. And women sewed curtains for the partitionless public restrooms so that there could be some privacy. What Yuri admired about the Japanese was their ingenuity and their ability to turn a negative situation into a positive one:

Though we lived in dismal barracks, men would build beautiful pieces of furniture out of the most useless-looking piece of driftwood. Women would order pieces of material from Montgomery Ward mail-order catalogues and create curtains to partition the rooms, and make bedspreads and tablecloths to brighten up our living quarters. These little touches helped to make this wasteland more like a home. Issei women as well as men planted flowers in front of their barracks, and we enjoyed seeing the bleakness of camp bloom with flowers and greenery. A few Issei women also brought their indigenous Japanese musical instruments like the koto and shamisen and provided entertainment at the Issei events and offered music lessons. Some also taught Japanese *odori* or *nanyuabushi* or *shigin* [traditional dancing]. We learned soon enough that our strongest weapons to sustain

ourselves were teamwork, a cooperative spirit, ingenuity, and concern for others.⁴⁷

In the camps, Yuri gained ethnic pride as she came to admire many qualities displayed by Japanese Americans:

One thing I want to say, I feel that going to camp actually is where for the first time I came to know my own people. And in doing so, I started, finally, to see myself as a Japanese American. In San Pedro, I loved the mixing of people, but then living comfortably in a White working-class area, I didn't have a sense of how Japanese Americans lived, those living on farms and in fishing areas. Before I never thought about being proud of being Japanese because no one chooses their background. But in camp, all of a sudden, I'm interacting with and talking to only Japanese every day. I started to learn about my own people. There's much to admire. They work so hard. And do things, even little things such as serving tea and crackers, with such artistry. In camp, under duress, the best and worst come out. I think it was mostly their strengths that came out. I was really proud to be Japanese.⁴⁸

The individuals she respected most exemplified courage, fortitude through adversity, caring for humanity, and community building. Yuri credits Mary Tsukamoto, whom she calls "one of the most outstanding women in Jerome," with organizing a variety of activities for adults and children to keep up their spirits and occupy their time: "She was afflicted with arthritis . . . was undergoing constant pains. Yet, this woman, almost single-handedly, with tremendous drive and ebullience, managed to organize the PTA, Sunday school, teenage clubs, community activities, and the USO." Tsukamoto also coordinated the numerous girls' clubs, including the YWCA, business and professional women and students, and USO hostesses, all while carrying on her responsibilities as wife and young mother. Yuri said with admiration: "To have watched her, as she spoke with different age groups and interests, arousing, encouraging, involving . . . was something beautiful to observe." Tsukamoto later documented these camp experiences in her book, *We the People: A Story of Internment in America*.⁴⁹

To this day, Yuri regularly tells people about Peter Kondo, a patient

in the Santa Anita Assembly Center hospital who was paralyzed from a 1934 car accident: "Peter Kondo, was at first, just another patient in the Men's Ward of the hospital. . . . He was a paralytic, who was totally immobilized. But Peter Kondo had a perennial cheerfulness and a dynamic personality that transcended his helplessness. He was the inspiration of the Ward F, and as such, his influence was contagious. Male patients coming into that ward, seeing his condition would never complain about anything, especially after hearing that Peter Kondo was once one of the greatest Nisei baseball players. He never talked about 'what was,' rather he showed us 'what could be.'"⁵⁰

In addition, Yuri appreciated the people outside her community who supported the Japanese Americans despite potential sacrifices to their financial standing and social status:

After the Japanese were moved out, Mr. and Mrs. Swearinger took it upon themselves to help the Japanese tuberculosis patients left at Olive View Sanitarium in Los Angeles. On their monthly visits, they took fresh fish and other food, equipment for handwork, and newspapers and magazines for the hospital inmates. A young ten-year-old boy from California traveled alone all the way to Arkansas to visit a school friend in the Jerome concentration camp. The little red-headed youngster spent a week with the Japanese family, and was one of the few outsiders to briefly glimpse wartime camp life. Also, a Mexican teenager from Los Angeles went to camp with a Japanese American family and actually lived there for two years, undergoing the same privations and limited life.⁵¹

The people and activities that Yuri remembers and the stories she relays reflect her values. She most admired the qualities of fortitude through adversity, humility, and a focus on the well-being of others. It is these qualities that formed the basis of her humanitarian ethics, her community service, and her later political activism.

