

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

Landing Day

NO. 648 HIKIAGE DOCUMENT

Name: Tei Fujiwara .

Date of Birth: November 6, 1918 .

Hometown: 13018-ban, Suwa City,
Nagano Prefecture, Japan

Address: (before the evacuation)

House Unit #21, Government Compound #8,
Shinkyō City, Manchuria

Occupation: none .

Number of Dependents: 3 .

_____ .
Hakata Returnee Processing

Today: September 12, 1946

_____ Hakata Harbor

_____ Sept 12, 1946

Department of Welfare

Head of the Hakata Returnee Office _____

_____ .

I felt exhilarated — my second life began on September 12th when the walkway was lowered. My first steps into Japan was on shining white concrete and I remember how it hurt the soles of my bare feet. We were herded from warehouse to warehouse in a confusion of procedures, and I didn't know what was what. Finally, we were directed to a dormitory and as we walked by a fence, Masahiro and I both noticed something strange.

"Mommy, there's a Japanese lady walking over there," Masahiro said in a loud voice. She wore a silk kimono with a traditional wide *obi* belt, and like Masahiro, I was amazed. I expected all Japanese women to look like me — miserable and in tatters.

I am a Japanese woman, and the poor refugee in front of me was also a Japanese woman. But Masahiro and I were shocked to see the beautiful lady dressed in a silk kimono — she was like a different species from us. When I think about it now, I must have been a pathetic sight — barefoot and emaciated. We were taken to the dorm facilities with an oddly picturesque name, *Matsubara-ryo* — 'the dorm with pine trees.' There were neat rows of temporary buildings with simple wood plank floors and a gravel pathway between the units. I went inside one and was very grateful to find a water faucet and a toilet nearby. We drank our fill of the water from the faucet. And we didn't have to wait in line to use a faraway toilet!

Here I was issued the official *hikiage* document, a crinkly, single sheet of paper — the only tangible evidence of everything we endured over the past year. Then they distributed all sorts of things: children's clothes, biscuits, wooden *geta* clogs, food coupons, and a blanket. I placed everything on the blanket and rolled it up into a bundle so I could carry it. It was heavy like a precious treasure box.

Since we left Sensen in August, this was the first time we slept with real bedding. In Matsubara dormitory, there were no *matsu*, no pine trees, just a warm breeze.

That night, I looked out into the harbor. There were still many ships, full of refugees like us, waiting in the port. They floated peacefully on the surface, and glowed gently like the phosphorescent sea algae that drifted aimlessly out at sea.