

Water Thicker than Blood: A Memoir of a Post-Internment Childhood

George Uba

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George Uba's memoir *Water Thicker Than Blood* reflects upon the personal and cultural intricacies of Japanese American life, before and after World War II.

Following the 1941 Pearl Harbor attack, President Roosevelt ordered all US residents of Japanese descent relocated to internment camps to monitor their collective "enemy" presence. Uba relates the general lack of effective protests made by Japanese Americans at the time; though traumatized over the loss of their freedom, homes, and businesses, there was an attitude of *shikata ga nai*, or "it can't be helped."

Part of an established Japanese community in California, Uba's family included first-generation immigrants; he belongs to the third generation. He notes that each group encountered different challenges. His parents, Florence and Katsumi, were married at Wyoming's Heart Mountain Camp. A woman of complex tenacity, Florence's internment diary noted her depression, fatigue, and soul feeling caged by barbed wire. After the war, however, she was determined to be a model American and to raise respectful and successful children. Florence's frequent clashes with Uba resulted from his independent nature, which he describes as not quite rebellious, but more of a "failure to submit."

Indeed, the book's generational contrasts note that Uba's generation was less self-effacing and accepting than their elders. Uba came of age at the onset of a time of social upheaval, challenging conformity and cohesive immigrant identities. Postwar Los Angeles even had gangs of *yogore*, or Japanese American "street punks," who rejected traditional obedience and "the accepted path." Remembrances of a childhood neighbor's green satin dress, "like an emerald lake at twilight," alternate with grim realities, such as a sign hung in a shop window after Pearl Harbor, offering free licenses to hunt "Japs."

With resonant finesse, *Water Thicker Than Blood* is a memoir about a family, a community, and the individuality of experiences.

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