One of the major crises that hit all the concentration camps was caused by the loyalty registration. The War Relocation Authority (WRA), the civilian agency managing the concentration camps, wanted to determine the loyalty of Japanese Americans in order to permit the so-called loyal ones to work outside the camps. The U.S. Army also

wanted to assess their loyalty to form a voluntary all-Nisei combat unit. In February 1943, the WRA administered a questionnaire called the "Application for Leave Clearance" to all adult internees. Two questions were particularly troubling. Question 27 asked if they were willing to serve in combat duty wherever ordered, and question 28, considered the key loyalty question, asked them to swear allegiance to the United States and to forswear allegiance to Japan. It was clear the U.S. government had not put much thought into developing the questions and the questionnaire caused problems in every camp. The Issei were caught in a dilemma. If they answered no to question 28, they would be considered disloyal to the country where they had lived most of their lives; but if they answered yes, they would become stateless people, given that the U.S. government denied them the right to naturalized citizenship on racial grounds. Some Nisei thought answering yes to question 28 might be misinterpreted to mean they previously held allegiance to Japan, a country most had never seen. Most internees were worried that if family members answered the questions in dissimilar ways, the family would be separated. Consequently, people's responses to these two questions had little to do with their feelings of loyalty to the United States. Besides, this was an absurd way to test loyalty. What they put on paper meant little compared to their actions. The majority of Japanese Americans professed and enacted strong patriotism. Even those who expressed anti-American sentiment hardly posed a threat to national security; not a single Japanese American was found to have committed sabotage, espionage, or fifth-column activities against the U.S. government.⁵²

Along with the majority of internees, Yuri, her mother, and her brother answered both questions affirmatively. This was predictable enough given the Nakahara family's patriotic and accommodationist stance. In time, Art and Yuri became part of the mass exodus of so-called loyals, who were allowed to leave camp to work. The jobs available to Japanese Americans consisted mainly of menial labor, seasonal farmwork, domestic services, or factory work. By late 1944, after thirty-six thousand internees had left, the concentration camps were transformed into settlements for the elderly and the young. But what affected Yuri most immediately was that those who answered no to question 28 were transferred to the Tule Lake concentration camp in northern California: "For some reason, a lot of families in

Block 3 [where Yuri lived] left for Tule Lake, and many of the children had worked with the Crusaders. It was sad to be separated from our friends yet another time.”⁵³

The next major crisis in the concentration camps came in January 1944. The reinstatement of the draft for the Nisei triggered hostilities between those who advocated military service and those against it. Sometimes families were split when one son joined the army and another resisted the draft. But this conflict did not directly affect the Nakaharas. Peter was in the army, Art had tried to enlist, and Yuri and Mrs. Nakahara were supporting Nisei GIs. For Yuri, the draft reinstatement signaled an opportunity for Japanese Americans to demonstrate their loyalty to U.S. war efforts. Her support for Nisei soldiers, manifested by her zealous letter-writing campaign, expanded to include working in the USOs in Camp Jerome and in Mississippi. By contrast, in the Heart Mountain, Wyoming, concentration camp, a group of men led a campaign against the draft, arguing that holding Japanese American families behind barbed wire while asking their sons to fight for the United States was the ultimate hypocrisy. The Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee, spearheaded by Kiyoshi Okamoto and Frank Emi, encouraged young Nisei men to resist being conscripted into the U.S. Army until their families' civil liberties were restored. In Heart Mountain, the seven most visible leaders of the Fair Play Committee, including Okamoto and Emi, were arrested, tried using a Japanese American informant's perjured testimony, and given four-year prison sentences. Also arrested was James Omura, a Nisei journalist who printed material about the Fair Play Committee's draft resistance movement in the Denver Japanese American newspaper, the *Rocky Shimpo*. Although acquitted on the basis of freedom of the press, Omura was blackballed from newspaper jobs and ostracized by some in the Japanese American community, especially the leaders of the ultrapatriotic Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). In addition, 85 men from Heart Mountain and 230 from other camps were convicted of noncompliance with the draft. Although the number of resisters pales in comparison to those who obeyed the draft orders, numbers alone fail to capture the significance of this act of civil disobedience. Douglas Nelson observed: "Given the repressive tactics of the administration and the very small likelihood of achieving any practical results, the fact that one out of every nine draft-age Nisei

