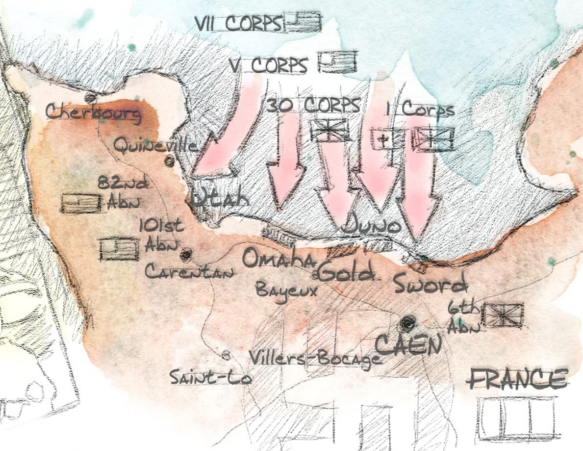




Serving on
the battlefield
and the Home
Front.

DECEMBER 7, 1941



CHAPTER SIX



HEALING

"I have never forgotten her kindness and concern."

— Sumiko Ito, R.N.

DURING WORLD WAR II THE MAYO CLINIC AND SAINT MARYS HOSPITAL staff served wounded military personnel overseas and ill patients in Rochester with selfless heroism. Almost 300 Mayo physicians volunteered for the armed forces. In Rochester, their colleagues worked round the clock caring for record numbers of patients. Harry Harwick, Mayo's chief administrator, described the war years. "The Clinic contributed heavily in manpower, perhaps a third of our consultants, including ranking members in many specialties, a good third of our Fellows, and, it sometimes seemed, almost every able-bodied man of military age in the non-medical sections. With this depleted staff, we were faced with registrations that reached record numbers." Deferring their retirements, many senior physicians "took on work loads more suitable to men half their age, and handled them superbly."



"Lists of
15 to 20
operations a
day were
almost routine."

Like his colleagues, surgeon O. T. Claggett, M.D., "carried the extra burden with a spirit that has never been excelled in the history of the Clinic." He recalled, "I believe my longest surgical list in one day was 23 major operations." "Lists of 15 to 20 operations daily were almost routine. I remember one day I had a list of 19 operations. A

visitor in the gallery spoke to me in the course of the day and said, 'I am the medical officer who examined you at Fort Snelling and turned you down as unfit for active military service. I think I made a hell of a mistake.'"

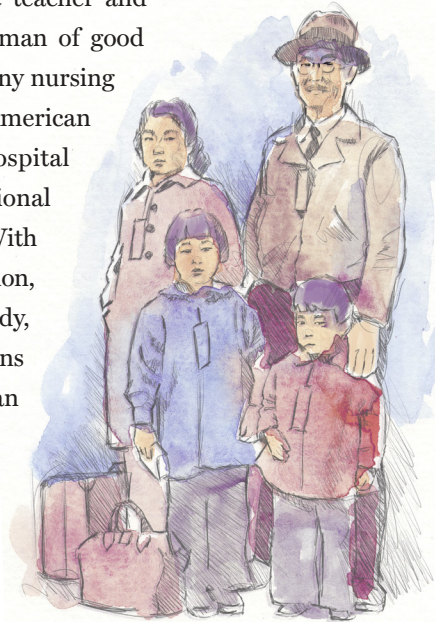
At Saint Marys Hospital, Sisters and staff met wartime shortages with equal spirit. A sentence in the hospital newsletter captured their resolve. "We must learn the true meaning of sacrifice, of more work, faster work and of one more job." Prayer was an essential part of the Sisters' day. Whether in chapel or catching a minute on the floors, they prayed for the armed forces and those who bore the burdens of war at home. "Healing in body and spirit" was their prayer and their practical means of support to help the displaced persons of Japanese descent living on the West Coast. Feared as enemy

agents, 120,000 Japanese-Americans were forcibly removed from their homes, jobs and schools to live in “war re-location camps.” Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, armed soldiers herded adults and children into tar-paper barracks without running water and adequate heat.

