

Chapter Nineteen: The Minetas_California, 1942

In 1942, while Daniel managed a first-aid station in Oahu, ten-year-old Norman Mineta loved baseball and Boy Scouts, growing up in a devoted Methodist family. His father, Kunisaku "Kay" Mineta, immigrated to the U.S. at fourteen, originally intending to reach San Francisco but disembarked in Seattle. After working his way south and struggling with English, he was enrolled in first grade at age sixteen, marking the beginning of his American journey. Years later, at twenty-four, he sought a wife, ultimately marrying Kane, who traveled across the Pacific as a "picture bride."

As Japanese internment began following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Kay encouraged his children, affirming their citizenship despite the impending doom. Executive Order 9066 soon forced Japanese Americans into internment camps, beginning with brutal eviction notices and searches for contraband. Families, including the Minetas, were coerced into selling their belongings at fractions of their worth, as discrimination rendered them powerless to resist.

The Minetas journeyed to the Santa Anita racetrack, converted into a crowded and makeshift internment camp. Norm had to leave behind his dog, Skippy, an emotional farewell that haunted him after he never saw the pet again. Upon arriving, the Minetas were assigned cramped living quarters with nothing but straw mattresses and were subjected to constant surveillance. The environment was stifling and reminiscent of imprisonment rather than an evacuation.

With no proper accommodations, meals consisted of undesirable, flavorless canned food distributed through long lines. Eventually, they were transferred to Heart Mountain, a more extensive camp housing over fourteen thousand people, surrounded by barbed wire. Life there felt somber, yet mothers still found ways to bond over shared experiences amid hardship.

The children were offered minimal recreational activities. Scoutmaster Glenn Livingston advocated for interactions between local Boy Scouts and the interned children, although initial hostility from white families emerged. Ultimately, a Boy Scout jamboree was organized within Heart Mountain, forging friendships across boundaries of prejudice as boys bonded over shared antics.

Despite the internment, the Minetas were fortunate. After the war, they returned to California, unlike many Japanese families whose lives had been irreparably altered. Norm's narrative reflects both the resilience of his family and the tragic ramifications of wartime paranoia.