

CITIZEN TROSO

DRAWINGS AND TEXT BY

Miné Okubo

*With a new introduction
by Christine Hong*



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WHEN England and France declared war on September 3, 1939, I had been traveling in Europe a year on an art fellowship from the University of California. I was stranded in Switzerland with nothing but a toothbrush. Everything that I owned was in Paris. The train fare from Budapest to Berne took my last cent and the money I had expected had not arrived at the American Express Office. Mail service was suspended and the French border was closed.



FORTUNATELY, I had friends living near Berne. After visiting around for a while, I ended up on a farm. Poland had been bombed and invaded, Switzerland feared invasion and all the men had been mobilized. As the situation grew steadily worse, my Swiss friends advised me to return home. I waited three months trying to arrange passage through France. A letter arrived from home saying that Mother was seriously ill. I decided to leave at once.



AT the French Consulate in Berne I learned that a transit visa to France would be given me if I secured a reservation on a boat sailing from a French port. My Swiss friends loaned me the money for the boat fare. I sailed on the last boat leaving Bordeaux. It was crowded with refugees who told me vivid stories of their experiences.



I arrived in New York with exactly twenty-five cents, but collect telegrams fixed everything. I was soon safely home in California. However, the joy of my return was cut short by my mother's death.

Not long afterwards I found myself on the road again—this time to settle with a younger brother at Berkeley in the San Francisco Bay region.



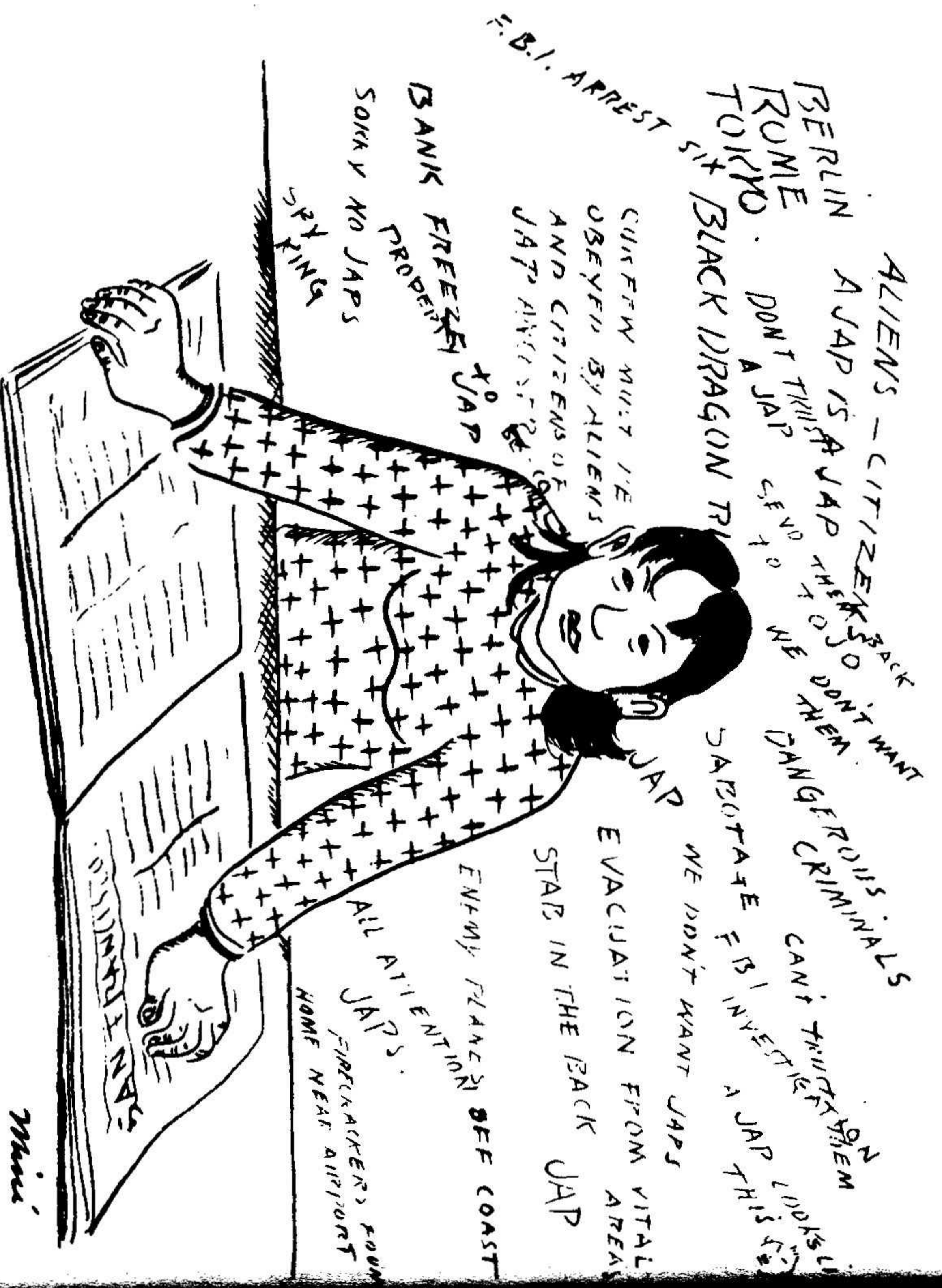
I had a good home and many friends. Everything was going along fine.