The plight of Japanese-American nursing students troubled Sister Antonia Rostomily, director of Saint Marys School of Nursing. A formidable teacher and disciplinarian, Sister Antonia was a woman of good heart and common sense. Aware that many nursing schools would not accept Japanese-American students, she believed Saint Marys Hospital with its experience in serving international patients would be a desirable setting. With strong support from hospital administration, the nursing school faculty and student body, her proposal went forward. The admissions committee selected 15 Japanese-American applicants, “for their scholastic ability, educational, and social background.”

For the young Japanese-American nursing students, the welcome opportunity came at a wrenching cost. They

Japanese-
Americans
were sent
to detention
camps.





Sumiko Ito
learned
nursing skills at
Saint Marys
Hospital.

left beloved parents and siblings imprisoned in primitive barracks, surrounded by armed guards and barbed wire. It is difficult to imagine their thoughts as they boarded trains that took them to Rochester, a 2,000-mile journey into a Minnesota winter and an unknown future.

Fifty years later, in 1994, one of the students, Sumiko Ito, wrote a letter to the nursing school's alumni office. She shared a life-changing experience that happened early in her student days. "It was with a thankful heart and a fierce determination to succeed that I entered my probationary period," she recalled. "Toward the end of my probation, a bunch of us were invited to a get-together at a friend's house. Time got away from us. We feared we would miss our curfew and ran all the way back to the nurses' home." They missed the curfew by minutes. The next morning a note on the bulletin board summoned the offenders to Sister Antonia's office.

"With great trepidation," Sumiko wrote, "I entered her door. To my vast astonishment, Sister Antonia did not admonish or discipline us. Instead, she said she wanted to talk with us. Knowing we were undergoing many adjustments and were subject to racial intoler-

ance, she asked how we were doing and if everyone was treating us well. She used this episode just to talk to us. I have never forgotten her kindness and concern."

Sister Antonia and many of the Sisters who prayed for Japanese-Americans did not live to read Sumiko's letter. Yet surely long before, they were confident that their prayer brought healing and solace for Sumiko and her people.



"I have never forgotten
Sister Antonia's kindness and concern."

Cadet nurses
trained at
Saint Marys during
World War II.



ENDNOTES

- Page 41: Harwick, HJ: *Forty-Four Years with the Mayo Clinic*. Rochester, Minnesota: Whiting Press, 1957, p. 33.
- Page 42: The statement “carried the extra burden with a spirit that has never been exceeded in the history of the Clinic” comes from Donald C. Balfour, M.D., and is found in the *Balfour Papers*, Mayo Clinic Archives, Rochester, Minnesota.
- Page 42: The vignette about Dr. Clagett is included in Johnson, V: *Mayo Clinic – Its Growth and Progress*. Bloomington, Minnesota: Voyageur Press, 1984, p. 37.
- Page 42: “We must learn the true meaning of sacrifice ...” is found in *Saint Marys Hospital Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1942, p. 3.
- Pages 43-44: “Relocation of American College Students: Acceptance of a Change” is described in Provinse, JH: *Higher Education* 1 (8): 1-4, April 16, 1945.
- Page 43: Information about admitting students to Saint Marys is found in the entry “American-Japanese Students,” *Annals of Saint Marys Hospital*, 1943. Americans of Japanese ancestry were hired for several positions at Saint Marys Hospital, including nursing instructor, night supervisor, dietitian, head nurse and secretary for the school of nursing.
- Pages 44-45: The story of Sumiko Ito is recounted in Wentzel, VS: *Sincere et Constant: 1906-1970 – The Story of Saint Marys School of Nursing*. Rochester, Minnesota: Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, 2006, p. 224.



CHECK YOUR COMPASS

HEALING

Inspire hope and nurture the well-being of the whole person, respecting physical, emotional and spiritual needs.
