

One Leaf in Time chronicles the life of Sylvia Churchill Prince, born in Tientsin, China, where her father was a successful businessman. For the first eight years of Sylvia's life, the Churchills enjoyed a life of luxury among a community of foreign businessmen and dignitaries. The outbreak of the Second World War brought that life to a sudden stop, as the Churchills were rounded up by Japanese occupiers and transported to an internment camp in Weihai. Prince offers a warts-and-all description of camp life, describing the harsh treatment imposed by Japanese officials, but also the resilience of internees from countries across Europe and North America. As her account reveals, it was possible to find entertainment, respite, and even joy in an environment where danger was but one misstep away.

After the war, the Churchills moved to the United States. Prince recounts her experiences as a nursing student at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, her marriage to optometrist James Prince, and her life as a mother of five, working nurse, and resident of Kilmarnock in Virginia's Northern Neck. Her experiences expose some of the trials and joys of raising a family and being a good neighbor in rural America.

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One Leaf in Time

A Memoir



SYLVIA PRINCE

© Sylvia Prince née Churchill

... excerpts ...

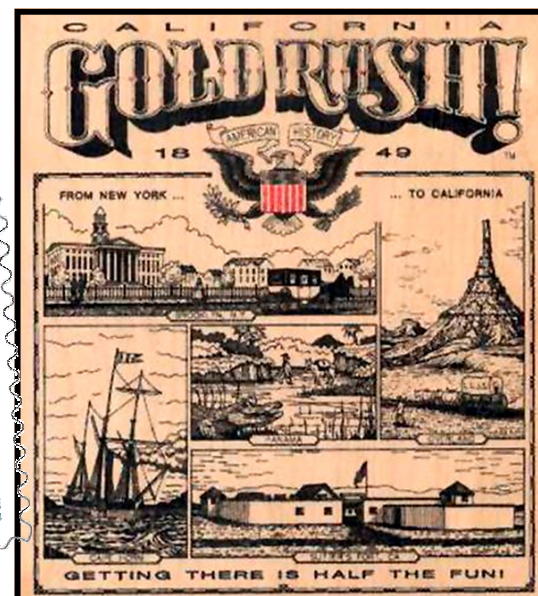
PREFACE

The 1800s were a century of tumult and adventure. Manifest Destiny, the fever that started after the settling of the American Colonies, was burgeoning with the increase of ships and transportation. Every country wanted to grab onto new possessions and land. Americans were not only expanding out west in a frantic "gold rush"; they were also building large wooden clipper ships, with three or four masts, that plied the ocean to the east and around Cape Horn to the West Indies and China, bringing back spices, silk, camphor, and tea to the Colonies.

Three of the docks in Plymouth, Massachusetts, were owned by

members of the Churchill family, so Sylvanus Churchill, my great-great-grandfather, I believe, was an active merchant on the China Seas. He married Elizabeth Carver, and they had a girl named Abigail, who fell in love but didn't get married. The gold rush of the 1800s was enticing men to travel west and the gold bug bit her sweetheart. Off he went, sailing around the Horn to San Francisco, leaving poor Abigail pregnant in Plymouth. Thus, I am unable to discover the name or whereabouts of my great-grandfather.

Though she married Ozin Bates on September 4, 1871, it must have been terribly degrading for a woman of that day, living in a small Puritan town, to be carrying a child out of wedlock.



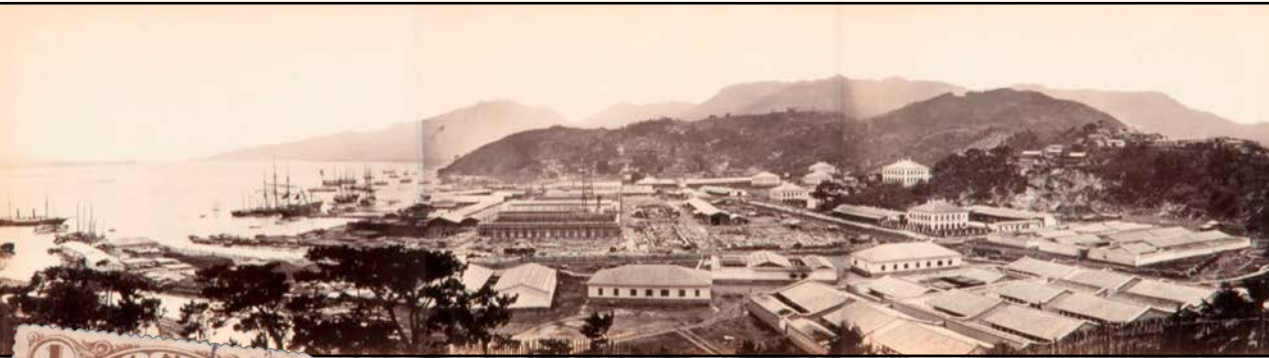
When my grandfather, Harry West, was born, his birth was never recorded.

Harry, however, somehow received a good education and kept up the family tradition of trips to China for trade. In 1890, he was appointed Vice-Consul of Foochow, China, the walled capital of Fukien province,

came back and each had their territory in the large cities called "concessions." Once again, history repeats itself as we battle today to claim our rights to oil in Iraq.

During this time, Grandfather Harry met and married a lovely young Malayan orphan who had been adopted by Baptist missionaries and educated at the University of

California in Berkeley. Maili Thompson (her Christian name) had four children: Wilhel-



by James G. Blaine, secretary of state for the United States. Benjamin Harrison was president at that time.

In 1900, there was an uprising in China called the Boxer Rebel-

lion. A Chinese secret society was formed to wipe out foreigners and their Western influences (such as Christianity), because their independence was being threatened. The Japanese had defeated China in 1895 and parts of China were under their control.

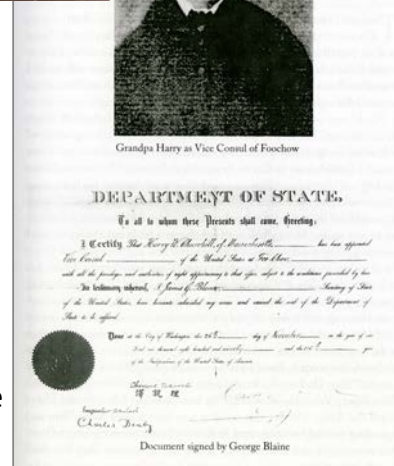
The Boxers, calling themselves "Patriotic Police," attacked foreigners and Chinese Christians in Tientsin and other large eastern towns. They went to Peking and murdered the German minister

mina [Billie], Caroline [Carrie], Alice, and Thomas (my father). Although they grew up in Plymouth, they were all born in China.

Dad, born on July 27, 1894, started working for the Singer Manufacturing Company at the age of fifteen, but it was no surprise that on February 3, 1914, he went to the American consular service so he could obtain employment in Tientsin with an American firm. He started at the Ameri-



Grandpa Harry as Vice Consul of Foochow



and the Japanese Chancellor. Two hundred thirty-one foreigners and many Chinese Christians lost their lives.

By August, troops from Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Russia, and the United States quelled the uprising, making the Chinese government promise to halt actions against foreigners. The Chinese also had to pay a total of \$350 million to the countries involved.

Trading rights were guaranteed, in the form of the Open Door Policy. The countries reciprocated by returning some of the money and promising that no more arms would be brought into China. Foreign legations

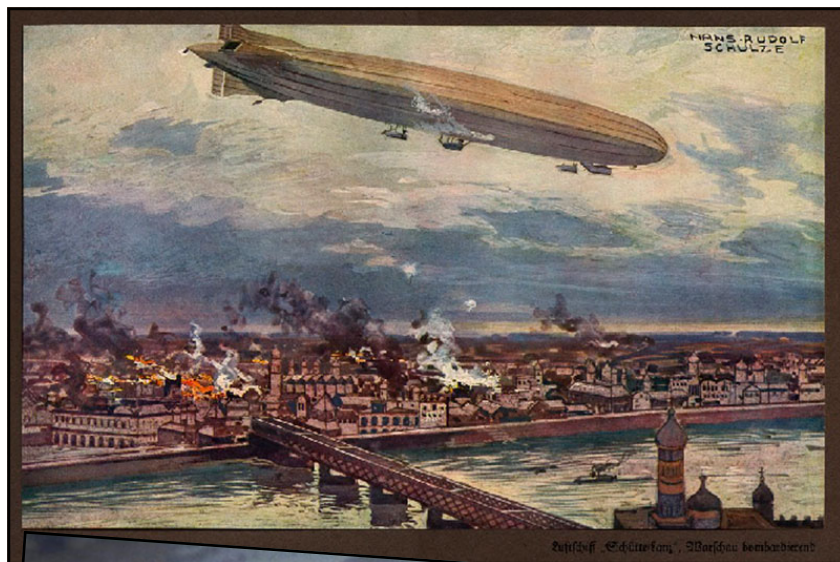
can Trading Corporation in 1912 at the age of eighteen, and so continued with them in China.

Born on the 21't of August, 1906, Ethel Lilly Lightfoot grew up in West Hartlepool, England. Her father, Alfred Henry

Lightfoot, died at an early age and left his widow, Mary Ann Westgarth, to raise four children: Dolly, Tom and Hilda (twins), and Ethel. At times the widow took in washing; later she purchased a boarding house. Sometimes the guests were a little seedy, but she handled them.

Ethel, my mother, had a deformed right foot and, as the family was quite poor, never had it operated on. Nevertheless, she did not let it hamper her.

During World War I, the Germans bombed Hartlepool unmercifully, and Ethel and her family had to rush to the basement as the air raid sirens announced the approach of German zeppelins and bombers. Her cat prophesied



My father, Thomas Churchill

the air raids by hiding under the kitchen table long before the blast of sirens. The zeppelins were able to fly 10,000 feet in the air, so they were hard to detect. Bunkers were built along the shoreline and they remain there today as an epitaph. The Germans also bombed towns such as Berwick and Tweed in the north and Warrington and Birmingham in the west.

London, however, was always the Germans' prime target. On September 7, 1940, at the start of World War II, German bombers followed the Thames River to find London and succeeded, even though the city was blacked out. They bombed many major buildings, such as Ten Downing Street and Buckingham Palace. Thousands of British citizens were killed, and several buildings and cathedrals were burned out.