THEN on December 7, 1941, while my brother and I were having late breakfast I turned on the radio and heard the flash—"Pearl Harbor bombed by the Japanese!" We were shocked. We wondered what this would mean to us and the other people of Japanese descent in the United States.



OUR fears came true with the declaration of war against Japan. Radios started blasting, newspapers flaunted scare headlines.

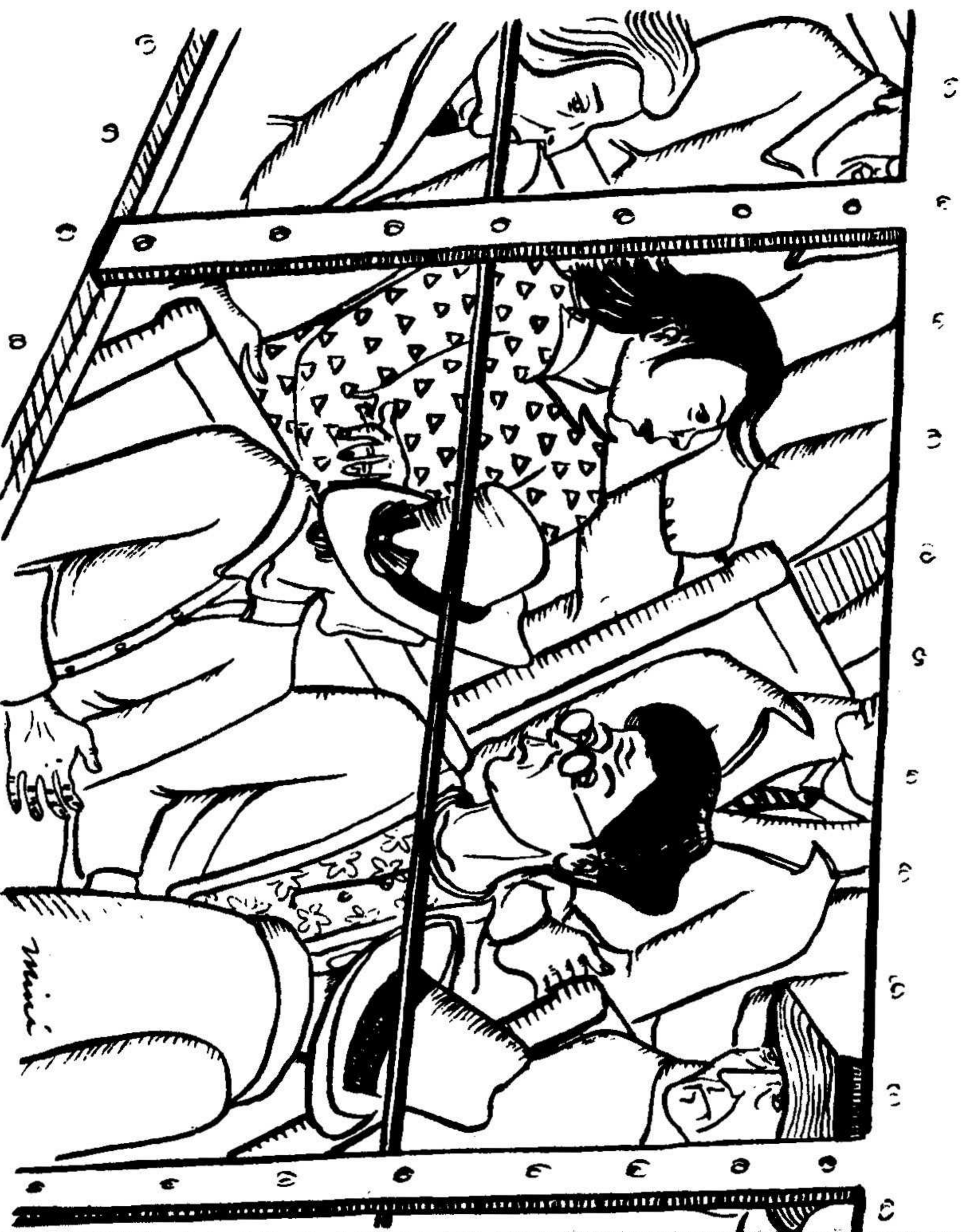


ON December 11 the United States declared war on Germany and Italy. On the West Coast there was talk of possible sabotage and invasion by the enemy. It was "Jap" this and "Jap" that. Restricted areas were prescribed and many arrests and detentions of enemy aliens took place. All enemy aliens were required to have certificates of identification. Contraband, such as cameras, binoculars, short-wave radios, and firearms had to be turned over to the local police.

At this time I was working on mosaics for Fort Ord and for the Servicemen's Hospitality House in Oakland, California. I was too busy to bother about the reports of possible evacuation.

However, it was not long before I realized my predicament. My fellow workers were feeling sorry for me; my Caucasian friends were suggesting that I go East; my Japanese American friends were asking me what I would do if all American

citizens and aliens of Japanese ancestry were evacuated. Letters from a sister in Southern California informed me that Father had been whisked away to an internment camp. A brother who was already in the army wrote letters full of wisecracks: "Better get ready for induction, kids. It's your turn now!"



THE people looked at all of us, both citizens and aliens, with suspicion and mistrust.

