

'Far From the Bamboo Grove' shows reader unfamiliar world

BY CASSIE SMITH

Take away your bed, hot shower, most prized possessions, and food; take away your parents, your dignity, and your past. These were the conditions mentioned in the autobiography, *Far from the Bamboo Grove*. It depicts the events Yoko Kawashima Watkins had to endure as an eleven year old girl fleeing Korea during the second World War.

The Koreans and the Japanese resented one another before the war even began. The Japanese were inhabiting Korea and tension among the two were extremely high. Yoko's father served for the Japanese government and was stationed in Korea. Could he have ever known that the life he and his family would build could never survive under such political instability?

Yoko describes herself at this time in her life as being "at the most bottom of bottom." But, imagine what horrific circumstances she lived through. Before she fled, she was forced to spend her days digging trenches at school, packing survival kits at home, and prepar-

ing food rations for the inevitable situation that was to occur.

The threat of a communist attack was what disturbed the family one sleepless summer night. Warned that soldiers were approaching the village, Yoko's mother gathered the "ruck sacks" and her two girls.

Tired and disoriented, Yoko struggled to comprehend what was happening. Where was her father? Where was her brother? She could not ponder on those things while her mother pushed her forward into the night. Her father and brother did not know they were being left behind.

Ko, being older and wiser than Yoko, was also physically stronger than her sister and mother. She carried the heavy canteens of water during the terrible hike through the Korean landscape. She was the scavenger of the trio, hunting through garbage, bushes, and streams to find food.

Yoko and Ko's mother was strong spirited. She had the admirable ability to push forward through the worst times she and her

daughters faced. She was economically a genius, in that I mean she made the most wise decisions during the long journey.

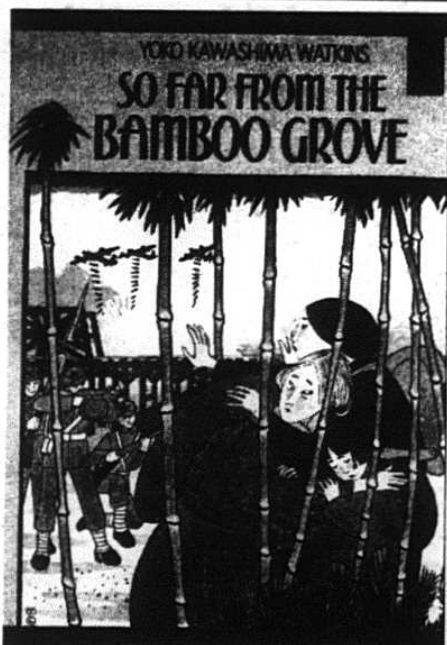
Yoko battled with her hunger and fatigue. Her tolerance for the situation and the constant disappointments she experienced was very low. Then again, who can expect a child as young as she was, to withstand from pining for the comforts of a home.

The terrible ordeal of traveling hundreds of miles, being inches away from buzzing bullets, and the constant craving for food of any kind is enough to break anyone.

Will these three survive? Will they reunite with their lost relatives? Will they make it to their home country, Japan?

This compelling story is heart-breaking. It is hard to realize that it is a true story and that these things happened to many families during the second World War.

One could not keep from taking something personal from this book. Whether it be strength, humbleness, or gratefulness you seek, this book and its contents will shed



light on those qualities that seem to be so hard to acquire.

Yoko's battles during this time made her stronger. They made her appreciate the life she had before the war and the life she would rebuild after the war. "I competed

with life and death when young. And I won," Yoko said.

I recommend this book to anyone that has ever taken anything for granted. Find this book. Read it. I'm sure you will find it inspiring.

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