



DEAR AMERICA

*The Diary of
Piper Davis*



*The Fences
Between Us*

KIRBY LARSON

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This book is dedicated to all of the nearly 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent who were incarcerated in the ten War Relocation Camps during World War II, but especially to those in Minidoka.



While the events described and some of the characters in this book may be based on actual historical events and real people, Piper Davis is a fictional character, created by the author, and her diary and its epilogue are works of fiction.

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Summary: Thirteen-year-old Piper Davis records in her diary her experiences beginning in December 1941 when her brother joins the Navy, the United States goes to war, she attempts to document her life through photography, and her father — the pastor for a Japanese Baptist Church in Seattle — follows his congregants to an Idaho internment camp, taking her along with him. Includes historical notes. Includes bibliographical references ().

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Sunday, December 7, 1941

While we were at church this morning, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. It's horrible. Please, God, let Hank be okay.

I've never been so scared in my life. I can't write any more.

Later

I know it's real but it doesn't seem like it can be. How could Japan attack us? *Why?*

Here's what the newsman on the radio just said, "From the NBC newsroom in New York. President Roosevelt said in a statement today that the Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, from the air. I'll repeat that. . . . The Japanese have attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, from the air." That's all we know so far. And it's not enough.

Margie made tomato soup and toasted cheese sandwiches for lunch. Pop ate two bites and Margie kept stirring her spoon around and around in her bowl. It's hard to care about food when your stomach is on a pogo stick.

Hank was one of the fastest runners on the baseball team. I couldn't count all the times he'd beat

out a throw to first base. But was he fast enough to outrun a Japanese bomber? And where would he run to, there on the ship? I'm curled up on the couch, wrapped tight in the quilt Mrs. Harada made me, shivering as if I were out in the cold.

Margie was at the kitchen table, her Chem book open in front of her, and Pop was in his den, both pretending to work, when we heard those words again: "We interrupt this broadcast to bring you an important bulletin." I ran to the radio and turned up the volume. The report was coming straight from KGU, the Honolulu radio station: "About eight o'clock this morning, Hawaiian time, the first group of Japanese airplanes attacked Ford Island at Pearl Harbor, the Navy's mighty fortress in the islands. . . . Three ships were attacked. The *Oklahoma* was set afire. . . . There has been no statement made by the Navy."

Even though I was under the quilt, my teeth started to chatter. Why weren't they talking about the *Arizona*?

Margie came to sit on the sofa with me. I opened up the quilt so she could crawl under, too. "I want Hank," I said.

She nodded and said, "Me, too."

“Is there room for one more?” Pop asked. We moved over and he wedged between us, his arms around each of our shoulders, holding us tight. We sat that way for a long time.

I leaned my head on his shoulder, his starched shirt scratching my cheek. “You’re still in your Sunday clothes,” I said.

He looked down at his shirt. “I guess I am.” But he didn’t move to go change. The radio sucked me in, like a powerful magnet. I couldn’t pull myself away. I was terrified of what I might hear but even more terrified not to listen. It was as if my being parked in front of the speaker could somehow make a difference in what happened to Hank.

Margie stood up. “I’ll make us some tea.”

“Shh.” I put my fingers to my lips. “What did they just say?”

Pop reached over and turned up the volume knob. The announcer said, “There will be a complete blackout tonight at eleven o’clock. That blackout is not only for the city of Seattle; it includes every light between the Mexican border and the Canadian border. Every light must be out by eleven o’clock.”

“A blackout?” My voice was a little squeak. “Does that mean they think the Japanese might

bomb here?” I thought back to Al James’s comment. We didn’t even have air raid shelters to go to.

“It’s a precaution, Piper.” Pop slid off the couch and tucked me into the quilt. “You keep listening. Margie and I will get what we need.”

But the phone rang right then. It was Mrs. Harada. When Pop hung up, he grabbed his hat and keys. “Piper, you’ll have to help Margie. I’ve got to go.” He ran out the door.

I ran after him like some kind of little kid. “Pop! What’s wrong?”

“Help Margie,” he said, swinging open the driver’s door to the Blue Box. “I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

Margie rummaged around in the basement for something to put on the windows. I got some old blankets from the attic. We didn’t talk much while we worked. I wondered if she was straining to listen for enemy planes flying overhead, like I was.

I went right back to my post in front of the radio when we were done. The announcer said that all of the Seattle radio stations were going off the air at 7 P.M., as a precaution. “A precaution for what?” I asked.

“They need to keep the airwaves clear for really

important stuff,” Margie said in her matter-of-fact scientist voice.

“But telling us what’s happening is really important,” I said. What other surprise attacks had Japan planned? What if they came while Pop was gone? I didn’t say any of these things out loud, but swallowed them down with a sip of the chamomile tea Margie made us.

The tea grew cold in our cups as we sat in the quiet, listening to the cuckoo clock tick, listening for enemy planes, while we waited for Pop, waited for morning.

Monday, December 8, 1941

DeeDee —

Pop was at the kitchen table, reading the paper, when I got up. WAR DECLARED! blared the headline. From the living room, I could hear the low mumble of the radio. Pop didn’t answer when I asked if there was any news about the *Arizona* that morning. His face was about the same color as the oatmeal he wasn’t eating.

I read the paper over his shoulder. The *Oklahoma* had been sunk. That was definite. I read the