St. Joseph's School for Boys



My mother, Ethel Lightfoot Churchill

BEGINNING OF WORLD WAR II

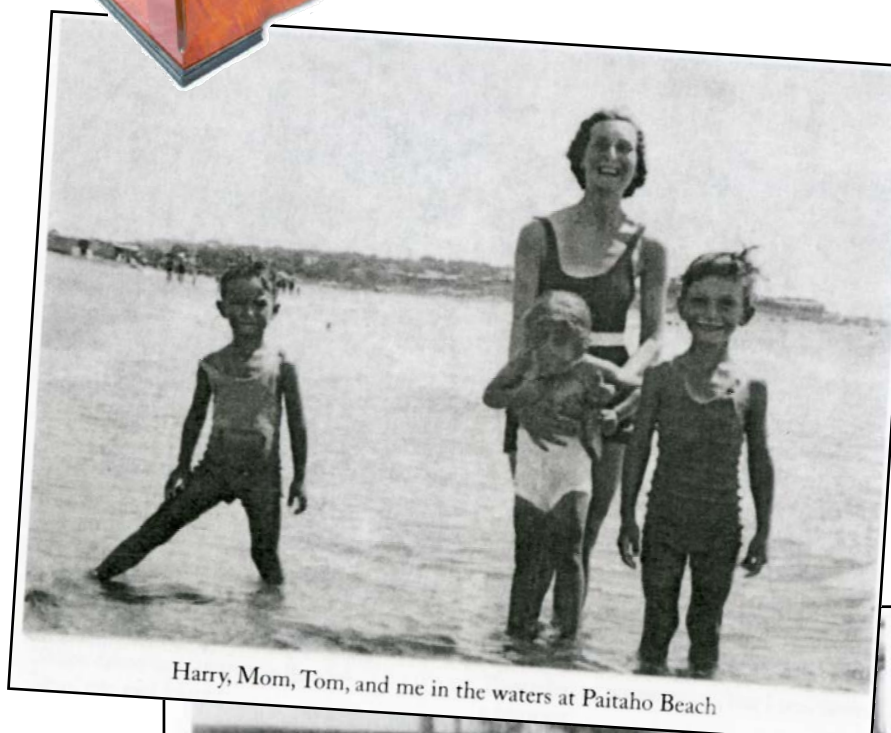
On the other side of the Pacific, a dictator was starting his rise to power. After the defeat of Germany in World War I, Adolf Hitler, an Austrian soldier from the Bavarian army in France, attended a meeting of the German Workers' Party, where his views against the Jews and Socialists were quickly accepted. He was blaming these groups for the country's lack of patriotism, will to fight, and poverty. He also advocated a "super" race that would exclude Jews and other ethnic groups. Enormous crowds listened to his agitated speeches and were soon cheering him on, with right arm extended, shouting, "Heil, Hitler!"

Coming to power in 1933, Hitler started barring Jews from shops, civil service jobs, and universities. By 1942, Czechoslovakia, which had been taken over by Germany in 1938, was ordered to strip Jews of their identity and exterminate them. They were put into concentration camps, where they were used as human guinea pigs, gassed in showers, or starved to death. Their bodies were then either bulldozed into shallow pits or cremated in ovens such as those found in Auschwitz.

Besides the millions of Jews that were eradicated, Gypsies, handicapped people, homosexuals, communists, and even some of the Soviet soldiers Hitler captured were killed. It wasn't until Hitler sent his armies against Poland that Britain and France joined in the war, but by 1940 he still conquered Poland and went on to ravage Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The United States joined in to help their allies, but not until the storming of Normandy did the British and American troops finally defeat the Germans. World War II ended in

1945 and Hitler committed suicide on April 30, 1945. The last German soldier surrendered on May 7, 1945.

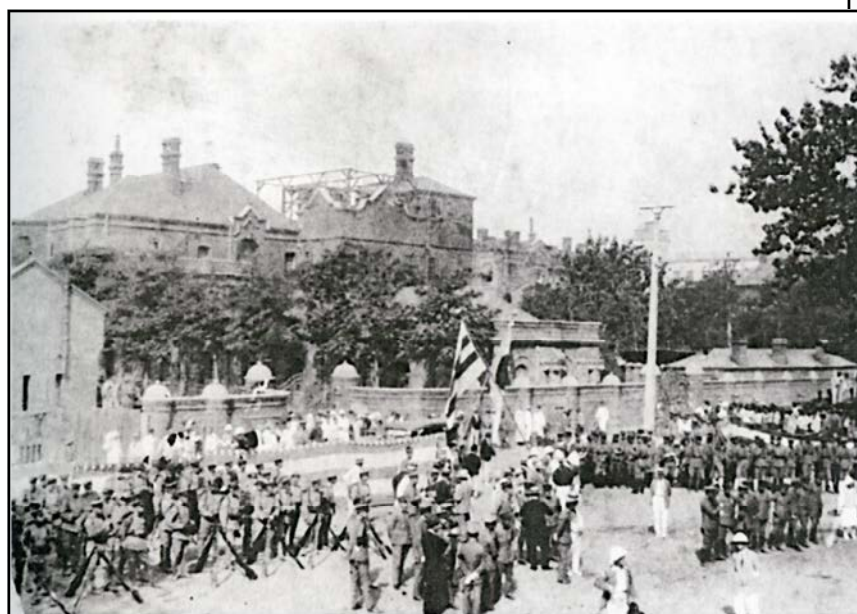
Every night after supper, my dad would go to his study and glue his ear to the Phillips radio. He was concerned that the United States would enter the war and help the British. Edward R. Murrow would broadcast the German atrocities from the BBC in London, trying to tell of the hardships of the English people, but President Roosevelt was reluctant to get involved.



Harry, Mom, Tom, and me in the waters at Paitaho Beach



Grape arbor bare after the flood—
Tom, me, and Harry



Japanese changing flag to "Rising Sun" in takeover of Tientsin, 1937

CAPTURED

The Japanese meanwhile were getting increasingly aggressive. Entering across the Bering Strait, they had already taken over one of the small towns in Alaska.

Dad had a premonition that things were going to get ugly. The Tientsin newspaper reported one morning that the British had to barricade their concession due to the escalation of the Japanese invasion. Dad rounded up Mom's jewelry, some of his bonds, and his Phillips radio. Pacing off several yards behind the house, he got one of the gardeners to dig a big hole in the ground and bury the lot.

On December 8, 1941 (actually December 7 in America), a clanging on the wrought iron gate disturbed our tranquil lunch, or "tiffin," as the British call it. It was noon and we had just started eating.

"Let them in," Dad told the gardener. He knew who it was. That morning, it had been announced that the city of Tientsin was surrounded by the Japanese.

Six lavishly embellished Japanese officers came down the path and marched up to the front door. Standing three abreast, they banged at the door, demanding to see the owner of the house.

With eyes like slits and jowls bulging over their tight braided collars, they sneered at Dad. I noticed their ruddy countenances, possibly from drinking too much saké the night before. In khaki uniforms with tiers of gold braid and rows of medals, each carried a Samurai sword and pistol at his side.

"We have just bombed your Pearl Harbor this morning," one officer announced. "You are now prisoners of war!"

With trepidation, I peeked around Boy's white cotton trousers. Fear, but also excitement, gripped me. What were they going to do with us and would Dad order them away?

Dad did not resist, however, and Mother was told she had to pack in seven minutes. She packed what she

could, mainly clothes and pictures. None of the silver, cut glass, and antiques was disturbed. All was left behind. Dad rushed about the house, closing up and giving instructions to the servants. The livestock and dogs had to be fed and the gardens tended to. Most of the servants left, but the gardener stayed on. "Don't worry," Dad said, "we know America, our country, is so strong it will soon squash these little yellow devils." To the boys and me he said, "We'll be back home soon, just do as they say so no one will get hurt." Little did we know that the items packed in our steamer trunks were all we would have for the next three and a half years, and that we were leaving our beautiful home, never to return. My porcelain doll sat on the hollyhock bedspread in our bedroom for four years. After the war, Aunt Alice went back to the house and sent Mother some of her cut glass and my poor ragged doll.

An old Baptist parsonage was selected by the Japanese for our temporary residence, and though we were not free to move about, Dad was given a special pass to take care of his affairs and work. After the flood, Dunlop closed and, on January 5, 1940, Dad started working for the COMIL Oil Company. The company handled such things as peanut and sesame oil, not crude oil. For a long time I thought he was in the crude oil business.

Around the English concession, the Japanese had put up barbed wire barricades that were patrolled by Japanese soldiers. The parsonage, at 10 Downing Street, had a balconied servants' quarters behind a brick building. We were put in these three small rooms on the second floor, accessible only by the balcony. At the end was a small cold bathroom. It was quite an experience making my way at night to the freezing, pull-chain toilet at the end of the balcony. My *derrière* remembers it well.

There was a small walled-in courtyard around the parsonage, and in this "prison" I became very bored. My favorite pastime was peering out at the peddlers and rickshaws through the large cast-iron gate. One day, to the delight of a passing "bing" peddler, I had exchanged a broken shoelace for a bright, pink piece of hemp. He stopped, with his bamboo shoulder pole that held a blackened cooking pot suspended from one end, and the dough, chopped leeks, and peanut oil in a sack sus-



pended from the other. Laughing with glee, he slapped his sides, showing his nicotine-stained teeth. The Chinese have always enjoyed jokes and often find miniscule quirks in life comical.

It was during this time that Dad started teaching me algebra. He had found a blackboard and lavishly covered it with algebraic equations. "This equals to that and that gives you this," he would say, and then erasing the board with a flourish, he would beam at me like I got it. Only I didn't get it, and the tears would start to flow like the Yangtze River. I was only eight years old and was very confused about something he seemed to think so simple. Plus, I wanted badly to please him.

"If you cry one more time, I'll give you a caning," Dad said with annoyance. He tried explaining again, covering the board with equations, but my mind went dead and all I could do was sob while tears ran down my cheeks. Off I was marched to the other room where Dad procured a short bamboo stick. "Hold out your hands," he demanded. Whack! Whack! Whack! Each hand got six licks. It was the worst pain I had endured in my short life.

After that, I avoided my father as much as I could. The swelling eventually went down in my hands and I could close them again, but it never cured me of crying. Luckily, he gave up the idea of teaching me. Instead, he started me in school for the first time. Girls were not supposed to attend school in China, but the British had set up a small co-ed school in the city. It was funny, because the first thing they taught was that there were six letters in my first name, quite a far cry from the long equations in algebra.

By February 1942, we were moved to Singapore Road. It was clear that the Japanese didn't know what to do with us as they were concentrating on the war in the Pacific. They had captured Indonesia and the islands of Malaysia, where they got supplies of rubber for their war machinery. Australia was the next country they would invade. Thank goodness, they were stopped by our troops before they got a foothold and the Aussies have never forgotten it.