On February 19, 1942, by executive order of the President, the enemy alien problem was transferred from the Department of Justice to the War Department. Restriction of German and Italian enemy aliens and evacuation of all American citizens and aliens of Japanese ancestry was ordered.

Public Proclamations Nos. 1 and 2 appeared in the newspapers. Three military areas were designated, including practically all of the coastal states of Washington, Oregon, and California, and the inland states of Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, and Utah.

Evacuation was voluntary; people of Japanese ancestry were instructed to move out of the region on their own. Several thousand moved out of the vital

coast areas but growing suspicion and general public antagonism caused unforeseen difficulties. On March 27, 1942, voluntary evacuation was halted and the army took over, to bring about a forced and orderly evacuation.



ON March 24, Public Proclamation No. 3 established the curfew. All American citizens and aliens of Japanese ancestry and other enemy aliens had to be home between the hours of 8 P. M. and 6 A. M. I had to have a special permit to travel to Oakland where I was employed because it was outside a five-mile radius of my home. Violation of any of the regulations meant fines and imprisonment.

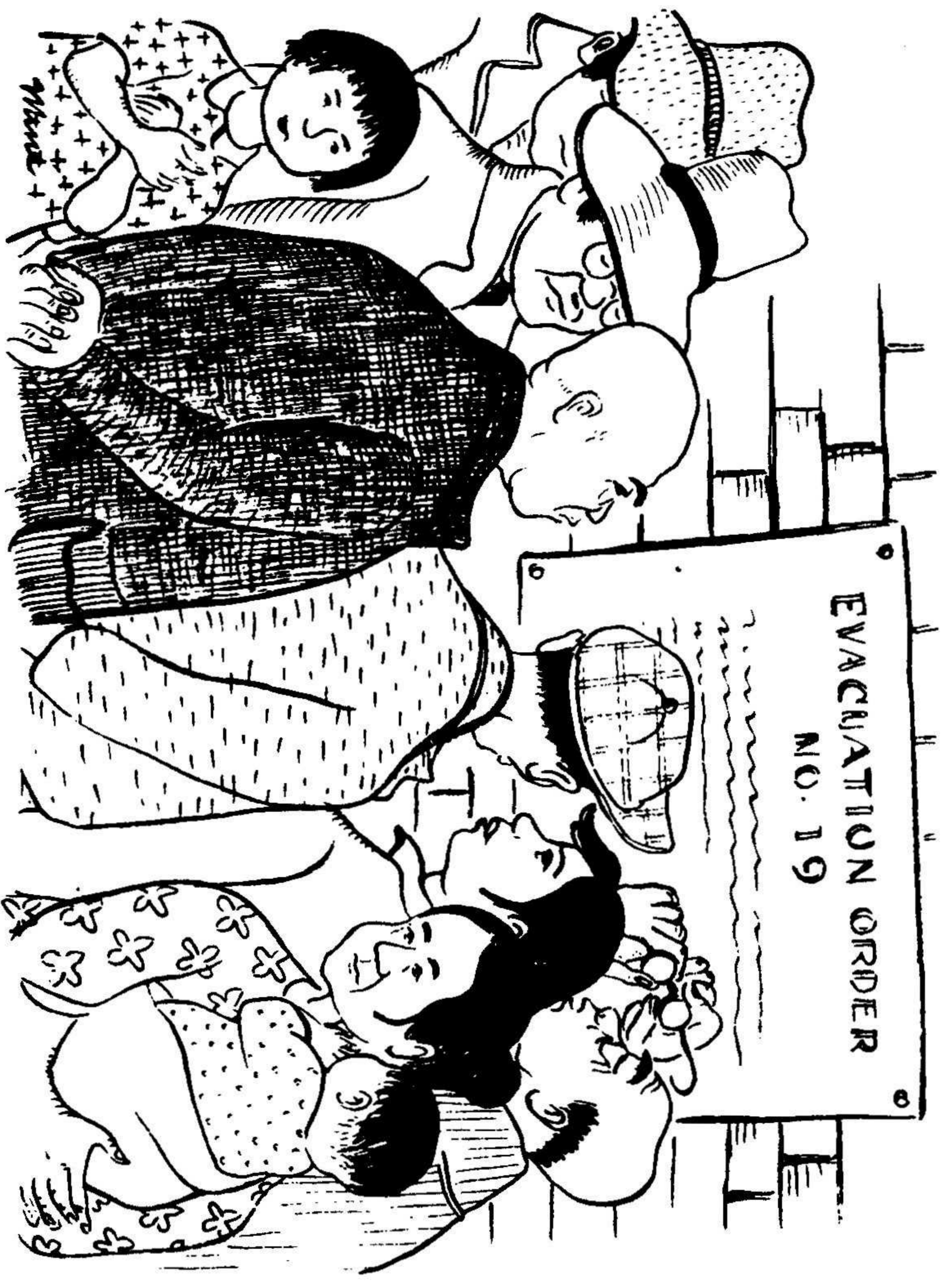
The Federal Reserve Banks took charge of property owned by the evacuees, while the Farm Security Administration took over the agricultural property. This was necessary because of the social and economic vultures preying upon the unfortunates expecting to be evacuated.



