

REPAIRING

Tule Lake, 2008

Misa Joo

Rachel said,
It wasn't about making a choice.
It was deciding
Which part of your heart you would rip out.
What part of your life you could survive without:
 Your mother?
 Your country?
 Your future?
 Your life?
It wasn't choosing.

From these hearts torn in half,
Families separated,
A community divided,
From these pieces,
What can we fashion
Together
At Tule Lake?

1978
We left right after classes,
Crammed in a Datsun B210,
Traveling through K Falls at night,
Stopped by the police, his flashlight blinding us.
"Where are you traveling?"
"To see family" we lied
"Just make sure you keep on driving -- out of town."

First ones to roll into Tule Lake Fairgrounds,
Feeling like trespassers.
Finally slipping into our sleeping bags.
We slept in one corner of the gym in great anticipation,
And in the morning woke, thrilled!
to a gym filled with
Seattle! Bellingham! Olympia
Portland! Ashland! Mt. Shasta! Sacramento
San Jose! San Francisco! Oakland
Los Angeles.
Issei, Nisei, Sansei
We cooked our own food together from our supplies
And lined up following Nikkei footsteps of another time,

Being together, the reward.
What did we make
Out of an empty gym
In a scary town?
A community!
Crammed together in crowded rooms,
We listened, hungry for our history, and
Laying the ground for Breaking Silence
Repairing –reparations – repairing

1991
Join the circles
Former internees, voluntary evacuees
no no yes yes
442nd MIS.
Join the circle
renunciant
join the circle
hoshidan.
Join the circle.
Listen .
Listen to the stories
Listen deeply, so deep you can see the zigzag tear
The open wound
Deeper until you feel your own throat shut
And your own eyes sting with tears.
Listen to what happens when a family must decide
In one day
What part of their heart
they can bear to tear out.
When each person must decide
What part of the heart you can survive without.
Decide!
What and where is your fight?
In uniform?
Or behind bars standing up for your Constitutional Rights?
Or turning your back on your country
which betrayed you and spit you out?

Listen more deeply.
Listen so deep you can be a child again
Listen so deep you can feel,
Actually feel
Getting lost among barracks
Or being wrenched away to another camp from Ojichan

who's left behind to die alone in a hospital
Or an Urashimataro
Watching the desert turtle
Oozing out of its shell
Shot for play by bored soldiers.
Listen deeply to the young mother
Until you can feel her apprehensions
visiting her family across camp
“We have to start walking back from Mama’s
So we won’t be caught in the daily sandstorm.
After all, the baby . . .”

Listen deeply until you can feel being elderly
Working hard, Sacrificing
Raising a family
Making a home
Building a community
Building a legacy for your children
Your grandchildren then
All of it reduced to two suitcases,
Behind barbed wire
Everything gone and turned to sand
Made mute by government rules.
By their rules,
Your language marks you
Alien
An alien as head of family?
An alien in the land made of your struggle
An alien after a whole life molding something to pass on
To the next generation, each decision
guided by “kodomo no tame ni.”

Listen deeply until you can feel
the pain and shame and guilt of watching
the pain and shame and guilt of your own elderly parents.

Listen until you see
Yourself in the bogey man.
Fear becomes recognition of
Your own image mirrored
In the Renunciant
The Hoshidan,
No longer names
No longer choices

No longer mistakes
But only the decision --
"What part of my heart do I tear out.
What part of my life can I live without."
Listen until you can feel your own heart tear
Your own eyes sting with acid tears
And carry the stories home
To tell them again.
Carry that burden
.Too.

Continue the repairing
Repairing -reparations - repairing -repatriation - repairing -- repeating
Repairing -- returning -- repairing,

One circle at a time.

We meet again
2010