The Germans were also becoming more and more powerful, gobbling up most of the countries of Europe

except for England, Spain, Switzerland, and Italy. In the Richmond Times-Dispatch, a February 1991 article recounts the sighting of German U-boats off the coast of Virginia and North Carolina and the torpedoing of merchant vessels along the Atlantic coast from Canada to Florida. This was the first contact with the war that

the American coast felt. The military commanders refused to report it and 1 asked the people of North Carolina to keep it a secret.

After 400 ships were destroyed, the military sent out U.S. airplanes to drop depth charges and Army bombers that attacked and finally dispersed the U-boats; Germany didn't send over any more. The Navy kept this all a secret, which makes one wonder what sort of secrets are being hidden from us today as we face the problems with terrorists and the Middle East wars.

Meanwhile, Dad sent Boy to the Wil-lows on his bicycle to obtain some more clothing and important papers. Boy had to sneak through the Japanese barricade and pretend he was delivering supplies to the soldiers. On his way back, Boy was searched, but they accepted his fabricated story.

"I've contacted the Swiss agency in hopes to get us passports to leave the country," Dad informed us. So on Sep-tember 1, we all had pictures taken at the embassy and received passports, but the last ship that could take us was full and we were left at the mercy of the Japs. However, we were children and the danger of the situation didn't have an impact on us at this time.

"Let me join, please. The boys and I were bored being confined in the Eng-lish concession, so Tom decided he would start a secret club. They only

wanted their friends, since their aim was to shoot at bul-lies around the concession with their slingshots.

"Okay," Tom said, "only you have to make our ammu-nition."

In the middle of the town was an immense mound of bricks with a hole in the center. Into this "fort" I climbed and spent afternoons rolling mud into balls that I dried on the shelves of bricks jutting out in the interior walls.

The club dispersed, however, when Tom (who was be-ginning to notice girls) got interested in a little blonde who lived in the apartment house across from our fort.



They tried to gussy me up, but I was always a tomboy.



Me, age 7

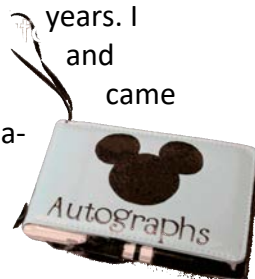
"I bet I can hit her window with my slingshot and get her to look out," he said.

Carefully aiming his trusty slingshot, with one of my biggest mud balls in it, he fired away. To his dismay, there was a tinkling of broken glass and, instead of the cute little girl, an irate father leaned out of the broken window shaking his fist at us and yelling for the police. You never saw three kids climb out of a brick pile and run for home so fast!



The Christmas of 1942, Dad gave me a little autograph book, and Tom and Harry were the first to write in it. Tom wrote: "I thought and thought and thought in vain. At last I thought I'd sign my name." And Harry wrote: "First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Sylvia with a baby carriage." They both signed their names.

This book became very precious to me, as many of my camp friends signed it during our camp years. I treasure the signatures of nuns, bishops, and brothers who kept us going when we were depressed and hopeless, and also the signature of my ship companion, signed with a flourish across a page, though our lives never crossed paths again.



By March, the Japanese had decided they had a place to keep us. Dad was alerted and resigned his position at COMIL. Chung Mei, his partner, took over the carpet factory they had started.

Again, the bayonet-toting Japanese soldiers came to the gates. "You come with us. Pack one suitcase—go on train," they said, as they dragged us out into the street. Number One Amah was with us and, as we staggered out of the parsonage, she interposed her body between us. Defying the drawn bayonets, she held us behind her and declared, "You will have to kill me first before you take these children!" Of course she spoke in Cantonese, but the gesture was enough. One of the soldiers pointed his gun at Amah's forehead and was ready to shoot, but the feisty little woman stood firm. Dad, who could speak seven dialects of Chinese fluently, ordered her to step aside and she reluctantly obeyed him. It was a tense moment; I could feel my heart pounding. How horrible to think of Amah murdered!

We quickly got our belongings together and lined up, escorted by the Japanese. Each of us carried a large trunk or suitcase with all we could jam into it. Not knowing where we were to be taken, we concentrated on warm clothing and blankets.

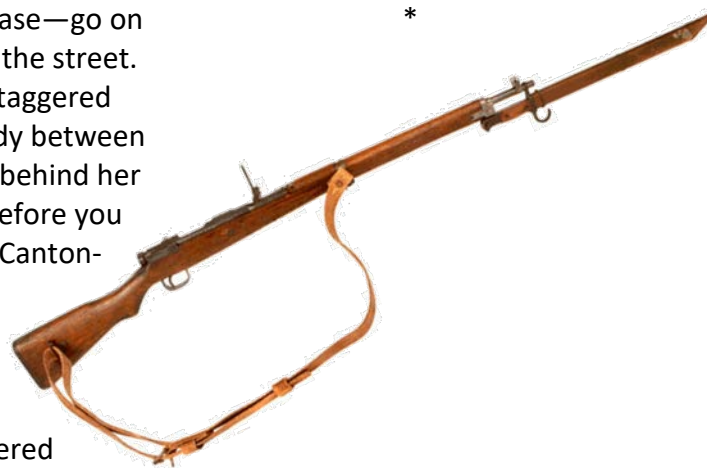
Belgians, Dutch, French, British, Russians, and Americans, all dragging their suitcases, marched single file to the train station on the other side of town. As we were

trudging along through the streets lined with sympathetic Chinese, Number Two Amah stepped out of the crowd with a small cotton bag and tucked it into Tom's hand. "Take," was all she said. It contained all her life savings. He tried to give it back, but she disappeared into the crowd.

We were a motley crew, people of all ages, occupations, religions, and nationalities, carrying or wearing whatever we felt dear. The White Russian ladies, part of the group that had opposed the Bolsheviks decades earlier, had on their mink stoles and jewelry, the children carried favorite toys or food. The Salvation Army members carried their instruments, and the nuns, brothers, and missionaries, dressed in habit, carried their bibles. One Salvation Army member had a tuba that kept getting in everyone's way, but he was so robust and jolly, nobody minded.

The atmosphere was definitely solemn. Sweating as we carried our heavy burdens, we labored up the hill to the train station (the same station Mother had come into about twelve years before.) Without any explanation as to our destination, the Japanese loaded us into the cars with great haste. There must have been at least five hundred men, women, and children.

Dad made sure we stayed together and didn't get separated because he wasn't certain the train would stop at only one destination. It had broken his heart to have to plait my long hair and chop it off earlier. If we were separated, my long hair would be difficult to manage, so I got my first real haircut.



WEIHSIEN COMPOUND

Click, clack, chunk; click, clack, chunk," whoosh! We were jammed like sardines in the passenger car of the train. There wasn't enough space to sit with the luggage, so Dad pushed the trunks between facing seats and had us lie over them. Mom sat at the end of the seat and held my head in her lap.

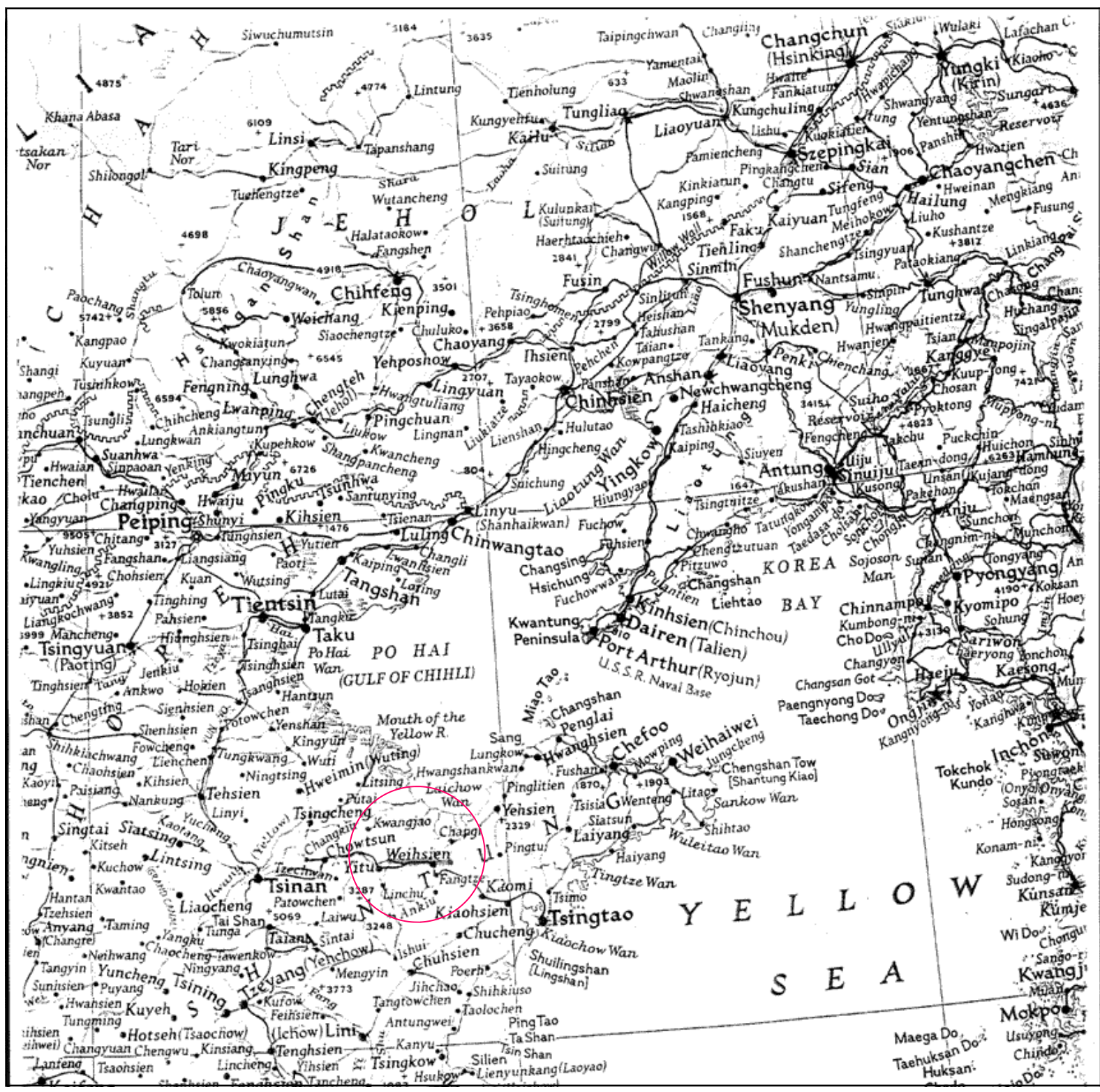
Where were we going? How would they treat us? The papers were already informing us of the atrocities that the Germans were inflicting on their prisoners in Germany.