"BE prepared for the Relocation Centers. Bring work clothes suited to pioneer life," was, in effect, one of the instructions. We made all kinds of hurried preparations. I had no difficulty finding boots and jeans but had to get friends to help find duffel bags, as most of the stores were sold out of them.

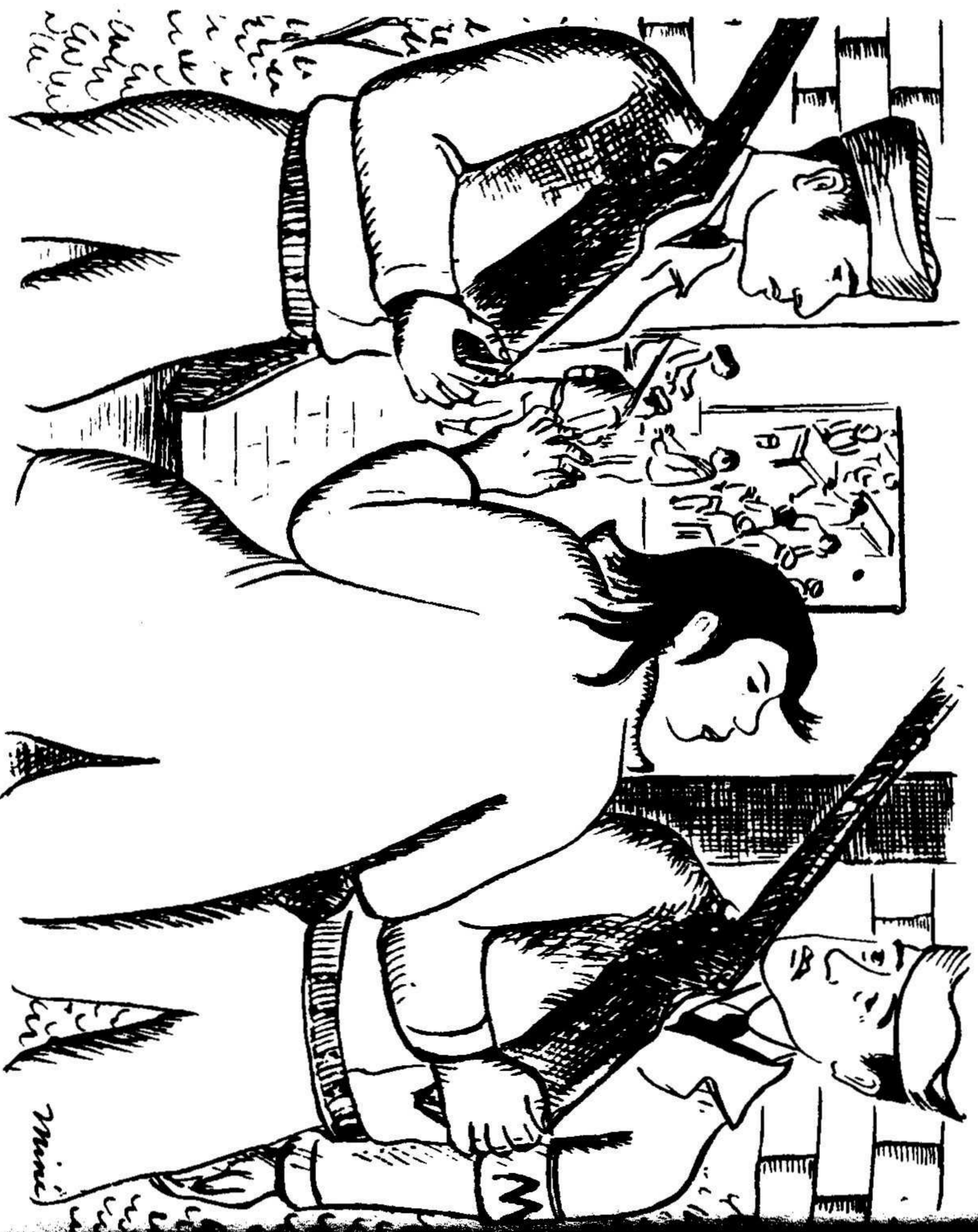
Shelter for 100,000 evacuees was constructed by the army within a space of three weeks. Race tracks and county fair grounds were changed overnight into assembly centers surrounded by military police and barbed wire. Fifteen centers were established, Manzanar in southern California being the first. Exclusion orders followed in rapid succession and the first formal mass evacuation started on March 31. Thousands were evacuated every day from the designated areas, and soon all American citizens and aliens of Japanese ancestry were moved

from the entire state of California, the western half of Oregon and Washington, and the southern third of Arizona. In all, 110,000 were moved out; two thirds of them were native American citizens.



ON April 24, 1942, Civilian Exclusion Order No. 19 was issued and posted everywhere in Berkeley. Our turn had come.

We had not believed at first that evacuation would affect the Nisei, American citizens of Japanese ancestry, but thought perhaps the Issei, Japanese-born mothers and fathers who were denied naturalization by American law, would be interned in case of war between Japan and the United States. It was a real blow when everyone, regardless of citizenship, was ordered to evacuate.



CIVIL Control Stations were established by the Wartime Civil Control Administration in each of the designated areas. One member of each family was asked to register for the family; people without families registered individually. On Sunday, April 26, 1942, I reported to Pilgrim Hall of the First Congregational Church in Berkeley to register for my brother and myself—a family unit of two. Soldiers were standing guard at the entrance and around the buildings.