[in Heart Mountain] chose to face jail rather than take pre-induction physical examinations is remarkable." Today, like many other Japanese Americans, Yuri admires both stances, asserting that it took tremendous courage to fight in the war as well as to resist the draft.⁵⁴

In other camps, notably Manzanar and Poston, violence broke out, often between JACL leaders and those opposed to JACL's policy of "constructive cooperation" with the U.S. government. Back then, Yuri had not heard about conflicts in other camps, but she remembered an incident of violence that occurred in Jerome:

A group of ten to twenty Kibeis attacked Rev. John Yamazaki and Dr. Thomas Yatabe, who was past president of the National JACL. Rev. Yamazaki and Dr. Yatabe were very pro-America and encouraged Nisei to volunteer for military service. The Kibeis, however, felt that serving in the American army was a betrayal to Japan. One of the Kibei groups took Rev. Yamazaki out into the forest and before he could take his glasses off, started beating him. He was a frail, elderly person who had been hospitalized in Santa Anita before being sent to Jerome. Our family was very upset. . . . This Kibei group also beat up Dr. Yatabe, a patriotic JACL leader. The way they lay in waiting for Dr. Yatabe was well organized. They had their people waiting in every hospital corridor. I think they locked the doors and waited for Dr. Yatabe to come in. There was no one there who could have helped him. He was just beaten.

Yuri condemned these acts of violence, then and today, despite changes in her political views: "I thought it was terrible, and still do today. These were cowardly acts. My feelings of distress and compassion for the victims have nothing to do with which side you're on. People should have the right to make their choices of loyalty."⁵⁵

Remembering the pledge she made in Santa Anita to support Nisei soldiers, Yuri spent most of her free time writing to GIs and working in Jerome's makeshift USO. Some thirty-three thousand Japanese Americans, including approximately one hundred women, served in the U.S. military during World War II. The irony was that they served their country despite its racist policies against the Japanese Americans. Not only were their families imprisoned in concentration

camps under armed guard; the Nisei GIs were themselves relegated to racially segregated combat units. In throwing together men based on their racial ancestry, the military failed to recognize the cultural differences between the Nisei from Hawaii and the U.S. mainland. The mainland soldiers called Hawaii men "Buddhaheads" because they were closely connected to their Japanese cultural roots. And the soldiers from Hawaii called the mainlanders "kotonks"—"a term connoting the sound of an empty coconut hitting the ground . . . referring to an empty head." Thelma Chang explained: "The California boys . . . came in with their 'pachuko' haircuts (slicked back ducktail haircuts), those zoot suit jackets, those great big hats and the pants that came down just tight around the ankles. . . . They were fancy, way out dressed, and the Hawaii boys came in with their bare feet, T-shirts and pidgin English. It was like throwing two roosters in a pen together."⁵⁶

In time, as the two groups learned to work together and trust one another, the cultural differences became points of comic relief. The 100th Infantry Battalion, with its Nisei volunteers from Hawaii, and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, with its Nisei volunteers from the mainland concentration camps and Hawaii, soon merged. They were sent to Europe and given some of the hardest, most dangerous assignments, which they fulfilled with courage and determination. After Nisei soldiers liberated Bruyères, France, from German control in 1944, the villagers and their descendants built a monument to honor their Nisei rescuers. Less than two weeks after freeing Bruyères, the 100th/442nd, including Yuri's future husband's Company K, was sent on what appeared to be a suicide mission, but they succeeded in rescuing the "Lost Battalion" of 275 Texans trapped in the forest near Biffontaine, France. In what historian Roger Daniels calls "supreme irony," the Nisei soldiers also liberated the 30,000 prisoners at the Nazi death camp at Dachau in April 1945, while their own families remained behind barbed wire.⁵⁷

The men of the 100th/442nd paid a heavy price for their valor. In one month of fighting, from Bruyères to the rescue of the Lost Battalion, the 100th/442nd lost two-thirds of its troops, with casualties estimated at 2,200, including 161 deaths. In the Lost Battalion ordeal alone, the Nisei soldiers suffered more than 800 casualties, a rate three times higher than the number of men they rescued. For

suffering this high casualty rate, the 100th/442nd became the most highly decorated unit of its size in U.S. military history, earning more than 15,000 medals for a unit of 3,000 men.⁵⁸

