

# MAKO DISCOVERS AMERICA

The Discerning Eye of Youth Looks at this Strange New World

By MAKO IWAMATSU  
With Illustrations by Taro Yashima

Editor's Note: Shortly before Pearl Harbor artist Taro Yashima (Jun Iwamatsu) and his wife fled Japan for America after years of persecution by the Japanese police. They left behind their young son, Mako.

All of World War II and ten years were to pass before the family was reunited in New York City, now the home of the Yashimas.

In this article young Mako tells of his readjustment from wartime Japan to America and of his reunion with his parents.

Dear K:

I haven't written even a single letter to an intimate guy like you. Forgive me.

I was separated from my parents for ten years before I came here. There was some sort of strange emotion in my mind while I was crossing the American continent—"how do I get along with my parents?" Though it was a silly thing to think, somehow I wanted to act like a kid being grown up toward by parents.

My new life with my family after meeting them at Penn Station was very satisfactory as if I found the light in the darkness. But for a whole month I couldn't call my parents with a decent word and kept on calling them "Oi Oi." When I just started to think I should do something about it, my mother told me same thing.

I wanted to call my father "Oyaji" and mother "Okan," as you know these words are spoken in the mountain village where I was evacuated during the war. These words have a characteristic of farmer's affection without any unnecessary meaning. They seemed pleased with that. My father showed me around the city when-

ever he had time and even when he had to go someplace for his business. He used to take me with him from the slum of New York to Park Avenue, two-bit theater to Music Hall, Coney Island and so on. We ate filthy hot dogs on the street corner. We ate Chinese food in Chinatown.

My first impression of New York was that people's living standard was exclusively on a high level materially, comparing to Japanese. I was surprised to see the babies fat like pigs. But sometimes I thought this huge stone-city looked like a machine which is being run by the strength of money.

The movies which enlarged my

eyesights gradually to the unknown world were interesting. But those Hollywood movies, complicated and exaggerated, make me dislike. Westerns in which I could see the continental scenarios and horses running wildly kept me busy for a while. But I got sick and tired of childishness of same old stories, such as a hero appears on a white horse as usual and gallops after the outlaws.

From this period my father started to take me to the foreign movies. So I had a chance to see the postwar Italian movies. They were depiction of actual people's life with fresh realities and something penetrate in my mind more clearly and deeply. Do you agree with me?

The food from all over the world were piled up in the stores. As I had a hell of a lot of "Oh Henry" on the boat till I contented, I used to feel to vomit whenever I saw them. Also my parents told me to eat this and that, as a result I got indigestion.

It was two months after my arrival that I began to go to school which my mother found in downtown. School had special English classes for foreigners. I who once handed in a blank sheet of paper on an English end-term exam, as you know, felt desperately the necessity of English. I studied it hard for three months, being with the Chinese, Italian, Jewish and

Puerto Rican who came here after the war. For a while I could not say a thing with my own feelings, though I liked the intimate relationships between teachers and students. Teachers more or less like friends.

After a while I was able to understand what they were saying, at the same time I faced a vexation. The more you begin to understand them, the more you would see the defects of some teachers and students. For instance, my math teacher, an old woman who never tried to understand students and dealt problems with her attendance book. She turned out to be a sychophant as soon as she saw a student's parent. Her appearance was quite a shock to me, as I was in the new period to have an interest in advanced math.

Most of the students in my school were vicious New Yorkers and I couldn't find decent likeable friends. They were born and brought up in this huge city and they had no ambitions, moralities and philosophies. They were enjoying their lives with fights and smoking marihuana. I had nothing to do, with a terrible loneliness, feeling myself completely alone.

You know I become very brutal in fight if it once happens. One day finally it happened with three guys. Although they were just trying to kid me, I took it as if

they were insulting me. I stuck on one of them unconsciously until I bust him up. Fortunately the rest of them disappeared in the crowds. When I was looking, with a bloody nose and a bruised cheek, for my books I left on the street, I found a Chinese friend who couldn't speak English better than me was holding my books with a great care. Within a year I wanted to get out of this joint and study in a decent school with decent friends.

I wanted to utilize my summer vacation to earn some money. As my parents aren't rich I couldn't spend much money on my own things. I also wanted to breathe the entirely different outer world's air, getting out of school atmosphere. That was five months after my arrival that I went to a Japanese employment agency and I made a comical episode.

The owner of this agency spoke in English to me who still wasn't use to it. You can imagine whether he spoke without any grammatical errors or not. Anyway, he told me, "I have a washing-dishes job," and I thought he said, "I have a job in Washington, D.C." and went home taking this job. Next day I was a dishwasher at a Chinese restaurant which wasn't so far from my house.

This job at a Chinese restaurant was mighty tough. I had to work

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"In a year or so I'll be going to college and major in architecture."



"... A Chinese friend who couldn't speak English better than me was holding my books with a great care."

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