A woman seated near the entrance gave me a card with No. 7 printed on it and told me to go inside and wait. I read the "funnies" until my number was called and I was interviewed. The woman in charge asked me many questions and filled in several printed forms as I answered. As a result of the interview, my family name was reduced to No. 13660. I was given several tags bearing the family number, and was then dismissed. At another desk I made the necessary arrangements to have my household property stored by the government.



ON Tuesday when I returned to the Civil Control Station, I found our names posted on the board along with the family number. My family unit of two was scheduled to leave with the next to the last group at 11:30 A.M. on Friday, May 1, 1942. Our destination was Tanforan Assembly Center, which was at the Tanforan Race Track in San Bruno, a few miles south of San Francisco.

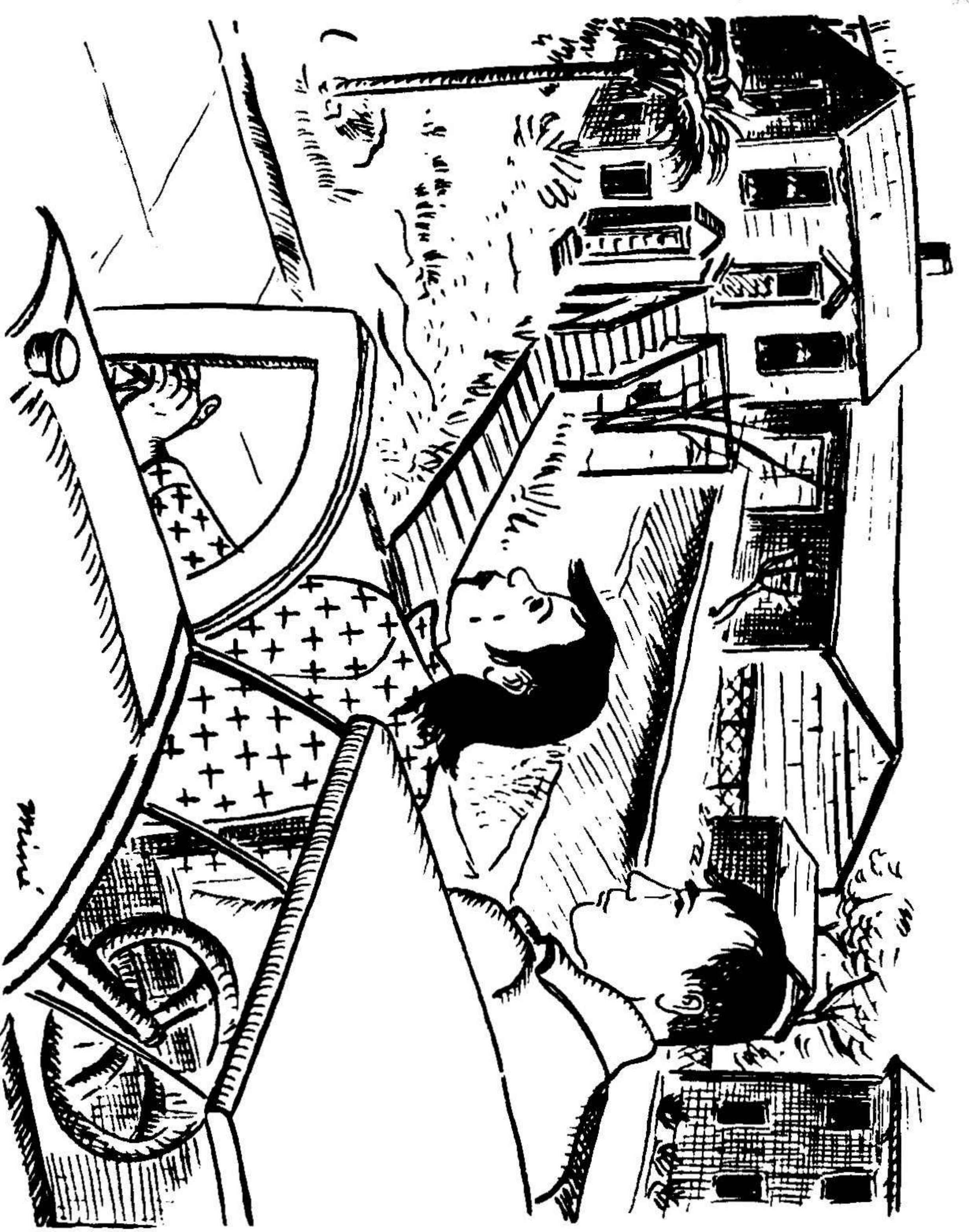


WE had three days and three nights to pack and get ready. My brother was excused from the University with a promise that he would receive his B.A. degree in June.

