



Gasa Gasa Girl Goes to Camp: A Nisei Youth Behind A World War II Fence

Lily Yuriko Nakai Havey

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Lily Nakai and her family lived in southern California, where sometimes she and a friend dreamt of climbing the Hollywood sign that lit the night. At age ten, after believing that her family was simply going on a “camping trip,” she found herself living in a tar-papered barrack, nightly gazing out instead at a searchlight. She wondered if anything would ever be normal again.

In this creative memoir, Lily Havey combines storytelling, watercolor, and personal photographs to recount her youth in two Japanese-American internment camps during World War II. In short vignettes snapshots of people, recreated scenes and events a ten-year-old girl develops into a teenager while confined. Vintage photographs reveal the historical, cultural, and familial contexts of that growth and of the Nakais’ dislocation. The paintings and her animated writing together pull us into a turbulent era when America disgracefully incarcerated, without due process, thousands of American citizens because of their race.

These stories of love, loss, and discovery recall a girl balancing precariously between childhood and adolescence. In turn wrenching, funny, touching, and biting but consistently engrossing, they elucidate the daily challenges of life in the camp and the internees’ many adaptations.

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