

## FURUSATO - The Lost Village of Terminal Island

Those who came of age during World War II have been called “The Greatest Generation”. On Terminal Island, California this generation is known as the ‘Nisei’ – or second generation Japanese, the American-born sons and daughters of immigrant parents. On the southern edge of the Port of Los Angeles, this isolated village offered a unique childhood experience. More than 3000 residents lived in a very small area known as Fish Harbor in San Pedro, 99% of whom were Japanese or Japanese American.

While their parents worked as fishermen or cannery workers, the Nisei’s memory of Terminal Island is as an idyllic place, where they were often allowed to roam free, share dinner at a friend’s house, or dive for abalone near the beach. The culture of Japan was everywhere, from the Shinto Shrine to the Japanese Fisherman’s Hall where Kendo and Judo were taught.

Physically and culturally isolated, the residents developed a unique dialect which combined Japanese and English – often in ways that were confusing to outsiders who spoke one or the other. The Terminal Island ‘lingo’ was symbolic of their status in California, accepted by neither the majority culture nor by other Japanese, the Terminal Islanders came to refer to themselves as ‘Yogores’ – dark and dirty on the outside, but pure and clean of heart within.

As the Nisei grew older, they attended San Pedro High School and began to share American traditions with their Issei parents. Baseball games became a weekly event, sponsored by village businesses and fishermen. Boy’s Day and Girl’s Day and New Year’s were celebrated alongside Christmas and other American holidays.

The Nisei’s development of this dual identity was cut short by the attack on Pearl Harbor – their fathers were immediately incarcerated by FBI agents and within months everyone was forced to evacuate their homes and leave Terminal Island forever. In February of 1942, residents were given just 48 hours notice to leave. Shortly thereafter, the implementation of Executive Order 9066 sent **all** West-Coast Japanese and Japanese Americans to Internment camps.

Most Terminal Islanders were sent to Manzanar, an internment camp at the foot of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. When the war was over, they found that their homes and elementary school on Terminal Island had been bulldozed by the Navy. Those that eventually returned to Southern California realized there would be no way to rebuild the village that had been their childhood home.

Despite these setbacks – or perhaps because of them – the Terminal Islanders refused to let their connections to each other fade. In 1971, they formed a club, which has been coordinating reunions, golf games, picnics and other activities ever since. Now in their 80s, the Nisei worry about the future of the Terminal Islanders club – and struggle to find ways to keep the memory alive. In 2002, they dedicated a memorial monument on the site of their former home, to honor their Issei parents and to preserve the memory of their **FURUSATO – Home Sweet Home.**