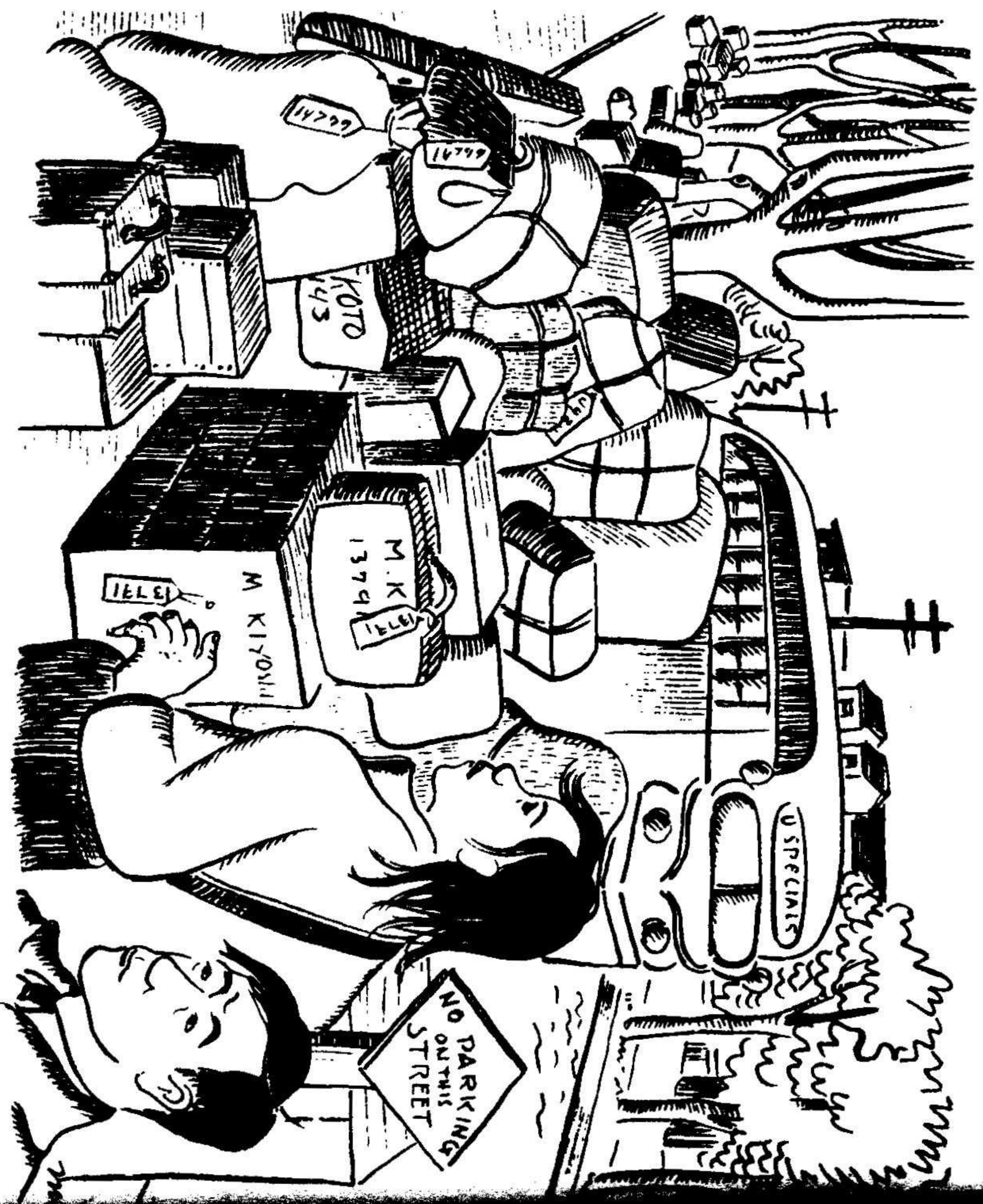
Our friends came to cheer us up and to wish us luck. It was like old home week but we were exhausted from work and worry. On the last morning the main part of the packing was finished but there was still plenty to be done. I asked different friends to take care of some of my cherished possessions. In the last hour I dashed to the bank to get some money, picked up my laundry, and paid my household bills.



WE tagged our baggage with the family number, 13660, and pinned the personal tags on ourselves; we were ready at last.