One paper reported that a German soldier had

smashed a little boy's head against a cement wall in a train station because the child refused to give up his apple. There were horrible pictures of the boy's brains and blood spattered on the wall.

Although night had fallen, and we were all sleepy, I listened to the men huddled together discussing the situation and how to handle it best. The Marines stationed in Northern China, numbering somewhere around 200, had been captured by the Japanese and were put into concentration camps also, but they were still convinced that the United States and Britain would soon come to our aid and punish the Japanese for their impudence. There was a rumor that we were traveling inland to Shantung province.

What we did not know was that close to 125,000 civilians—men, women, and children—were



large dirt playing field. They were shouting commands in Japanese, which we did not understand, but it didn't take a genius to understand the gestures and those sharp, pointed bayonets. Finally they sorted us into family groups and lined us up in long rows. As they paced back and forth in front of us, we got our first introduction to the men who would be our jailers for the next three years.

They were a raggle-taggle bunch, mostly rejects from the regular army due to physical ailments or high status of their kin in Japan. Some of the higher echelon could speak a little English, although it was short and stunted. Anyhow, they got it across that we would be housed in single rooms that were connected into rows or blocks. The single people were to occupy two large dormitories, one for men and one for the women, with about thirty-six square feet available to each person. This only gave them enough space for a bed and a trunk.

In the blocks we were given one room to every four people, but as luck would have it, our family of five was assigned two rooms. With a view of one of the dormitories, we were flanked on one side by a robust Dutch family that had eleven members and a Belgian family on the other with a family of four. The Dutch family had

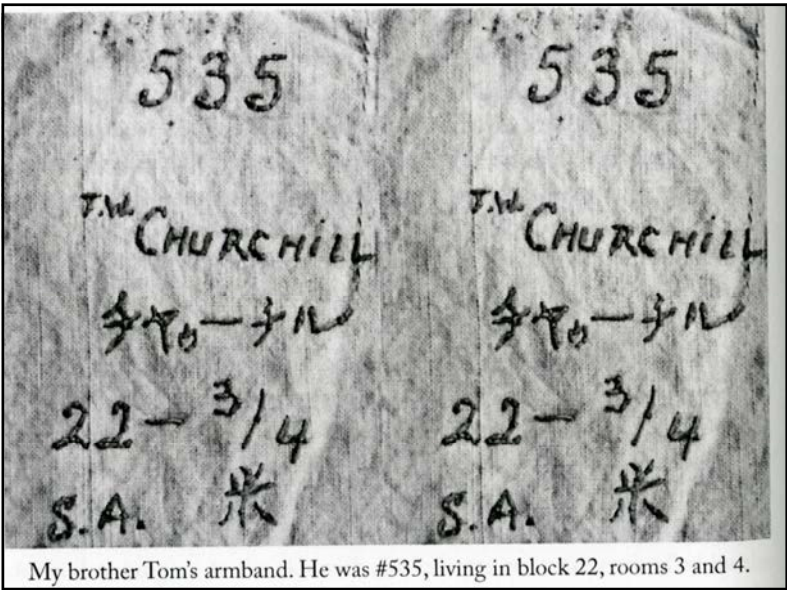
only two rooms and the Belgians one, which caused a little animosity at first, but they soon got over it.

The camp was commanded by a general that we in-

With bayonets drawn, uniformed guards jostled us into a

stantly disliked. Carrying a long sword that reached to the ground, he strode along our disheveled rows, passing out armbands. The armbands were made of muslin and were printed with our names in English and Japanese, our block number and age. (Mother embroidered ours later.) We were to wear them at all times and would be in serious trouble if caught without them.

With another Jap to translate, the general then gave us



orders to organize our camp, selecting people to head up the food distribution, housing, sanitation, and medical needs. (We added the education and entertainment ourselves later.) A gentleman from the British-American Tobacco Company was put in charge, and he formed a town council. The purpose of this was to look into problems, referee any grievances, and see that the camp work was evenly distributed.

The internees, numbering about 3,000 at first, came not only from Tientsin, but Peking, Shanghai, and Tsingtao as well. Some of the brothers and sisters came from Chowtsun, located in Shantung Province. In an atmosphere of "none better than the rest," we were free from coveting thy neighbor's house or car or from the hassle of class status. Bankers, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, clergy, and teachers (all we needed was an Indian chief) —all were put in the same cauldron and had to make the best of it.

There were some grumbles about living spaces, but, though most of us were total strangers, we started living harmoniously together. Mother told me that when the chores were assigned, the ladies had to take turns cleaning the latrines. They were called water closets. I believe there were four and each had a big WC painted on the side of the cement building. Inside there were two long planks about a foot apart and underneath a long furrow filled with ashes. "You have to put your feet on each plank and squat over the hole. Only don't fall in," Mother cautioned me. It was not an easy task without a seat or handle to support you. Rather breezy, too, I recall.

The White Russian ladies put up a fuss when they were told they had to take their turn cleaning off the planks and scooping the refuse from the ashes to throw into an open sewer nearby. Finally, the town council stepped in and they did their smelly job grudgingly.

Every morning and night, we had to stand in front of our row of rooms to be counted. However, the Japs had trouble counting past ten, so the Dutch family of eleven always put them in a tizzy. They would go up the line scratching their heads counting and recounting, then stand and argue with each other. This was amusing enough, but quite to our surprise, Mrs. Dejongh produced another little Dejongh shortly after we arrived. (Mrs. Dejongh was a big, plump, jolly woman; we never even knew she was pregnant.) Now they had a count of twelve!

One morning, when baby Paul was crawling, Mrs. Dejongh decided to potty train him, so she left him inside on his little pot. It really puzzled the Japs as they counted and recounted the Dejongh family. They soon became nasty, spitting out threatening words to Mr. Dejongh. With a sigh and a shrug of her shoulders, Mrs. Dejongh disappeared into their rooms and came back proudly with little blond-haired Paul still sitting on his pot. Carrying him to the end of the row, she set him down in his place next to his sister. All but the Japanese had a wonderful laugh.



In one of our little rooms, Dad built himself a collapsible bed. He could lift it out of the way against the wall during the day and we had that space to sit and eat in. The second room had a bunk bed, which Harry and I slept in, and two cots that Tom and Mother occupied. The nine-by-twelve-foot space was so jammed with beds that there was only enough room to squeeze between. Each room had a small screened window almost to the ceiling. By the door, in the front, stood an old dilapidated coal stove. We looked at the whitewashed walls with holes smashed in them in dismay. The moldy ceiling and bare light bulb were such a change from our lovely home on Race Course Road.

Well, as soon as the weather got colder, Dad started to worry about us freezing without heat. As the stove had no stovepipes to exhaust the smoke, he had to find a supply of them. We had been told that there was a pile of coal at the back of the camp that we could dig for ourselves, so that was no problem.

He soon located the stockpile of stovepipes in the basement of the bachelor's dormitory. It was located close to block 22, where we were housed, and several big elm trees shaded it. On inquiry, Dad found that they were not to be given out to the prisoners but were saved for the Japanese quarters. Waiting until there was a moonless night, he blackened the boys' and his faces

Food was not scarce at first, but it was far from substantial. We did get turnips, cabbage, and sweet potatoes that were brought in by neighboring farmers. Meat was kept on trucks for days without refrigeration and often had maggots in it. The soup was seasoned with Chinese leeks, but there were no spices. If it hadn't been for sweet potatoes, we would have been sadly deficient in Vitamins A and C because there

Winters were quite severe in Weihsien. With our



clothes getting threadbare by the second year, Mother kept busy pulling out her sewing basket. Layering the clothes we had and passing down sweaters and socks helped a little. "Sylvia, I need some water for washing," Mom would say, and off I would go with my little bucket—the same one that I used to carry tea back from the dining hall to our rooms. Sometimes the pump handle would be frozen and I had to break away the ice and melt snow to prime it. With all my strength, pump handle in both hands, I would jump up and come down with full force ... No water. Collecting myself and blowing on my frozen hands, I'd try it again until, with a squish, the pump cooperated. Then I'd take the bucket of water back to our room to be heated on the pot-bellied stove.

Though it was cold, like all children, we ventured out into the snow, throwing snowballs at each other with our bare hands. We had quite a few snowfalls, as the climate was very much like New England. Sometimes, Dad had to let the stove burn out, as we were getting low on coal. We'd sit, teeth chattering, in our beds, while Mother dried out our clothes on a line over the stove. Those were the bad days, as the thought of being prisoners and subject to death at any time weighed heavy on our minds. Dad tried to keep us busy and Mother taught me to knit and sew, but we still felt depressed.

Winston Churchill once said, "We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give." Several of the internees made an example of this.

One of the most colorful of these was a Trappist monk. His name was Father Martin. In his sect he was sworn to a life of fasting and silence. He was not even supposed to mingle with others. Dragged from his monastery and thrown in with a huge group of people should have been desolating; instead, Father Martin turned out to be the most social person in camp. With his twinkling blue eyes and constant good humor he would visit the widows and single young women, dressed in a well-pressed white linen suit, and join them for dinner, sometimes sharing a bottle of Chinese whiskey with them. Everyone knew and loved him. With his jaunty Panama hat perched over

a bushy, black beard and curly long hair, he was often seen chatting with people in the compound.

What we were not aware of was that he had started a black market over the wall with the Chinese! During the internment, he often donned his heavy robes and prayed for hours under the camp walls. He looked so pious in his homespun Woolsey frock that even the Japanese sentries would cross themselves as they passed by. We did not realize what was going on until we found eggs, whiskey, and extra veggies being passed out to the people that were suffering most from the lack of food or sickness.

