

The Block Manager: A True Story of Love in the Midst of Japanese American Internment Camps

Judy Mundle

Open Books Press (May 7, 2019)

Hardcover \$30.00 (294pp)

978-1-941799-67-3

Judy Mundle was astounded when a Japanese American work colleague—rendered here as Janet Hayashi—confided that she had been a block manager at an American internment camp during World War II. In this poignant memoir, she reveals the shocking truth about life in the camps.

In the early 1940s, West Coast Japanese Americans “forfeited [their] homes, jobs, private lives, beloved pets ... and all freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution” when the US government ordered their internment. This memoir powerfully relates the fear and confusion that Hayashi, twenty-two, felt as she and her family were moved from Stockton, California, to a hastily constructed camp surrounded by barbed wire and machine-gun-wielding soldiers, never again to live in their hometown.

Fluent in both English and Japanese, Hayashi was assigned to be a block manager, responsible for checking inmates’ whereabouts, reporting grievances and noncompliance, and mediating disagreements. Though petrified, she did her best to practice *gaman*, “patience with dignity.” Engaging and informative, this book is an intimate glimpse of her Japanese culture, delivering understanding regarding inmates’ mindsets, responses, and attitudes.

Hayashi’s emotionally charged narrative is disturbing in its harsh accounts of life in the shadow of the machine gun towers. It reveals that crowding, lack of privacy, unappetizing food, insecurity, and—after she was moved to a camp in Arkansas—heat, humidity, and hordes of stinging insects took a toll on the prisoners. The book honors these interned Americans for their courage, resilience, and dignity. Despite adversity, men are seen planting gardens; women, doing their best to create privacy and a sense of home; children being born, learning, and playing; and people, including Janet and the man who became her husband, falling in love. Their stories are a legacy and a warning for a troubled world.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July/August 2019)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission’s 16 CFR, Part 255.