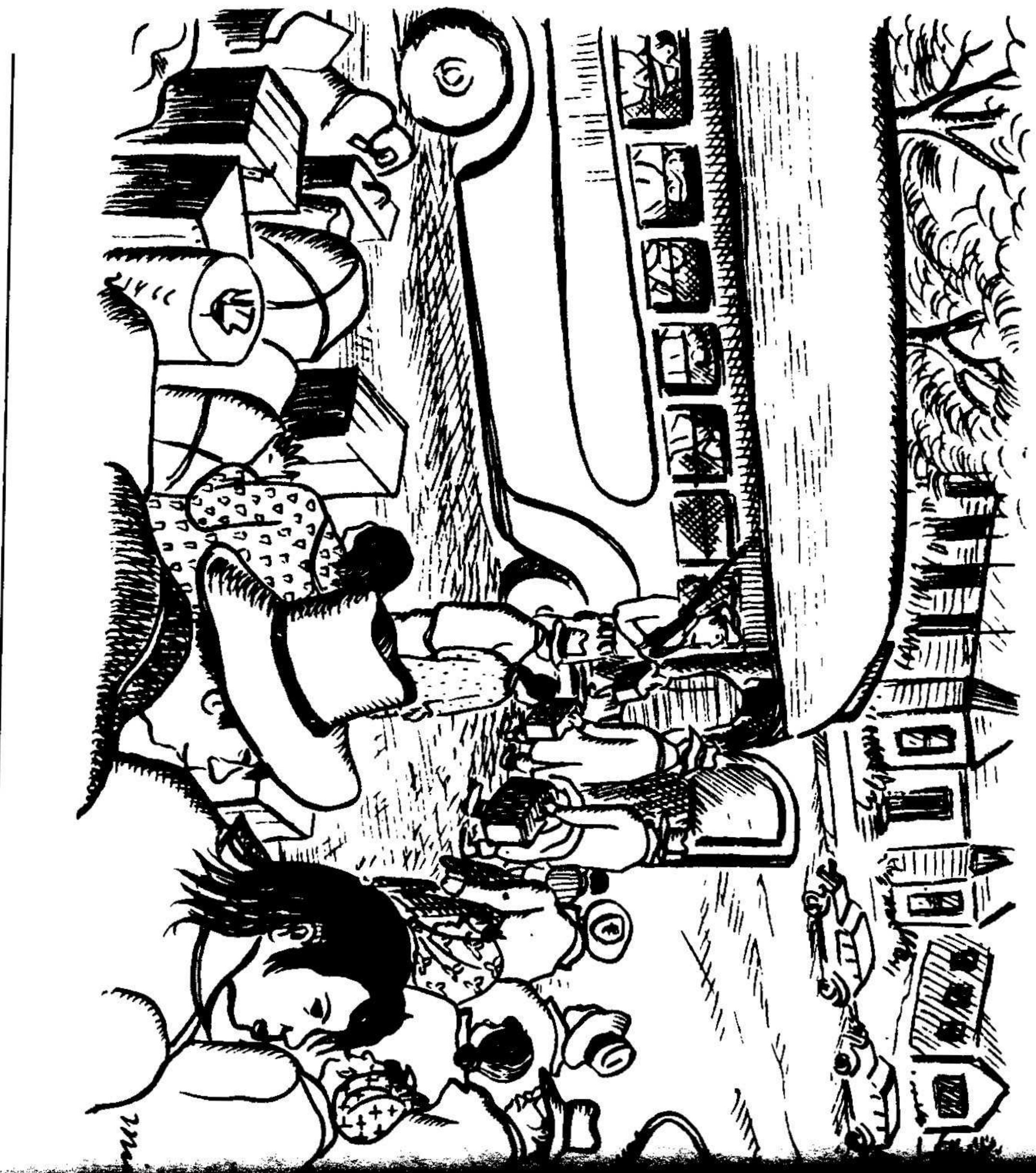
OUR friends came to take us to the Civil Control Station. We took one last look at our happy home.



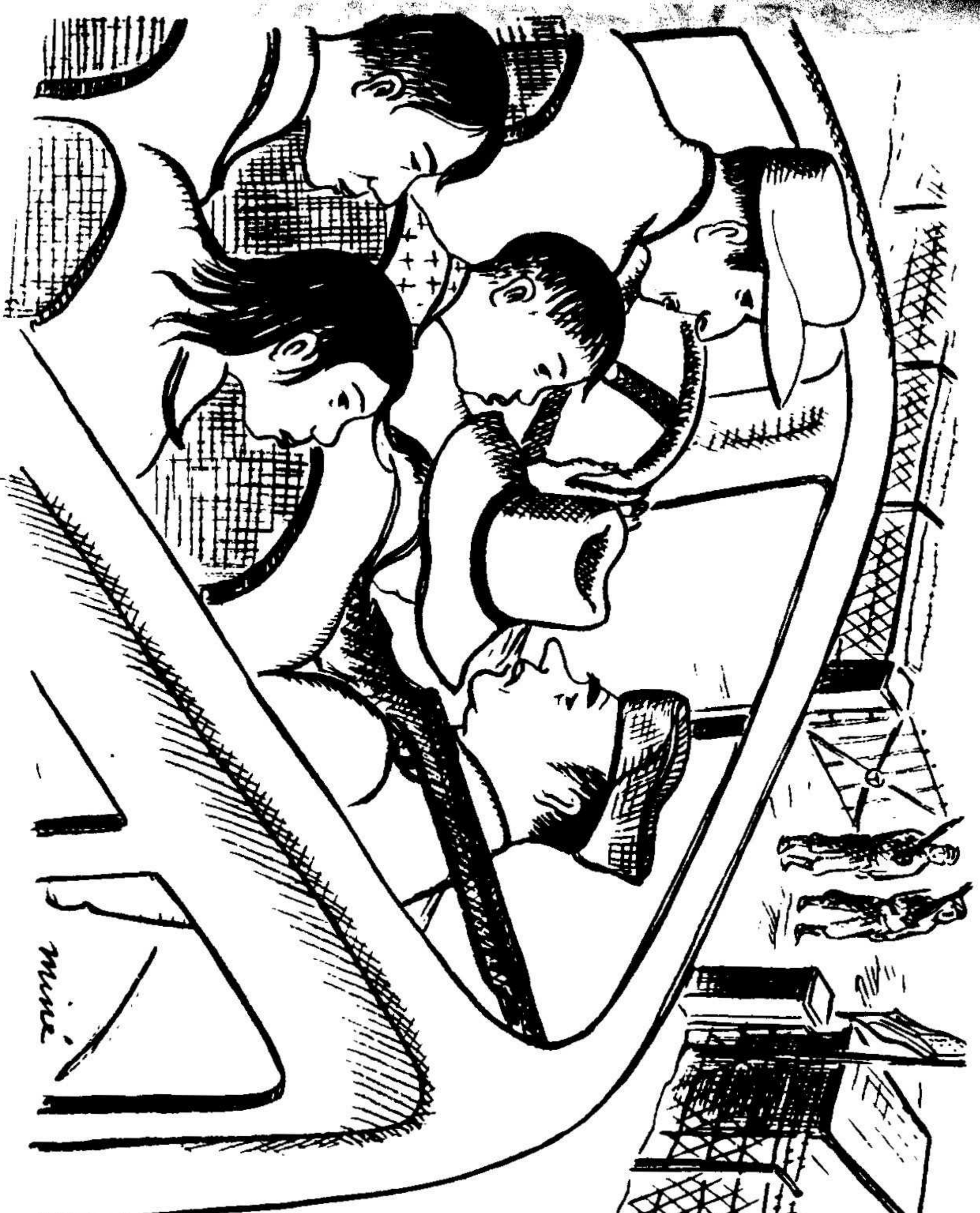
THE entire city block around the Civil Control Station was guarded by military police. Baggage was piled on the sidewalk the full length of the block. Greyhound buses were lined alongside the curb.



