

Fort Sill Internment Camp and the Wishes of Small Children

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To the faces of my children sleeping, I will not say goodbye nor will I forget...

Taken prisoner by the dark and furious.

On this night of endless rain.

-Muin Ozaki, Fort Sill internee and Tanka Poet

July is the month of Tanabata (七夕) a children's festival where wishes are written on pieces of paper and fastened to stalks of bamboo to flutter freely in the wind. Most of these wishes are the sweet uncomplicated yearnings of children: health, world peace, happiness for their parents, brother, sister or community. Sweet and uncomplicated, but still very much needed.

On June 11th, the Department of Health and Human Services announced their plan to use Fort Sill, a military base in Oklahoma, as a site to hold unaccompanied migrant children coming up from the Southern border. The plan for expansion was made after the Border Patrol announced they detained more than 11,000 unaccompanied minors in May alone- the highest number since 2006. There are currently 13,350 minors already in HHS custody.

While the number of sites is increasing, the quality of these centers is deteriorating. Due to a lack of funding the Department of Health and Human Services announced that it would cancel its educational and recreational programs for children. Teachers can no longer be expected to be paid. Since December 2018, five children have died at the border. Due to these deaths, the quality of the border facilities is under scrutiny. It's questionable whether they meet basic levels of sanitation and shelter. "We are in a full-blown emergency, and I cannot say this stronger, the system is broken,' acting [Customs and Border Protection] Commissioner John Sanders said on a call with reporters Wednesday" (Flaherty, 2019).

During WWII, Fort Sill was also used as an Internment Camp to detain more than 700 Issei and Nissei. On Densho, Fort Sill is known for its 100 degree F temperatures during the summer and harsh winds. An internee, Mr. Oshima was shot trying to escape the camp after suffering from depression. "It's a gut punch to us to repeat history like this,' **David Inoue**, executive director of the Japanese American Citizens League, told the World Socialist Web Site" in regards to the using Fort Sill as a shelter for unaccompanied migrant children (London, 2019). Examining the poor living conditions of today's shelters, the lack of appropriate access to healthcare, the discrimination and blatant racism demonstrated by the government, parallels can be drawn between Japanese American internment during WWII and current day migrant shelters. Children are our dreamers and our wish makers. How do we stand up as a community to support each other's children and show up for the promise of "never again?"

笹の葉 さらさら
軒端にゆれる
お星様 キラキラ
金銀砂子

Bamboo leaves are rustling, rustling,
Swaying close to the roof's edge,
Oh, how the stars are twinkling, twinkling,
Gold and silver grains of sand.

五紙器の短冊
私書いた
お星様キラキラ
空から見てる

Five wishes
I have written
The stars are twinkling
And watching from the sky.

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