

Trying to Make a Home

Part 1

Part 2

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We arrived at Rohwer in the summer. The black tar-paper on the barracks radiated shimmering waves of heat. Our room was a bare sixteen-by-twenty-foot space with raw-wood plank floor and walls, and three windows. Just one room for my parents and us, three kids. The only pieces of furniture provided were a black pot-bellied stove and five Army cots—one for each of us.

My parents' full-time job became setting up our new life in Rohwer.

Mama began the daunting task of making a home for us. She sewed curtains from government surplus fabric and braided rugs with strips of cloth. She couldn't prepare our food because meals were served in a communal dining hall. This was hard for her—a precious personal responsibility that was taken away.

Daddy scoured the camp for scrap lumber and loose nails to make shelves and stools for us. On our journey to Rohwer, he seemed really worried about our family's uncertainty. Now, in the camp, he was coming to grips with a shared existence with many other people confronting the same hardships.

The recreation halls had activities for everyone. Many children learned to play a musical instrument for the first time. Some kids had judo lessons or took art classes. Adults took classes or practiced the ancient art of wood carving or flower arranging.

I remember going to school behind barbed wire fences. We began every morning with the Pledge of Allegiance. I could see the barbed wire fence and armed guards in towers from the schoolhouse window as I recited the words, "with liberty and justice for all."

Part 2

Trying to make a home for us was the big challenge our parents had. My mother was constantly busy. She hated the lack of privacy in our tiny barrack room and so she found some olive drab cloth of military discards and she made curtains with her sewing machine which she had smuggled into camp. Anything sharp or pointed was contraband, but she marched right past all those armed guards with her portable sewing machine wrapped in blankets and sweaters – disguised. And she made not only curtains for us, but clothes for us and then she braided rags – made them into little

rugs so that when we got out of bed we didn't have that hard splintery wood floor to walk on bare footed. And at meal times I remember people were always complaining about the food. I thought it was lunch time and I ate what they had. The big treat was Spam. That was delicious. I loved it! It was after we came out of the internment camp that my parents tried to make up for what they thought we had lost. And so we were introduced for the first time to something like sushi.

Our block became a wonderful place to explore and find things. There was a ditch that went around our block and we caught pollywogs and put them in great big, huge pickle jars. We watched them sprout legs and lose their tails and turn into frogs which was magical. We also caught ants in the big pickle jars filled with dirt and we saw them make their nest right alongside the glass. And we saw their fascinating network of tunnels and little chambers and it became a whole ant city that we saw.

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