

OUR RETURN TO JAPAN

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Students Return To Japan

Virginia and I needed to return to Japan, because Father had taken a job with the Canadian Academy in Kobe, which included his children's tuition, and boarding school in America was no longer paid for by the mission board. The other problem was that, because of the unfriendly relations between America and Japan, money could no longer be transferred between the two countries.

Father later told me that the challenge of arranging return passage for our entire family in 1940, had been solved by requesting the mission board to hold our passage money for us, and he paid for our fare in Japan by the sale of some of our possessions that we couldn't take with us anyway. At that time, a good standard Underwood typewriter and a decent, recently built, American upright piano were invaluable. I had not thought about it, but tickets to Japan, for Americans who were living in Japan, could not be bought. I never thought about this problem.

I had packed up my footlocker to be shipped back to Echo Farm and had my other belongings ready to take the train back to Philadelphia, when I was told to get off the train in New York and go to the 19th floor of Rockefeller Center, where the Japanese consulate was located, and ask for the Japanese Consul General, who would assist me. Since the American Consul General in Yokohama had been helpful to Father, I did not think anything about it, though this was happening in reverse. Usually the travel job of a consulate in a foreign country is to have a clerk who issues visas and to keep track of and look out for the safety of its citizens in dangerous situations.

That afternoon, after a short wait, the Japanese Consul General appeared and had my things taken to a room in the consulate. After visiting for a while, he took me to see the New York World's Fair, which was called The World of Tomorrow. While there we visited the Japanese Pavilion, and the featured exhibit of the large globe where you enter and travel slowly around the inside, looking down from all angles to view all the good things that were on their way in the wonderful world that was coming. We then briefly checked out another one or two exhibits. I would have liked to do a lot more, and he took me to dinner. Afterwards we went to the amusement park and we visited a couple of exhibits and stayed long enough to see the combined water fountain and fireworks display.

The next morning, I was taken to his office and introduced to a young staff member. I was told that he had been ordered back to Japan and would be escorting us to be sure that everything worked out well. Our passage had been booked and Virginia and I would board at Philadelphia for our trip back to Japan. I then returned to Echo Farm knowing that our arrangements had been completed.

The Trip

We were to board the freighter at Philadelphia, but when we learned that it would be spending five days taking on cargo in Baltimore, we decided to have our trunks loaded in Philadelphia and have an uncle drive us down to Baltimore to catch the boat there.

I would share a stateroom with the man taking us and Virginia would be alone in the next cabin. During the voyage, the captain explained to us that the usual brief tour of the engine room was not available, as the ship was designed to be used in wartime as a fleet supply ship, so that its seven cylinder diesel engine was the same as the engine used on the fleet's destroyers. It would have no problem keeping up with the fleet.

During the voyage I had three interesting escapades which I feel will be fun to share. The first is about a problem with Virginia's room key. Most of us kept our cabins unlocked during the day, except when we were in port, as we had confidence in those of the ship's staff who had access to our area. However Virginia, as a young female passenger alone in her cabin, locked her door when going out unless it was for a very short time. She got locked out when her door half opened as she stepped around the corner. As the ship rolled, the door swung closed and locked automatically. As the ship had no master key, it was a real problem. There was a narrow deck across the front of the ship outside the cabin, and fortunately her porthole was partway open. So, as I was quite slender and agile, I slithered in, with the steward holding my ankles, and managed to reach across and get the key, then open the door.

The second adventure was in regard to my adventures with the bath steward. Since most of the passengers were Japanese, the water in the tub was kept filled and very hot, to give the equivalent of a Japanese style ofuro. Since I was a fifteen-year-old boarding school boy, my idea of bathing was a quick shower after my afternoon sports. A bath was for Saturday night.

Since we were teenagers traveling alone, the bath steward felt it was his duty to see I got my bath every day. Since I wasn't getting that much exercise, I didn't think that was necessary. This led to a cat and mouse game between us most afternoons at my 2:30 time slot. Sometimes I would duck into Virginia's cabin when I heard him coming, because I guessed he would be looking for me in my cabin or on deck. If I thought he was going one way, I would go another. One of the passengers was a golf enthusiast, and the Captain had worked out a driving range for him. There was a very small platform alongside the funnel and a doormat had been placed there. There was a golf ball, with a stout cord attached, for him to hit and then retrieve his ball. I had heard about this and used this dodge a couple of times. I really gave the poor man a hard time.

My third adventure during the trip is even more fun to write about. There was a Brazilian businessman who had gone to visit the New York World's Fair, to take his nineteen-year-old daughter to see it, as a special treat for her. They were traveling home by freighter. They boarded with us at Baltimore and debarked at Balboa, at the entrance to the Canal, to catch another boat down the east coast of South America.