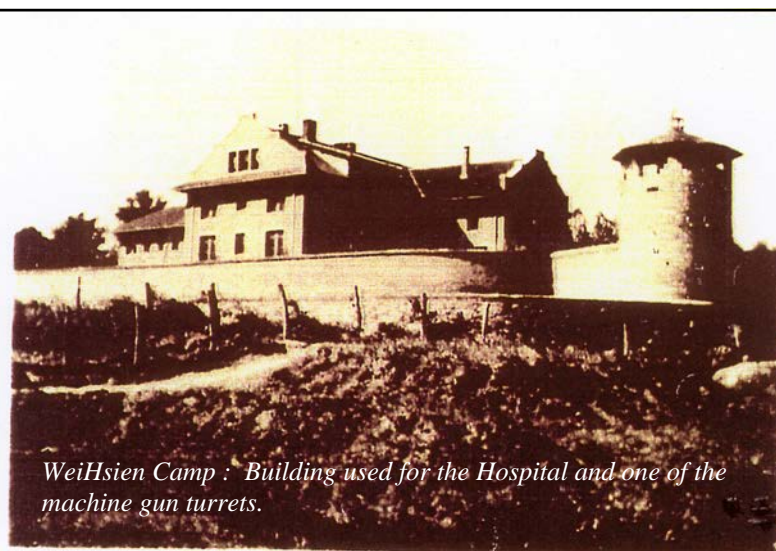
The good father was somehow corresponding with the Chinese farmers as they brought in our days' rations or had found a hole in the wall that he could whisper through. Then, at the appointed time, he would send money in a small basket over the wall and the farmer would send the basket back with eggs in it. Not only was this dangerous because of the electrified wire along the top of the wall, but guards frequently made their rounds patrolling the city-block-sized compound. When the basket of eggs was passed over the wall, Father Martin would hurriedly place the eggs under his robes, kneeling fervently in prayer until the guard was gone.

Soon the black market idea caught on and others joined in to provide food and whiskey to our tables. (The Chinese were quite adept at making whiskey from all the corn that was grown in this area.)

Sadly enough, one day Father Martin was caught in the act. The Japanese soldiers bound his hands and marched him off to a jail tower for a month. We were all afraid that he would suffer worse consequences and breathed a sigh of relief that he was not tortured or killed. The irony of it all was that he was given the solitary confinement he had chosen for his lifestyle anyway, as a Trappist monk is supposed to speak to no one and spend his life in confinement and prayer.

We all rejoiced. His lady friends brought cookies and notes and threw them through the bars into his cell. They even made up words put to the tune of "If I Had the Wings of an Angel." Everyone around camp was singing it:

Oh, meet me tonight in the moonlight,
Oh, meet me there all alone.
For I have a sad story to tell you,
A story that's never been known.
Oh, they trapped me a Trappist last Wednesday,
Now few are the eggs to be fried.
Alone in a dark cell I ponder
If my clients are hollow inside.
For here there is no one to buy from,
No one to help me along.
I'm missing the bustle of business
Away from the hungering throng.



Weihsien Camp : Building used for the Hospital and one of the machine gun turrets.

For there is a big bag on the outside
 Overflowing with honey and jam,
 But how can I get it to this side
 Till the bootleggers know where I am.
 Many thanks to my friends; your good wishes
 Flooded my lonely cell yesterday.
 Oh, why can't I swim like the fishes?
 So the rain might have washed me away.
 But confinement has some compensation,
 I'm not in a rush to be free;
 Before it was Tsingtao that fed me,
 Now my food comes from dining room three.
 I hope that the time passes swiftly
 And I will be seeing you soon.
 Then you'll find me right back in harness,
 By the light of the silvery moon.

I'm not sure whether Father Martin or one of his admirers wrote this, but it caught on and became very popular.

The poor farmer who was supplying the eggs was not so fortunate. He was captured, tortured, and hung outside the wall for three days until he was finally shot. We had to listen to his screams as he was being tortured and the wailing of his family after he died. "That poor man," I cried. "He was only trying to make some money for his family." Mother tried to console me, but I couldn't forget the sound and the thoughts of that poor Chinaman dangling from the barbed wire. It was terribly frightening and reminded us that our captors were not to be taken for granted.

Another incident that occurred in the camp involved one of the White Russian women, a woman named Mrs. Chevasky. She was quite a troublemaker anyway. (She was one of the women who had refused to clean the latrines when it was their turn.) The sewers were getting filled to the brim, permeating the camp with an awful odor and collecting hoards of flies. Actually it was the town council's job to do something about it, but this dumpy, red-haired, boisterous bastion of a lady took it into her own hands.

Confronting the Japanese general, whom we all hated, in the area between our block and the dormitory building, she blocked his path. (We had nicknamed him "Gesundheit," because he frequently snarled a Japanese word that sounded very similar.) We all stood agape as she sputtered on. Shaking a finger in Gesundheit's face, she threatened to notify the Russian embassy about the unsanitary conditions. What was this woman thinking? General Gesundheit stepped back with a cold stare on his frozen face, eyes squinted into slits and mouth barely visible over a greasy chin. Without uttering a word, he unsheathed the samurai sword that hung from his barrel-like body and with a swift upward sweep, slashed it across the woman's face. Mrs. Chevasky let out a pierc-

ing scream as the large wound gapped open, spewing blood and tissue over her.

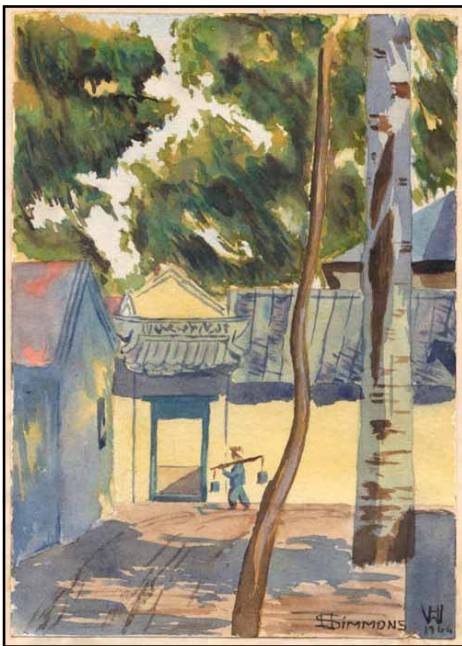
I don't remember what happened after that, but we never saw that woman again. She was either too embarrassed to show her scarred face or she may have died from infection, but General Gesundheit still strutted about the camp like a pompous peacock.

After that, we did have the sewers emptied. Two Chinese coolies came in each month with a big basket that they carried between them on a pole. They were ragged and filthy, but

these men later became our source of information for the events and progress of the war. They evidently hid thin rice paper up their noses when they entered the camp and, typical of the Chinese coolie, would blow their noses robustly into the dust as they passed by one of the camp leaders. On the paper, they could only print small scraps of information, but it gave us a boost to know that the battle was being won by the British and Americans. Of course, they were constantly in danger of being caught, having to wait until the Japanese guard turned his back. The contents of our sewers were then spread over the fields to fertilize the crops that eventually fed us. Talk about recycling!

Through them, we learned how the Japanese had lost the Battle of the Coral Sea and were defeated on the small island of Midway, which ended their expansion into the eastern part of the Pacific. By March 1943, they were forced to retreat across the Yangtze and, by March 1944, crossed over the border of India. In June, the U.S. sent B-29 Super fortresses over Japan, strafing and bombing the main cities. After many bloody battles at Saipan, Guam, the Philippines, and Leyte Island, the U.S. Pacific Fleet defeated the Japanese fleet in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. By January 1945, the Allies had reopened a land route to China and, with terrible loss of life, took over Iwo Jima and Okinawa Island, forcing the Japanese to surrender in China. Of course we did not hear of all this until we were liberated, but the scraps of information that we received from these "spies" helped to buoy up our spirits. Many of the men were even planning to take over the camp.

A famous figure who gave so much of himself was Eric



The Honeyman !

The image shows two pages from an autograph book. The left page features a hand-drawn scroll with the text "M, WEIHSIEN FRIENDS". The right page is titled "My Friends" and contains several handwritten signatures, including "P. De Jongh", "L. Pander", and "M. Pander".

The photograph shows two open pages from an old autograph book. The left page has several faint, overlapping handwritten signatures in dark ink. One legible signature appears to start with "H. Lang". The right page contains more distinct handwriting. At the top, it says "+ H. D. King & Co.". Below that, "Bishop of Charleston" is written. A large, bold signature "L. C. Boole" follows, with "D. S. Y." written underneath it. Further down are "+ Geo De Conestable" with "r.a. Sloan he" below, and "+ Eug. Lebarville" with "P. L. of Younginghe" below. The bottom entry is "+ J. Foster Vt Bishop". On the far right edge of the right page, the word "BISHOPS" is printed vertically along the binding.

God bless our Weichsien
friends
Friends whom we love
Stand beside them and
guide them
Thru the night, with a light
from above
May we meet you, may we
greet you.
May we see you soon again
God bless our Weichsien
friends
Friends whom we love
Father Jan Joog.

One of my mentors, Father Gilkin, was a terrific artist and I spent many hours standing by his side and watching him paint and sketch parts of the camp. How I

Sister Aurelia S.C.
 Sister Theresia C. O.P.S.
 Sister Clementia O.S.F.
 Sister Sophie (C.O.P.S.)
 Sister M. Dulacini O.S.F.
 Sister M. Gatin, S.P. Kaifeng, Honan
 Sister M. Francisca, O.S.B. Kaifeng, Honan
 God love you always - Sister M. Anthony
 Sisters your co-servants
 God bless you - Sister Mary Collette
 God bless and keep you all
 Sister Wilbara O.S.B.

"They also serve who stand
 and wait" - to serve! I shall
 always remember our camp
 duty with pleasure just
 because of the lovely people
 with whom I worked side
 by side. Sr. Mary Louise

Items from Autograph book - letter with nuns' signatures

Joseph Churchill
 a loving memory of
 our grandfather at
 Weihaiwei Camp.
 Rev. P. Scallan, S.J.
 Our supplier of Black Market items

Where were they taking them? It was a mystery and each person had an opinion. Some thought they might be put into "work" camps as a lot of the military captured in China were. We had heard of the "ovens" used by the Germans to eliminate the Jews. Would this be their fate?

Suddenly, someone broke out with "God Bless America." We all joined in and the rafters of the dining hall shook with the sound as we belted it out! I have never felt such a surge of adrenaline and pride. The Jap guards cringed with the thought that we might use this surge of patriotism to start an insurrection. It was poignant to see their yellow faces turn pale as they gripped tightly to their bayonets.

Everyone felt a little better as we finished up with "Britannia" and the "Marseillaise" and shook hands all round. Often I think of those wonderful people and wonder what happened to them. We never heard from that group of clergy again, but I hold quite dear the tattered little autograph book with all their signatures in it.

