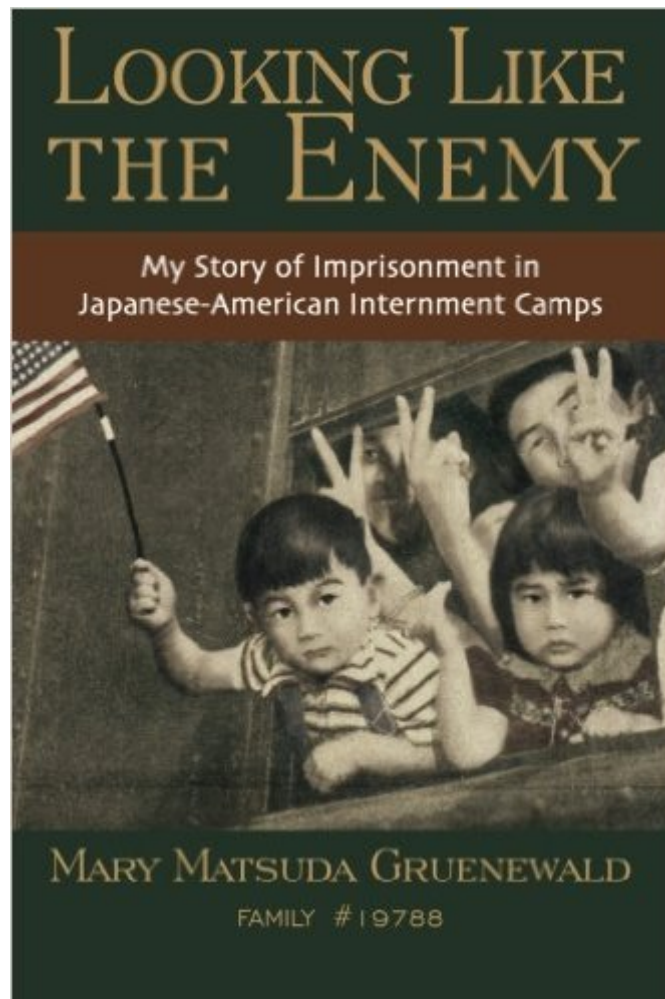


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Looking Like The Enemy: My Story Of Imprisonment In Japanese American Internment Camps



Synopsis

The author at 16 years old was evacuated with her family to an internment camp for Japanese Americans, along with 110,000 other people of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast. She faced an indefinite sentence behind barbed wire in crowded, primitive camps. She struggled for survival and dignity, and endured psychological scarring that has lasted a lifetime. This memoir is told from the heart and mind of a woman now nearly 80 years old who experienced the challenges and wounds of her internment at a crucial point in her development as a young adult. She brings passion and spirit to her story. Like "The Diary of Anne Frank," this memoir superbly captures the emotional and psychological essence of what it was like to grow up in the midst of this profound dislocation and injustice in the U.S. Few other books on this subject come close to the emotional power and moral significance of this memoir. In the end, the reader is buoyed by what Mary learns from her experiences and what she is able to do with her life. In 2005 she becomes one more Nissei who breaks her silence.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Even if one is aware of the internment of the American Japanese, I doubt that most people can form any real idea of what it was like without reading a personal chronicle like this. It is difficult to express how painful it is to read, and I already knew the basic story. Sure, now we know that it didn't turn into a second Holocaust, but the people in the camps didn't have that comforting foreknowledge. One needs to be reminded that although the intense portions of a tragedy may be long over with,

the ramifications for the people who suffered through it can last all their lives, even for those who didn't lose everything that they had owned before the catastrophe. Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston also wrote a classic memoir: *Farewell to Manzanar: A True Story of Japanese American Experience During and After the World War II Internment*, and it is well worth reading both of the books for the similarities and differences between the two experiences. Houston was perhaps 8 or 10 years younger than Mary Matsuda, and her family dynamics were quite different, so they really complement one another. Being older, Mary Matsuda had to confront personally and directly issues that Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston didn't, although of course her family members did. JWH tells us more about her life after the camps; MMG ends her books in 1945, with only an afterword summarizing the later lives of the Matsudas. I found the book very vivid. I could easily imagine how I would feel having to destroy so much family history, even being afraid to keep a set of dolls lest it add fuel to the anti-Japanese fervor.

For sixty years, Mary Matsuda Gruenewald chose not to talk about her experiences in the Japanese-American internment camps during the Second World War. Forced into those camps as a confused, naive seventeen-year-old, she was unable to comprehend her situation, and until the early twenty-first century was not prepared to explore this region of her personal - and her country's - history. When in her seventies, her children grown, her parents and brother gone, she finally admitted to herself the importance of stepping beyond "the self-imposed barbed-wire fences" (p. x) and telling her story. Mary Matsuda moved to Puget Sound with her family at the age of two, in 1927. She and her older brother, Yoneichi, aged four, were American citizens by birth. Her parents had emigrated from Japan, but due to complex and unforgiving American immigration laws at the time, they remained Japanese citizens. Life on Vashon Island was "idyllic," (p. 1); her family rented a small strawberry farm which they worked; Mary and her brother attended the local school and church; and all the residents were friendly and warm-hearted. There were only a handful of Japanese on the island, and Mary was one of the few in her schoolhouse, but rarely were any in her family victims of prejudice. In December 1941, the Matsuda family trembled as they listened to radio broadcasts of the Pearl Harbor bombings. Though their neighbors and friends gathered around them in support, and though they were loyal residents, citizens, and believers in America, they were concerned the government might move against them. They burned all their cultural belongings; all their records, all their dolls, and all their photographs. The only Japanese item they did not burn was her parents' copy of the New Testament.

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