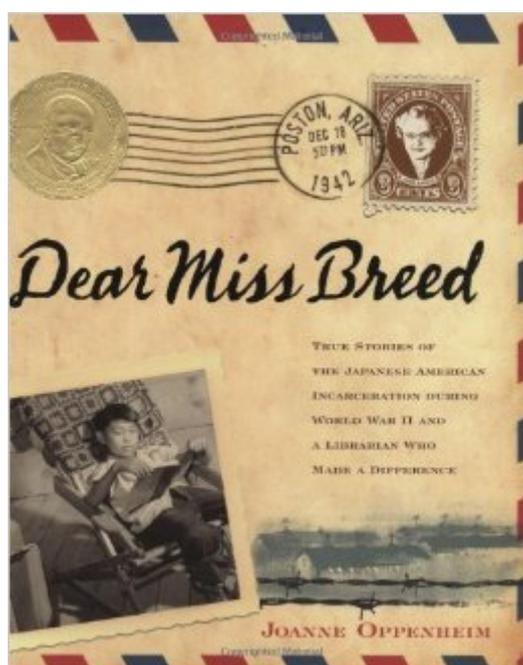


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# Dear Miss Breed: True Stories Of The Japanese American Incarceration During World War II And A Librarian Who Made A Difference



## Synopsis

A chronicle of the incredible correspondence between California librarian Clara Breed and young Japanese American internees during World War II. In the early 1940's, Clara Breed was the children's librarian at the San Diego Public Library. But she was also friend to dozens of Japanese American children and teens when war broke out in December of 1941. The story of what happened to these American citizens is movingly told through letters that her young friends wrote to Miss Breed during their internment. This remarkable librarian and humanitarian served as a lifeline to these imprisoned young people, and was brave enough to speak out against a shameful chapter in American history.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

After Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941 Americans of Japanese ancestry (Nikkei) were considered high security risks and were publicly labeled the enemy. FBI agents quickly imprisoned dozens of Issei (first-generation Japanese Americans). In a few months, the remaining Issei and Nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans) were sent to relocation camps. They could only bring what they could carry and were given one week to store, sell or abandon their possession. Valuables were sold for a fraction of their value. Dear Miss Breed is a tribute to Clara Breed, the children's librarian at the San Diego Public Library. When Breed learned that the

Japanese-American families were going to be interned, she worried about what would happen to the children and teens. She went to the railway station to say good-bye and gave each a postcard addressed to her, urging them write to her. This gave them a way to stay connected with the outside world. Breed sent back letters, books and gifts and provided them hope and faith during their incarceration. Oppenheim wrote Dear Miss Breed when she looked online for a childhood Japanese-American friend and learned her friend had been interned--and how Miss Breed was a lifeline during the war years. Oppenheim uses personal letters, political cartoons and recent oral histories to tell about life in the Santa Ana and Poston internment camps. The conditions were pretty horrible: communal showers and toilets that offered little privacy; being surrounded by barbed wire and being watched by armed soldiers in a guard tower. They remember long lines for laundry; the bland communal meals; and the racism and hatred that the Nisei encountered when they temporarily left the camps to work.

Can we stand firm for JUSTICE in wartime? HOW CAN WE NOT?? Clara Breed had a passion for children. She could not be silent when witnessing unjust actions taken by our government following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941). In the Foreword for this 2006 book, Elizabeth Kikuchi Yamada wrote "I am appalled I did not realize that I was a prisoner of my own government." (Read her moving poem on page 265). The first children's librarian in San Diego, Miss Breed had become well-acquainted and friends with many children of first generation immigrants from Japan. As a child I learned from a sermon the Japanese numbers \*ichi\* - \*ni\* - \*san\* - \*shi\* - \*go\* ~~ On page 17 the author explains that "sei" is translated "generation" and is the key to the words \*issei\* - \*nisei\* - \*sansei\* - \*yonsei\*. ALL persons of Japanese ancestry in America are called "Nikkei" - \*kei\* meaning thread or lineage. When families were forced to leave for internment camps (the U.S. govt. says "internment" is not the correct title), the librarian's compassion was not 'switched off'. The children must have hung on desperately to their parents' stoic optimism to get them through the shock of being so ill-treated by the nation in which they were born, and other cruel ironies. Joanne Oppenheim's research and story-telling turned up pictures and letters of those young people & gathered them into a book well worth its "heft"! It is easy to believe that Joanne Oppenheim was \*destined\* to tell this story. While 'tracking down' members of her own graduating class in upstate New York, she used her detecting skills to locate Ellen Yukawa who had been a classmate in 1945-1946 after release from internment. This is a poignant story in itself.

\_Dear Miss Breed: True Stories of the Japanese American Incarceration During World War II and a

Librarian Who Made a Difference\_ by Joanne Oppenheim is the remarkable story of one woman who "fought injustice through the power of words and small, but constant, acts of kindness." In 1942 Clara Breed was the first children's librarian at the San Diego Public Library. She loved children, and she loved books. Most of all, she loved connecting the two. On April 1, 1942, Americans of Japanese ancestry, considered a threat to the security of the United States, were given one week to prepare for evacuation to an unknown site. They could take with them only what they could carry. They had to store, sell, or abandon the rest of their possessions. As Miss Breed said good-bye to her young patrons at the railroad station, she gave them stamped postcards addressed to herself so that they could write her when they reached their new home. Thus began correspondences that would see families through their short-term "home" (horse stalls at the Santa Anita racetrack) and their home for several years (the relocation camp in Poston, Arizona). Over the years Miss Breed sent the children books, Christmas and birthday gifts, treats, and requested items. Even more important, she showed the children and their families that she cared for them. She wrote articles about their treatment for *Library Journal* and *Horn Book Magazine*, awakening teachers and other librarians to their plight. *Dear Miss Breed* contains excerpts from the 200+ letters that Miss Breed received from the children between 1942 and 1945. Sadly, only one of the letters she had written could be found. However, the content of her letters can often be inferred from the children's letters.

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