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Persuasion in the Post: A Letter from Harry I.J. Slack

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hometown in California before they set sail. The majority of the letter is entirely dedicated to describing to Evelyn how well Richard is doing away and overseas in an attempt to keep her from becoming overly worried; he even types the letter on a typewriter which would help confirm that the soldiers do in fact have access normal everyday things, even way out in a remote location in the Southwest Pacific Islands. At the end of the letter Richards signs off “Simply as before, Dick”, a salutation that makes it seem like nothing major has really transpired at all.



Towards the end of the letter, however, Richard’s worries about the war and the effects it is having start to surface. He solemnly tells Evelyn how the “gaiety that once prevailed” in his hometown of Stockton is gone and he

expresses his exasperation at how “the females have taken over many of the jobs”. Visiting his hometown and meeting with his old teacher seemed to make the war seem much more tangible for Richard. Though the letter begins as a reassurance for Evelyn, as Richard writes about his news the letter becomes more like a journal for him to express his worries and fears without having to explicitly state them.

Though Richard had mentioned her briefly in the letter, his old teacher from his hometown, “Miss Humbarger”, was actually an important woman in the Japanese communities of Stockton, California. [Elizabeth Humbarger](#) was a prominent mentor and

teacher for Japanese-American students and even helped them further their education while being interned. She inspired Esther Lee Fong, [Stockton Unified's first Asian teacher](#), to follow in her footsteps and dispelled for Esther the notion that all teachers were white. In a newspaper article from 1969, Elizabeth is honored with a \$10,000 [nation-wide scholarship](#) with her name on it that will be awarded to a student of Japanese heritage and most recently she was honored in 2010 at San Joaquin Delta College with the [Elizabeth Humbarger Tolerance Garden](#).

Looking at the [information provided](#) with the scrapbook from where Richard's letter resided by the Iowa Heritage Digital Collections lent a greater insight into the letter's



addressee. The scrapbook was made by Evelyn Corrie who had kept correspondence with several soldiers she had befriended throughout the war. According to the website, and [confirmed](#) by Dick's daughter Jeannie, she had met Richard at a Military Intelligence Service language school called Camp Savage. This military camp was located in [Savage, Minnesota](#) and its purpose, surprisingly, was to teach Japanese-American soldiers to be fluent in Japanese as well as military intelligence. Many had become so Americanized that very few of the second generation Japanese-Americans were actually proficient in the language.



Sgt. Richard Hayashi's letter was sent in April of 1943, just a little over a year since the United States entered World War II. The date of his letter also marked fourteen months since President Roosevelt had signed a wildly fear-based [executive](#)

[order](#) to move all American citizens of Japanese ancestry living near the Pacific coast to internment camps. No matter whether these legal American citizens had ever even visited Japan, their ancestry was enough to condemn them to being Japanese spy suspects. There is a dark irony in the fact that the United States had created concentration camps for its own citizens meanwhile trying to free members of other countries from them. As it turns out in the [information provided by Jeannie](#), Richard's own family were prisoners of the Rohwer Internment camp in Arkansas. In light of this information, Richard's masked worry about the war in his letter becomes even more emotionally complex. Like many other Japanese-American soldiers drafted to fight for a country who treated members of their communities so poorly, conflict and anger were probably weighing heavily on Richard's mind as he was shipped across the equator.

Written by: Alison Schwebach

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