In addition, 6,000 Nisei served with the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) in Asia and the South Pacific, interpreting Japanese communications, translating stolen military documents, interrogating Japanese POWs, and deciphering enemy codes. While most Nisei in the MIS, including Yuri's twin brother, Peter Nakahara, had to attend military language school to improve their limited Japanese and to learn military terminology, their linguistic skills were critical because few in the American military understood the Japanese language. After capturing the "Z" Plan from a downed Japanese plane, the MIS men's translations uncovered Japan's naval strategy for defending the Marianas (Guam, Saipan, and Tinian) and the Philippines against the Allied Forces. Knowing Japanese military strategy in advance, the United States was able to successfully counter Japan's military aggression in the Pacific Theater. U.S. military historians have declared the "Z" Plan the most important enemy document captured during the war. In daring feats, the Nisei intelligence men crept within hearing distance of Japanese troops to learn of their plans. One MIS man even swam across a river in Burma to a Japanese-controlled area and by impersonating a Japanese officer, commanded the soldiers to surrender. The men of the MIS have been credited with shortening the war by two years.⁵⁹

The Nisei soldiers of the 100th/442nd in Europe and the MIS in East Asia fought courageously, becoming distinguished for unprecedented military achievements. Yuri believes that the valiant efforts of the Nisei soldiers were instrumental in changing mainstream America's views toward the Japanese and opening opportunities for later generations of Japanese Americans. The superior performance of the Nisei soldiers was not lost on the War Relocation Authority and the Office of War Information, who championed their achievements, as well as their fundamentally middle-class aspirations and behaviors, in a postwar propaganda campaign designed to create a positive image of Japanese Americans and facilitate their resettlement. Roger Daniels contends that "although the term 'model minority' was not coined until 1966, the seeds of the concept were planted in the waning years of World War II."⁶⁰

In Jerome, Yuri, then twenty-two years old, applied her journalism

experience to writing a column, "Nisei in Khaki," which appeared in each issue of the camp newspaper, the *Denson Tribune*, published twice per week by the War Relocation Authority. Through her writing, she worked to inform the camp residents about conditions facing the Nisei soldiers, to report excerpts from soldiers' letters, to boost the morale of soldiers and internees, and to address issues of concern to Japanese American soldiers. One of the themes that ran through her articles was that of nondiscriminatory treatment of soldiers, regardless of their military ranking, their perceived degree of patriotism, and any cultural differences. "A month or so ago," wrote Yuri, "a visiting soldier wearing a service unit insignia was stopped by a Center resident and tagged a 'sissy' for being under the service command and not in the combat team. . . . He is one of hundreds of other nisei boys who . . . had high hopes of going across to convey his loyalty, but who . . . was assigned only to tasks such as working in service clubs." Her advice to these soldiers embraced an accommodationist stance: "Let us realize that a good soldier isn't one who can just show himself well in battle, but is one who will do his duty well. . . . Our nisei service unit men may never receive recognition for the part they are playing at the moment, but they are as valuable to the army as that of any other branch of service."⁶¹

Yuri used her column to encourage readers to reach out to those in need: "Every serviceman must take back with him some little incident that he experienced on his stay here. Who knows when such memories may lower or raise that soldier's morale. And what of 'not knowing the soldier?' We need not know a person to be kind to him." Drawing from her own experiences in understanding the power of letters to the confined, she passionately urged her readers to write to the soldiers: "If some of you girls knew what letters can do for a soldier's morale, you wouldn't let one day slip by without writing some 'dog-face' a few lines." Some found Yuri's forthrightness not only unusual but downright pushy. Yet others agreed with her rationale for promoting letter writing. "I was stunned that a perfect stranger would ask me to write to GIs," recalled Dollie (Nagai) Fukawa, who was soon an enthusiastic member of the Crusaders' letter-writing campaign.⁶²

It was not unusual to find quotes from mainstream American figures in Yuri's articles. Not only did she admire the messages contained within these quotes, but given her patriotic values, she also respected

the men and women behind the words. Sports was another common theme. She wrote: "In connection with the importance of athletics in high school, General MacArthur made the following statement: 'Participation in athletics is the planting ground for character buds to grow and develop that the individuals may bear fruit on other fields in other years.'"⁶³

