



World War II

The End of Childhood

In 1939, we heard that war had started in Europe. Japan had been fighting in Manchuria for a long time and then in other parts of China. Now Japan became friendly with Germany and Italy. Those countries were attacking other European countries and Japan began to attack other Asian countries. The United States did not enter this big war until in December, 1941, after the Japanese warplanes made a surprise bombing attack on American warships in Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. I was sixteen years old then and too young to bother paying much attention to something far away. After Pearl Harbor, though, we began to listen to the radio to hear how many enemy ships sank, how many bombs were dropped, and how many airplanes were shot down. We celebrated when we heard our soldiers had won a battle. We never heard how many of our soldiers were killed or how much damage was done by the enemy.

Soon things got very bad. There was a shortage of food and fuel and many common goods. My mother began to be worried that maybe the govern-

ment would draft women to go to dangerous areas to take care of wounded soldiers. She sent me to work for her friend in the town of Kamata on the edge of Tokyo. The friend's husband was a soldier. My mother said, "You must go there and help my friend. If you have a job with a soldier's wife, maybe you will be safe from drafting."

My father went with me on the train to go to Tokyo. He stayed overnight at the friend's house. The next day when he started home, I went with him to the train station. On the way he said, "Don't come all the way to the station. I want you to go back." I said goodbye to my father, and he said to me, "I will not look back to see you, so you go ahead and go straight back to the house." But he did look back at me. I was standing there with tears running down my face.

I was Father's girl. I would miss him so much. Every night for a long time the tears wet my pillow and I hoped he would come to me and take me back home. My mother told me later that my father said that was the hardest thing he ever had to do, to leave me in the city.

The separation was very sad. It was the first time I was far away from my family. I missed seeing Mt. Fuji in the distance, the mulberry bushes growing in the field, and the clear water of the stream. I was homesick.