Nosing around the barricaded Japanese barracks, Harry found himself a friend one day. A Japanese sergeant took a liking to him and invited him to sit and talk. After the first visit, Harry came back with a small packet of sugar. This culinary object was like a sack of gold to us. Harry was praised for his initiative and soon returned to visit the sergeant. To Mother's horror, he returned this time with the sergeant's well-worn uniform britches. "He just wants you to sew up the tear in the back of his pants," Harry pleaded. "Never!" screamed Mother. "Sew up the pants of the enemy? I'd rather die!" She took the britches and threw them into the corner of the room. "How dare he. What cheek," she muttered as she stormed off. It wasn't long though that she retrieved them from the corner and put a great big patch on the seat. "After all, the sergeant may take his anger out on Harry," she reasoned, "and I made a horrible job of the sewing anyway." She was truly British.

God bless and keep you
 all always under the shadow
 of His wings.

Sister St. Francis
 Sister of Providence
 Kaifeng, China
 St. Mary of the Woods, Indiana, U.S.A.

"God bless and keep you always"

wished I could draw like this gentle man! Some of his

sketches appear in Gilkey's book, but my favorite of a giant Chinese elm in front of the bachelor's dormitory may be lost forever.

The day they were to leave, we gathered in the largest dining hall to say our good-byes. It was an emotional moment with everyone talking at once. The place was packed with British, American, Dutch, Belgian, French, and Russian prisoners; all of us had grown so fond of the Catholic bishops, nuns, and brothers.

PLAYS, GAMES, AND TERROR

Some of the prisoners lost a lot of weight by the second year, but even this travesty became a game. It was circulated about the compound that there would be a contest between the men to determine who had lost the most weight around their waist. Everyone turned out to watch the contest. The men lined up and, with jeers and jokes about their lovely figures, had their waists measured. One young man won by touching his fingertips in front of his abdomen and his thumbs behind his back. We laughed and cheered him on, but deep down we knew that things were getting pretty bad. How much longer could we hang on?



One of the things the British started was an amateur hour in the big auditorium. This building, which resembled a temple on the outside, was used for schoolrooms during the week; Catholic, Episcopal, and Baptist services on Sunday; and an entertainment hall on Saturday night. Even the Salvation Army members played familiar hymns, standing at the corner on Sunday night. "Rock of Ages" and "Nearer My God to Thee" were some of their favorites.

The shows on Saturday ranged from renditions on spoons, whistling, tap-dancing, and comedians, to plays and musical concerts. One man sang "Mammy" very well with his face blackened and dressed like Al Jolson. When he got down on one knee, opened his arms wide with white-gloved hands outstretched and wailed "Mammy," the whole crowd cheered. "A Christmas Carol" was very popular as December drew near. Tom was praised for the way he was "shooting" his cuffs into the air as he played the part of Tiny Tim.

It was something that kept the camp busy: auditioning and looking for talent. As the years dragged by, being confined grated on our nerves, especially the men. The Saturday show gave us something to look forward to and relieved the strain.

Harry got into the act, too. Doing a little two-step, he and a line of boys came out singing, "Mama's little baby loves shortnin' bread." Quite a feat for him, as Harry despised singing and was very shy. Too young to do my part, I watched with interest and enjoyed the laughs.

The ones who were really enthralled by the entertainment were the Japs. They insisted that the first two rows of seats be reserved for them and even though they understood very little English, there was always a lot of guffawing, clapping, and noisy laughing from their section.

Dressed in their brightly colored yukata, or silk robes, they were especially amused by the English banter, such as someone coming out with a crook to drag a bad comedian off the stage. Once an actor came onto the stage with a chamber pot and wove his way through a choral

group as they were singing a classical piece: stopping at each of the singers and indicating that he wanted a donation, then peering into the pot with eyebrows raised and a quizzical look. This silly humor is so typical of the British, and the Japanese loved it.

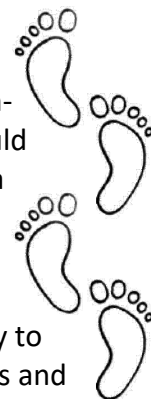
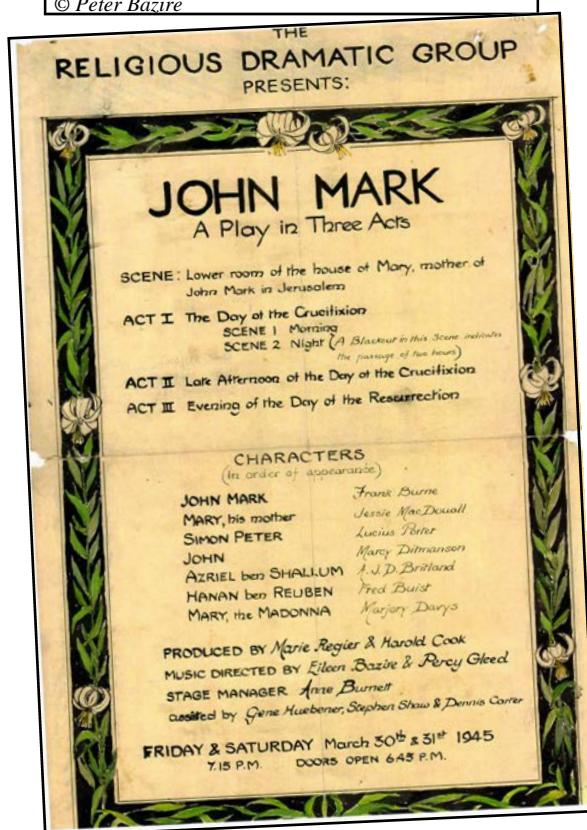
In the summer, the sun scorched the campgrounds, making the dirt roads hot and dusty. Some likened it to a desert. Hopping from one shady place to another to keep my bare feet from burning on the dusty roads, I would make my way to the library a block away. Although we passed shoes down to others that fit them, in the summer it was just as easy to discard our too-tight shoes and go barefoot.

The library was my favorite place. It was made up of books that the internees had carried to the camp and donated. Several of them were children's books. There I discovered Florence Nightingale and Clara Barton and dreamed of being like them, caught up in a war and attending the bleeding, frightened soldiers holding my little lamp. Years later, Dad said to me, "I think you should study nursing." I agreed.

"One, two, buckle my shoe" we would chant as we jumped rope using a long piece of hemp we found lying around the Japanese barracks. I



© Peter Bazire



had a small group of friends that I hung around with (the first time that I had to deal with girls my age), and I was very shy. We signed each other's diaries and pledged that we would be true-blue to each other. Of course, that didn't last very long.

One of our favorite games was jumping rope, and we soon became accomplished at it. There was:

Teddy bear, Teddy bear, turn around
Teddy bear, Teddy bear, touch the ground.
Teddy bear, Teddy bear, go upstairs,
Teddy bear, Teddy bear, say your prayers.
Teddy bear, Teddy bear, turn off the light.
Teddy bear, Teddy bear, say good night.

You did all the motions as you jumped the rope and said "Good night!" as you stepped out from under the swinging rope without it hitting you.

Other chants were "Grace, Grace, dressed in lace, went upstairs to powder her face" and "red hot pepper," where the rope went faster as the items got hotter. Hopscotch was also a favorite game, as was checkers, which we played with different-colored rocks.

One or two times the Dutch, Belgian, and English embassies sent care packages to their countrymen. When the food was consumed, the tin cans were discarded in the garbage cans at the end of each block. We found it lots of fun, rummaging through the garbage to collect the labels of these cans from different countries and exchange them with our friends, just as the kids do today with baseball cards.

Having no toys, television, or electronic games, we had to use our imaginations and improvise (something the children today don't do). Drawing paper dolls intrigued me. Spending hours, I would pretend my doll was attending a dance or going on a cruise, and I would dress her appropriately, even down to the shoes and parasol. There were no Barbie dolls with sequined dresses, hairbrushes, and high heels to be had, but my doll was just as classy with her crayoned outfits.

Most of the time I was a loner, having spent so much time without peers my age. But I slowly overcame my shyness with the help of our "club" and the people who spent so much time teaching and keeping us busy. Scouting was a big help, too. A large Scot, Miss Budd, started the Girl Guides, which is the European name for Girl Scouts. It was fun learning to tie knots, signal in Morse code (two arms stretched out for dash and one for dot), and even "camp out" in the camp, tying a blanket between bushes and building a little campfire over which I suspended my tin-can pot. Of course I had to be back in front of our rooms to be counted by nightfall, so

I couldn't sleep over.

Christmases were hard times because we had no presents from "Santa," but we sang Christmas carols, had Christmas services and pageants, and tried to make each other a surprise gift. When I was ten, I sewed a small envelope-shaped purse out of a cotton handkerchief for my mother to keep her cloth bandages in. She used the strips of cloth to bind around her deformed foot, giving it padding. On the front I had embroidered a pink rose. "Oh, Sylvia, you did this all yourself!" she exclaimed in surprise. I was delighted that she used and kept it until it faded and finally fell apart.

Tom and Harry kept themselves busy around the camp. Tom claims that he and a chum sneaked out of the camp one day in a supply truck. The trucks were kept in the Japanese barracks but were not well guarded. "Geez, they don't watch these trucks like they should," noted Tom. "I bet we could climb into them and escape." So he and his friend, Frank, climbed over the barbed wire barricade and into a truck. "Duck under this tarpaulin, Frank. They won't see us and they'll drive right out of the camp." Their purpose was to get into Weihsien, but gee, where would they go from there?

They arrived in the city to find that beggars were starving in the streets. Some were eating paper and leaves to quell the gnawing in their stomachs. The Japanese had robbed them of all their food and murdered many of them. Scurvy and other diseases left them covered with sores, blind and lame. The place was teeming with heavily armed Japanese soldiers and it wasn't long before the boys were discovered. Tom insists that they were pulled out of the truck at gunpoint and sent back in an armored car. "Frank and I really thought we were goners and were we terrified!" I'm sure our parents were terribly frightened also, and Tom and Frank got severely reprimanded.

Our entrepreneur, Harry, kept himself busy stealing bricks out of the camp walls! He would work on them with a penknife until he got the bricks loose, usually picking a spot that was hidden by bushes or buildings. Then he would barter them to the internees who lived in the block rooms, and by the end of a year or so he had earned a big roll of Chinese bills. To the Japs' surprise, there were gray brick patios springing up in front of the blocks along the rows. Dad embellished ours by growing castor oil plants around it. The large dark-green leaves made a nice privacy hedge and a place to sit when our crowded rooms became unbearably hot in the summer.

As the years dragged on, people became noticeably more lethargic and sickly. If it hadn't been for strong-willed men like Eric Liddell, who organized the children to play sports and keep active, we would have gone downhill, too. By the spring of 1945, he had started the Camp Olympics Games to keep us fit.