Shortly after the formation of the 442nd, Camp Shelby in Mississippi became the training site for the Nisei soldiers from the 100th Infantry Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team. In Mississippi, there was strong racial hatred, harassment, and violence against anyone with an Asian face, even in uniform. And though the Nisei soldiers had authorization to use the USO in Hattiesburg, they were often uncomfortable in that USO predominated by White soldiers. So the Jerome YWCA issued a call for young Nisei women to visit Camp Shelby for a weekend in June 1943. At Jerome, posted flyers read: "Girls! Let's do our part! 100 girls invited to Camp Shelby, Miss. . . . All expenses paid. All girls 18 years of age and over, get your application from Mary Sato. . . . 3 buses to be provided. One Caucasian Personnel and one Evacuee Mother will chaperone each bus." Despite the enthusiasm of the organizers, only eight girls responded to the first call. But, after repeated appeals to their patriotic and feminine duty, eighty-three girls eventually signed on. "Showing no fatigue from their long trip, the girls danced the night away with two hundred or so lucky Japanese American soldiers, selected by lot, each of whom had paid ten dollars to cover the cost of the trip," wrote Masayo Umezawa Duus.⁶⁴

After the young women visited Camp Shelby, Nisei soldiers began weekend excursions to Jerome. Unlike other soldiers who could visit their families or roam freely, the Nisei soldiers had nowhere to go when on furlough. Their families were scattered across the United States in different concentration camps or were far away in Hawaii. And those with families in Manzanar or Tule Lake, the two California concentration camps, were forbidden to visit there because the West Coast was off limits to Japanese Americans until early 1945. Thus, the only home for Nisei soldiers was the Japanese American community inside the concentration camps. Jerome and Rohwer, a fifteen-hour bus ride from Camp Shelby, were the closest. As increasing numbers of Nisei soldiers spent their weekend furloughs at the two camps, internees worked to set up services and activities for them. The Jerome YWCA staff,

particularly Mary Tsukamoto, who served as its first director, and her husband, Al, played a key role in establishing the Jerome USO.⁶⁵

The USO organized activities, especially dances, for the soldiers during their stay at Jerome. The young Nisei women worked as hostesses and dance partners, while Issei women and men served as chaperons. Yuri recalled: "There were rules like the girls had to be seventeen or over; most were between ages seventeen and twenty-five, though I guess they could be older if they wanted to be. At the end, I think the age was dropped to sixteen because younger girls wanted to go to the USO dances. I think soldiers were getting younger too. An eighteen-year-old guy would rather have a sixteen-year-old dance partner than a twenty-five-year-old one."⁶⁶

The young men in camp also supported the USO, notably by organizing baseball games between the Jerome All Stars and the Nisei soldiers' Aloha Team. Over one memorable Fourth of July weekend, baseball games were played during the day and a USO dance was held Saturday night. On Sunday morning, some four thousand people, almost half the camp population, came out to the playoff game. The Jerome All Stars became the champs, but no one cared who won. It was a friendly competition, unlike the real-life battle taking place on the war front.⁶⁷

Yuri recounted her participation in this USO:

All of Jerome really came together and supported our GIs. We had to find housing for the soldiers when they came to Jerome for their weekend visits and organize activities like the dances for them. As families left camp, the soldiers would stay in their vacated barracks. This meant lots of people were involved because every block had to let the USO group know how many units in their block were vacant. Each week one, two, or three buses came, each holding forty-five men. So we had to find a hundred or so beds scattered throughout the camp. We each had different responsibilities. Mine was to greet the soldiers when they came in and determine how many beds were needed and where they would stay. We'd look at the map of the camp to find the number of beds available at various barracks. The buses usually rolled in at 2 a.m. and the camp Niseis took the soldiers to their barracks.⁶⁸

Hearing the story in her own words, one fails to understand the central role Yuri played in the USO. USO director Mary Tsukamoto described Yuri, then Mary Nakahara, in these terms: "When the soldiers came to Jerome . . . it was Mary who met them at the gate long past midnight, welcomed them and arranged places for them to stay. . . . This one woman USO, Mary Nakahara, inspired many with her deep spiritual message and her compulsion to teach. She invoked a spirit of gladness and appreciation. A sense of values accompanied her cheery smile and her creative attempts to bring joy into the lives of so many." Masayo Umezawa Duus concurred: "Of all the girls who helped out at the USO, few were more dedicated or enthusiastic than Mary Yuri Nakahara. . . . The [Aloha] team spent only two nights there, but their memories of Camp Jerome were mingled with memories of Mary."⁶⁹

In serving others, Yuri discovered personal benefits. Working late at the Jerome USO one night, she met the man who would become her husband.