This young woman was slim and very attractive, and looking for a bit of shipboard romance. When I had been in boarding school, other boys who lived nearby and could get home for weekends, would brag about their dates. But that was a completely different world for me. One evening, when some of the other men were in our cabin playing mahjong and smoking with my cabin mate, I went out on the quiet, darkened deck and stood at the rail, watching the silver moon light a path across the glassy sea. Before long, I noticed that this young woman was at the rail, not too far away. This companionship was a comfortable sharing, but after a while when she said, "stand a little closer" and made a slight move towards me, I bolted and found a quiet place where I could madly start writing romantic poetry. I'm afraid she found me a dud, though I still did occasionally visit with her during the day.

On the way to the canal we stopped at Tampa, New Orleans, with a long, interesting trip up the lower Mississippi River to get there, and briefly across the river at an oil refinery for some transfer of fuel.

Then on to the San Jacinto River, with a short ride up that river with lots of oil refineries on the right bank. Then we continued on to Galveston, where we were not permitted off the boat, as it only stopped for a few hours. At Tampa, New Orleans and Houston we stayed for more than a day and had time for our escort to take us off the boat. Part of the reason for these visits was so that he could take care of some business regarding our cargo. We waited outside and when he was finished, he showed us around the city.

At Tampa, on another afternoon, he took me to an isolated pier, where I met a local fisherman with whom I visited. I also had a good look at the bay and could look south, where a new high bridge had just connected the highway running along the coast. At New Orleans we had our longest stay, at least three or four days, and one afternoon he took Virginia and me to a movie. I remember that when we were in a downtown shopping section of the city, and it was the last day of our planned stay in port, I always got a bit nervous when out of sight of the ship, for fear the boat would leave without us.

I was always interested in observing what I could of what was being loaded or unloaded. We were loading lots of scrap iron in the front hold, for use in Japanese blast furnaces, and maybe some of the manufactured goods we were unloading had been made using some of that steel. It seemed like, symbolically, the ship was like a manufacturing machine where scrap iron went in the front and manufactured goods came out the back, made with the superior Japanese steel.

The trip through the Panama Canal was very interesting, and I even went up to the bow to get a better look at the procedure of going through the locks. We arrived just before dawn and had to wait our turn, anchored out in the harbor. A launch came out to pick up the man and his daughter. It was mid-morning before we entered the canal. I noticed that the lock master, up in his tower controlling the flow of water, was American. After we left the lake we had entered in leaving the eastern locks, the canal was narrow enough that we had to be careful in passing a ship going in the other direction. As we went through the major cut, I watched the big dredge which had to constantly clean out the canal. Things were so interesting, I hated to take time off for meals.

After leaving the canal we went straight north to Los Angeles, where we stopped for eight hours for fueling. Our Waterhouse cousin Dorothy, and a couple of other cousins, were there to meet us, and we spent our short time ashore at an amusement park where we visited while enjoying the rides.

When we were a few days out from Yokohama we encountered a fairly strong typhoon, and I spent much of the time in our dining room, looking out the forward porthole and watching the clinometer on the back wall, which showed the number of degrees of our roll. The Captain had said that the ship was built so that it could right itself from a roll of 28 degrees. He later told me that, although he loved to maintain a tight schedule, he had to take time to turn south to meet the waves head on, since his forward hold was filled with loose scrap iron which might shift when the roll got up to 24 degrees.

In finishing off this story, it seems to me it makes an interesting and unusual story about the developing feelings of a teenager enjoying an unsupervised long boat trip as war clouds were gathering. I did not think of it as unusual for the Consul General to be so personally involved in my case, as when our family were returning to America in 1936, the American Consul General at Yokohama had been involved in my case, by saying that his son would be my roommate when I went to Westtown boarding school and would look out for me.

In the last couple of months, I thought it might be interesting to use my developing research skills to see if I could learn the name of this very kind and helpful Japanese gentleman. His name was Hidenari

Hideyoshi, who was one of the last two Japanese diplomats representing Japan in America just before the war. It went on to say that he had been married to an American wife during this period, and that she left him when he was repatriated to Japan, but then wrote a controversial book about her experiences called *Bridge to the Sun*. This information left many questions in my mind and at the very least dropped me into the middle of this controversy, as the core motive of my service in Japan was bridge building. I just checked my research and discovered, to my joy, that he survived the war, and his work was finally recognized and he became the interpreter for the Emperor and the chief line of communication between the Emperor and the GHQ of the occupation of Japan.

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