All the camp enjoyed the Olympics. It covered discus throwing, high jumping, wrestling, and track, as well as relay races and ballgames. Everyone turned out to compete and cheer their teams on. The long-distance race around the inner walls of the compound pooped me out but it was fun. I believe I came in last.

"Coming of age" had not been a problem with me until one day when I was lying in my top bunk feeling a little sick. The screen door opened and a friend of my brother strolled in saying he had come to visit Tom. I never liked the boy. He was a big, surly teenager who had gotten into trouble peeping into windows a few times, but we talked for a while. "Where are Tom and Harry and your parents?" he wanted to know. The next thing I knew he was standing on the lower bunk and groping into my shorts. "Get out or I'll tell my father!" I threatened, but he had me in a position where I could not get away from his probing hands and leering face. Luckily, I got my back to the wall next to my bunk and, with all my strength, kicked him in the face! He fell backwards, covering his bloody nose, and ran out the door. This encounter gave me a totally different view of the male gender.

From my top bunk there was another scary incident as I was falling asleep. The two-by-one-foot back window was located near the bottom of my bunk and, suddenly, I noticed something white creeping up the open screen. It looked at first like a



large white hand and I was terrified that someone was trying to break into our room. A monster perhaps, trying to get me! "Mom!" I screamed. It turned out to be a large white rat, about the size of a boy's sneaker, with a trailing tail about a foot long. There was a pile of trash and old boards against our back wall and this large rodent had made a nest in it. The boys laughed at me, but my fear was so great that I would crawl into bed after that, covering my head with a blanket so I didn't have to look at that window. Dad went to the town council and complained that internees were throwing too many unused items outside, and soon the debris was removed. After that, camp authorities circulated an announcement: "All trash must be thrown away and nothing hoarded in the compound."

On the weekends, our incarcerators would get all spiffed up. Dressed in their fanciest yukata of yellow, green, and red silk, all perfumed and hair slicked back, they would walk down the dusty street in their wooden clogs. At the front gate, they would get rides into town to find some concubines to spend the night with or just to drink in the bars. Dad and a few of the other men would waylay them as they came back into camp and invite them into the rooms to sit and talk. It was a good way to get the news and, being lonely, the drunken soldiers had loose tongues. Besides, Dad kept a little black-

market whiskey on hand to help. Many a time I saw a disheveled Japanese reeling out of our rooms late at night.

Some of us had found parts of weapons in our ceiling spaces and in the basements under the dormitories. Dad had found a pistol hidden over his room, but there were no bullets for it. Nevertheless, the men had been secretly plotting to overcome the Japanese when the time was right and the Communists were close enough to help us.

We knew the war was not going well for the Japs, often hearing their antiquated planes flying overhead sputtering and almost crashing. Japan was on the verge of giving up, but when? Surely they would be moving their battalions to the war-front soon, leaving our area of China unsupervised.

One dark night, two of the single men from the dormitory decided to make a break for it. With the help of a Chinese mercenary, they cut the electrified wires and hoisted themselves over the wall. They intended to join the Communist group upon hearing that Mao had moved his guerillas closer and was attacking the Japanese from the north.

As soon as they scaled the wall, sirens went off all over the camp. Armed Japanese, bayonets drawn, started rushing out of their living quarters. It was 2:00 a.m. and all of us came out, rubbing our eyes and wondering what was going on. Shouting and jabbing their bayonets at us, our jailers made us march to an open playing field.

"What are they going to do to us, Daddy?"

"I don't know, but I think that some of the people are missing. Stay close and do as they say. They seem very angry."

Lining us up in rows as to our housing in the blocks, they brought in machine guns that they set up in front of the group and trained on us. Then they went methodically down each row counting and counting again. It was a terrible loss of "face" to be missing one of their prisoners, and now, not only one, but two were missing! How would they report this to their superiors in Japan?

That was our scariest episode, as we thought they were going to shoot the lot of us. Instead, they kept us standing in rows, waiting for our fate until dawn, and then dismissed us back to our rooms. We did not know what had happened until Dad got a chance to talk to some of the dorm inmates. After that, we were all made to appear on the playing field at 4:00 p.m. each day and stand, with our armbands on, to be counted. If we were late, the whole block or dormitory had to stand an extra forty-five minutes. One of the internees was always late, so we usually spent a good part of the afternoon at roll call.

RESCUED AT LAST

The school that was organized by the committee was rather haphazard.

We sat in tiered rows of seats and, with the different subjects, changed places with the next grade level to another wing of the temple-like meeting building. One side covered mathematics, another covered English, and so on. The teacher in each section had to gear his instruction to the grade level of the children at that session. Again I learned algebra and long division.

We were blessed with a diversity of teachers; one even taught French. I remember singing "Frère Jacques" and "La Marseillaise" and getting the basics of the language. But history, which another teacher covered, was all British history, because he was English. There were King Arthur, Queen Elizabeth, Rufus the Great, and all the Henrys, including Henry VIII. Although I didn't get the best of grades, I enjoyed being introduced into an international and all-round experience and finally becoming a scholar.

About twice a week, we would all gather in this building and have music. Miss Budd, the beefy, ruddy-faced Scotch woman who also ran the Girl Guides, led us in song. Harry hated to sing, so he would just mouth the words and Miss Budd would put down her baton and move as close as she could to him. Then, cupping her ear with a fleshy hand, she would bend down to his face to hear his voice. The group would all titter, and poor Harry was so embarrassed his face would turn red.

"You take the high road and I'll take the low road and I'll get to Scotland before ye." It was **August 17, 1945**, and Miss Budd had us in full swing in our school building when it came: the sound of an American plane, different from the broken-down lawn mower sound of the Japanese air force, came steadily booming, louder and louder. We all dashed to the playing field, tumbling over each other in excitement and jumping up and down. Looking up to the sky with shaded eyes, we were enthralled by the sight of a huge,

silver airplane as it swooped several times over our heads.

It flew so low that we could see the pilots sitting in the cockpit. Everyone was jumping, waving, and cheering, holding onto each other and laughing, then crying. This was it! We knew this was it!

Then out of the bowels of the B-24, seven parachutes unfolded one at a time. Armed American soldiers, looking like toy dolls, drifted into a cornfield next to the camp. Unfortunately, one of the men thought the top of the corn was the ground and with this misjudgement, broke his leg.

Throwing open the gates, the internees rushed out to meet

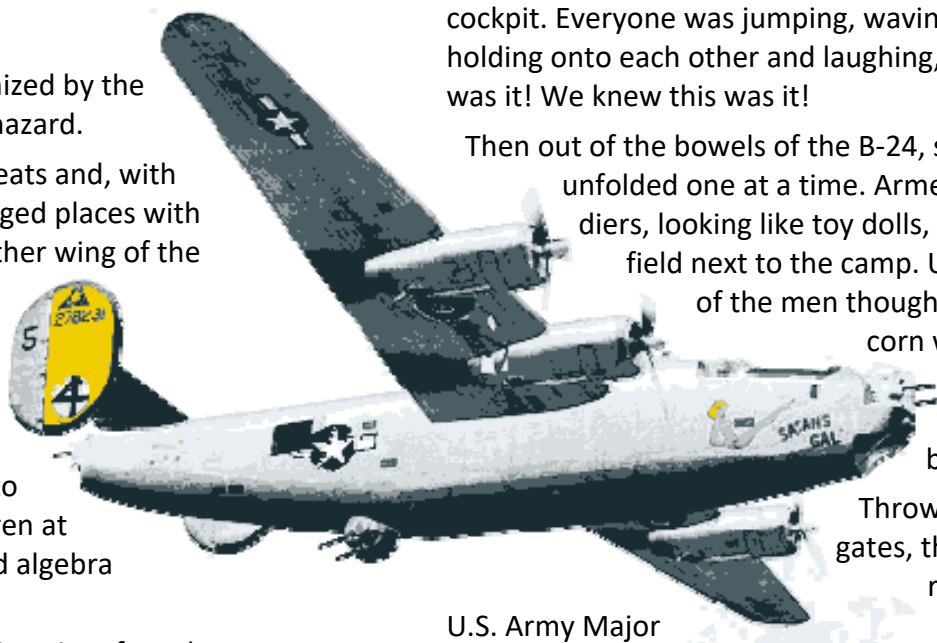
U.S. Army Major Staiger and the six paratroopers who liberated us. Tom recalls that the Marines packed away their parachutes and, as he approached, they lay with weapons drawn, ready to tangle with the Japanese. The Japs, however, knowing the war was over, had piled their rifles in neat stacks and were standing in front of the guardhouse by the front gate, with their hands held over their heads. They gave in very passively and weren't about to argue with the U.S. troops! The only one

missing was General Gesundheit. He evidently ducked out the back door, fearing reprisal.

Triumphantly, the jubilant internees carried in our 'rescuers (the Marine with the broken leg was given medical attention at our crude little hospital) and we stood up to give our heroes three "hurrahs!" before smothering them with questions and stories.

To our surprise, who should turn up during that week but the two men who had jumped camp about six months before? They had joined the Communists and, with dirt-smeared faces, proceeded to give us accounts of their escape, narrowly being caught by a band of Japanese reconnoitres, and their induction into the Communist army. They also told us that the Communists had chased the

Japanese out of most of the cities and were all around the camp. Evidently they stayed on after that and fought with the guerrillas.



MOVING DOWNSTREAM

After the first detachment of parachutists secured the camp, several more jeep-loads of soldiers and Marines were brought in to commandeer the Japanese and to sort out the evacuation of all the internees. The dense foliage had covered our camp so completely that it had taken them a month to find us. Trying to get transportation and locations for all of us was a big job. Most of the missionaries felt compelled to remain in China and continue their work in the provinces, but a lot of the businessmen knew that there would not be any of their jobs left in war-torn China, so they opted to go back to their homelands. Dad was given the option of taking us to the United States, with the help of the Red Cross, or going back to our house in Tientsin.

"What do you think, Ethel?" I remember him asking Mother. She had not been happy in China anyway, having been bossed by my two aunts and Grandma, and there was no guarantee that the house was not in a shambles after being occupied by the Japanese.

"You always wanted the children to become American citizens anyway, and this would be a wonderful opportunity for us to get to the United States," Mother reasoned.

So it was decided. What excitement, what curiosity about this new adventure! We couldn't wait to get started. But how would we travel over the Pacific Ocean to this new land?

After packing our bags and saying goodbye to all our Weihsen friends, Dad had to fill out several forms while we waited for trucks to carry us out of the city. During this time, the soldiers entertained the children with rides in their jeeps. Everyone piled on, but to my embarrassment, the tire under the fender that I was perched on went flat. The pounds I had gained must have done it, I thought. It really hurt to have everyone laughing at me as I jumped off.

Finally, the trucks arrived, and once again we made the trip to Weihsen. It was a dismal sight in the city to see beggars lying against the buildings, their sores full of flies, some trying to fill their stomachs with brown wrapping paper. I closed my eyes and turned my head into Mother's shoulder. She put her arm around me and drew me closer. What devastation to a quaint little city!

"Where are they taking us, Dad?" I asked.

"First they will take us to Tsingtao on the coast, and then, after all the paperwork has cleared, we will probably have to go to Shanghai in order to get a ship." Dad was familiar with all these cities along the coast of China, as he had often made sales trips there while he

was working for COMIL.

It took us only a day to get to Tsingtao by train and the once-beautiful Edgewater Mansions where they housed us. This huge hotel, perched on the edge of the Pacific Ocean, was shaped like a crescent moon and boasted rounded balconies, stepped tiers, all facing out to the ocean. There must have been one hundred rooms—each one pillaged by the Japanese as they moved through the East Coast. Oriental carpets were stained and torn, walls were pitted and smeared with graffiti, and bare mattresses were piled in the corners. There must have been some beautiful pictures on the walls, but only the nails they hung from remained. It was a sad sight, but still better than our previous surroundings. The view from the balconies with the bright, blue Pacific Ocean extending out to what seemed eternity made up for the drabness of the rooms.

"Can we stay here forever, Mother?" I asked as we swam in the pristine lagoon next to the hotel. I was intrigued by the soft white sand and beautiful, small, pink shells. With the sun warming us, and the waves lapping at our knees, it seemed like heaven.

After two weeks, the Red Cross moved us again, with our meager clothing, to Shanghai. "Look, Tom, the buildings are all gray and go up so high you can barely see the sky." Shanghai was a really bustling city. The only relief from the austere business buildings were the flags and buntings draped occasionally with the firm's logo or name in Chinese. The rickshaws carried us through the city and to the docks. There we were introduced to our new living quarters: a troop transport named the USS Lavaca. Three hundred and ninety-two evacuees left Shanghai harbor on the **USS Lavaca** that day. It was October 11, 1945. There was a mixture of internees from several camps that the Japanese had in central China.



Our first stop was to be Okinawa, Japan, but after a day out to sea, we hit the tail end of a typhoon. That day we had gorged ourselves with a foison of food: pork chops, asparagus, fruits and juices, milk, and wonderful desserts. What a feast!

Just as we had our metal trays filled, the whole mess hall started to tip like a trick room in an amusement park. Then slowly, it tipped the other way. Everyone's

food tray started sliding across the tables. People were eating out of their neighbor's tray as it slid past. Mashed potatoes, chops, and the entire marvelous accompaniment finally landed in a sloppy mess on the floor at the end of the tables while we gripped, white-knuckled, to a bar encircling each table.

"Whoa, what is happening?" Harry tried to grab his large piece of apple pie as it slid away. Not having our "sea legs" yet made it more unmanageable. The sailors were amused at our clumsiness. Trying to hold on to each other and gripping whatever seemed riveted to the floor, we finished our meal in haste. Poor Mom had a terrible time trying to stand up with her bad foot. Actually, we would have been better off if we hadn't dined so regally, as most of us got seasick and vomited all night. Some passengers stayed seasick for weeks.

When we came out on deck to go to our quarters in the bow of the ship, we could look down at our feet and see the ocean and look up to see the opposite railing of the ship above our heads. The wind was blowing the sea into your face with such strength you could barely stand up. Huge waves broke over the sides and swept over the deck.

"Hold on to this rope," Mom said, "so you won't lose your footing and get washed into the sea."

"I can't, I'm scared!" I said, but I slowly followed behind Mother and we reached the safety of our cabin. The following days were miserable as we fought off nausea with every roll of the ship and got into the routine of naval living.

"Peep—peep—peeeeep!" Every morning we were awakened at 6:00 a.m. by the boatswain's whistle. Then the captain would give us announcements for the day or words of encouragement. "I'm really proud of the way that you weathered the storm last night. Hopefully, we can make the rest of the trip more enjoyable," or "There will be no more squirreling of food in your bunks. It encourages rats, and we have enough food, so do not try to save it. Have a good day." We were taking back portions of pies and cakes that we weren't able to consume, as we were so used to conserving our food and had missed these wonderful sweets during those three years. Trying to hide these goodies under our bunk mattresses was making a horrible mess.

The bunks that we slept in were like metal hammocks hung from the ceiling in tiers of three with barely enough room to turn over and certainly not enough

room to sit up. Each night we rolled into these bunks, wrapped ourselves in a scratchy navy blanket, and were lulled to sleep by the rolling ship and the anchor sliding across the bow.

After the typhoon had passed, there was a large metal tub filled with orange sections for us to suck on. The Captain had ordered it put on deck to help us overcome motion sickness. He was a wonderfully kind and thoughtful man, often saying, "I want to make you as comfortable as possible on this old tub." Although some of the evacuees remained sick a long time, our family seemed to get over it pretty well. Tom, however, still cannot eat asparagus.

My friend Catherine and I soon found something to occupy our time. "Look, we can play house with these perfectly rolled ropes." Attacking the neatly coiled rescue ropes that the sailors had stacked in a corner of our deck, we sectioned out rooms: the kitchen here, the bedrooms there, using the ropes as our "walls." Well, did we get into trouble! The captain was furious as he blasted over the loudspeaker, "Whoever made this mess had better put it back in order tout suite!"

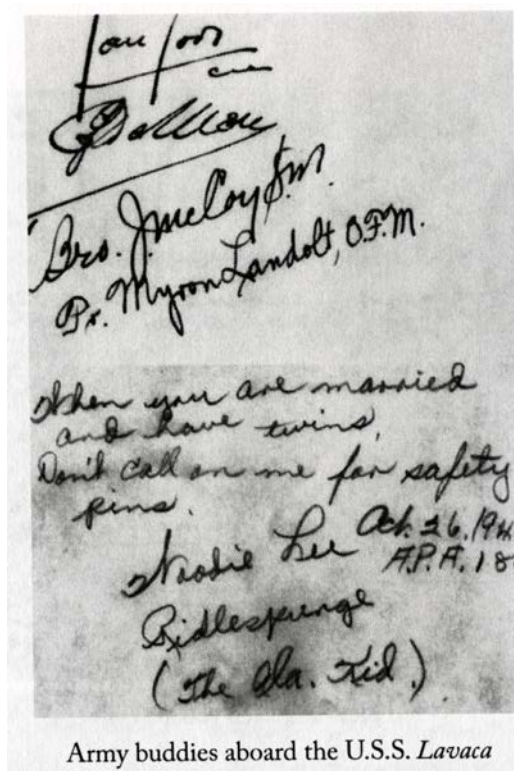
The next time we got into trouble was on Navy Day. In celebration, the captain had assigned a sailor to take us on a tour of the ship. Mother didn't go, but a whole crowd of evacuees followed behind our escort, who was explaining the procedures in the different parts of the ship. They fired off the big anti-aircraft guns, showed us the bridge, and had us following this seaman all over the ship.

Well, Catherine and I were not paying attention when he announced that the tour was over so, like a couple of rats, we kept following the Pied Piper. To our embarrassment, he led us down into the sailor's quarters in the belly of the ship. As we climbed down the steep metal stairs we were confronted with about forty sailors sitting, standing, and lying in their bunks with nothing on but their underwear! We burst out laughing.

"Come on Catherine, let's get out of here," I gasped, as we quickly turned and struggled back up the ladder, hoping we had not been seen.

Harry and Tom really admired the sailors and the work they did on the ship. Sometimes they were allowed to help with the chores, like polishing the railing. Harry found a virtual oasis of busi-

ness with the sailors and the Marines, who, because they were headed home to their families, were eager to swap whatever they had for his Chinese money. Touting



Army buddies aboard the U.S.S. Lavaca

the "perfect souvenir," Harry had his pockets filled with American money and candy bars in no time. No wonder he had to go to the dentist as soon as we were settled.

The Lucky Lavaca, whose logo was a big cow with a sailor hat on, pulled into Okinawa about a week after we left Shanghai. It was rumored that we were to pick up a load of Marines who had been fighting there. Everyone strained to see as the stringer pulled up and our crew lowered the Jacob's ladder. Dressed in fatigues, with their sunburned faces still smudged from the rigors of war, the Marines assailed the knotted rope ladder in rows of eight to ten. This was their trip home and it showed in their eager faces as they agilely climbed up the ship. On their backs, their packs and bedrolls—all that they cared about. "Look, Mother, there is a tiny monkey clinging to that marine's back. Isn't it cute?" Sure enough, one of the Marines was allowed to board with his new friend and pet.

After they were settled in, we continued on our voyage with a full ship. The Marines were put in the stern of the ship with the male evacuees and were given strict orders not to encroach on the women in the bow. They ate in the mess hall after us, but we all enjoyed coming on deck during the day and basking in the sunshine and watching the ocean.

One afternoon, after lunch, with my usual tardiness, I was climbing the mess hall ladder when I looked up to see the doorway blocked by a blond-haired willow of a man. His raw-boned jaw collapsed into a luxuriant smile as he leaned back on the metal railing. "Well, hi-yah little gal, let me give you a hand up!"

A bronzed, callused hand reached down to mine and I felt the strength of a well-trained arm lifting me up the last steps. "Marine Corps Sgt. Lewis Hornsby here," he snapped with a brisk salute. "What's your title?"

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About the Author

Sylvia Churchill was born in Tientsin (Tianjin), China, in a prestigious home built by her grandfather, Harry Churchill, Vice Consul of Foochow. Her father also lived in China and was a businessman. In 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and rounded up foreign nationals, putting them into concentration camps. Sylvia and her family spent three years in Weihsien Camp, where they learned first-hand how harsh their Japanese overseers could be. But they also learned what was important in life and to persevere despite the hardships of Weihsien and repatriation to a new country.

At war's end, the Churchills sailed to America and settled in Cape Cod. Sylvia attended Massachusetts General Hospital School of Nursing and married James Rex Prince, after graduating in 1956. They lived in Richmond for three years, then moved to Kilmarnock, Virginia, where they raised their five children. Sylvia worked as a nurse for Doctor Broaddus Gravatt and at Rappahannock General Hospital, while Jim covered the county as the optometrist.

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