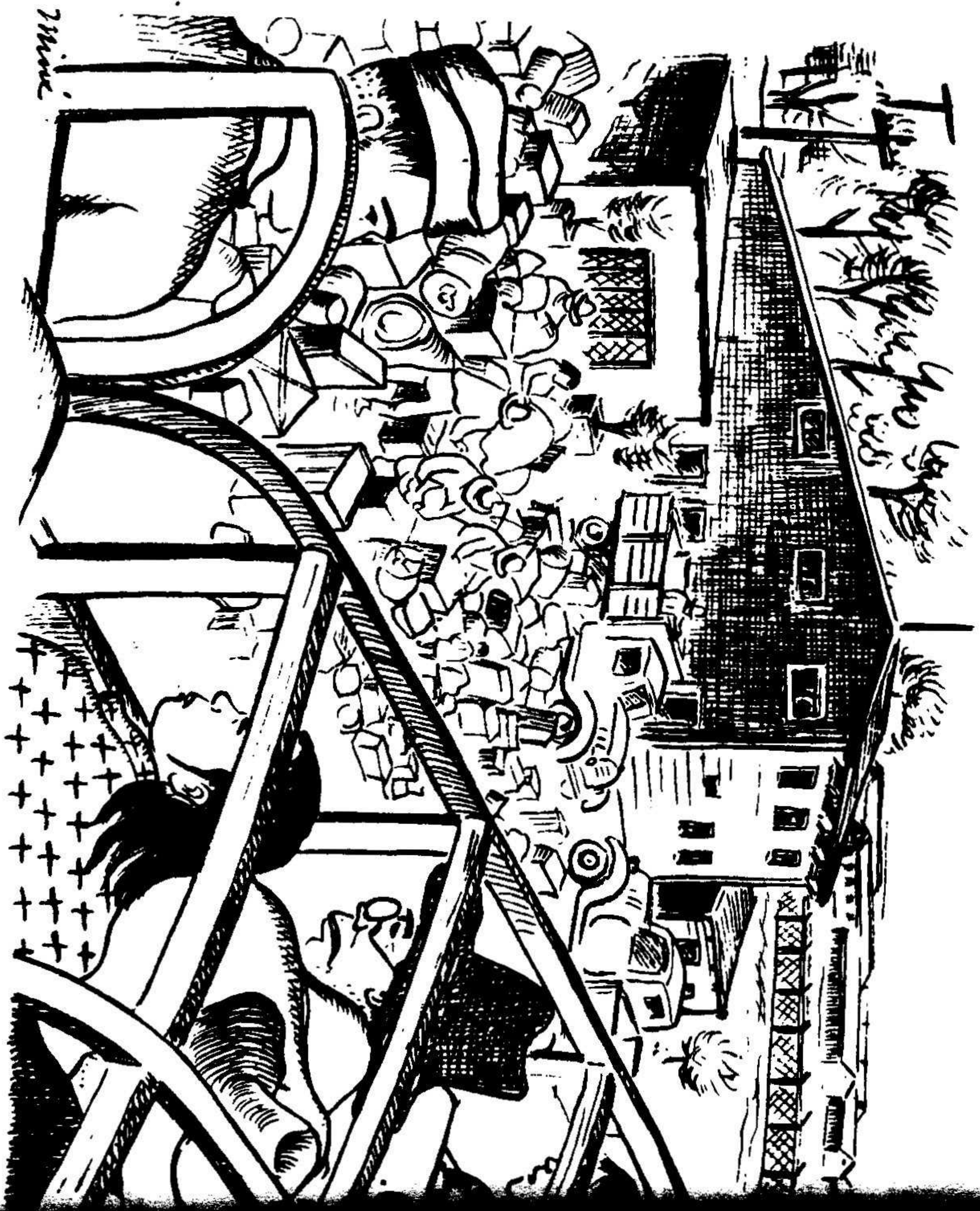
WE said good-bye to our friends and entered the Civil Control Station. Hundreds of evacuees were already there. A guide directed us to Group No. 4 to which we were assigned. Sandwiches and fruit were served by the church people. At 11:30 A.M. Group 4 was called. We picked up our hand luggage and fell into line.



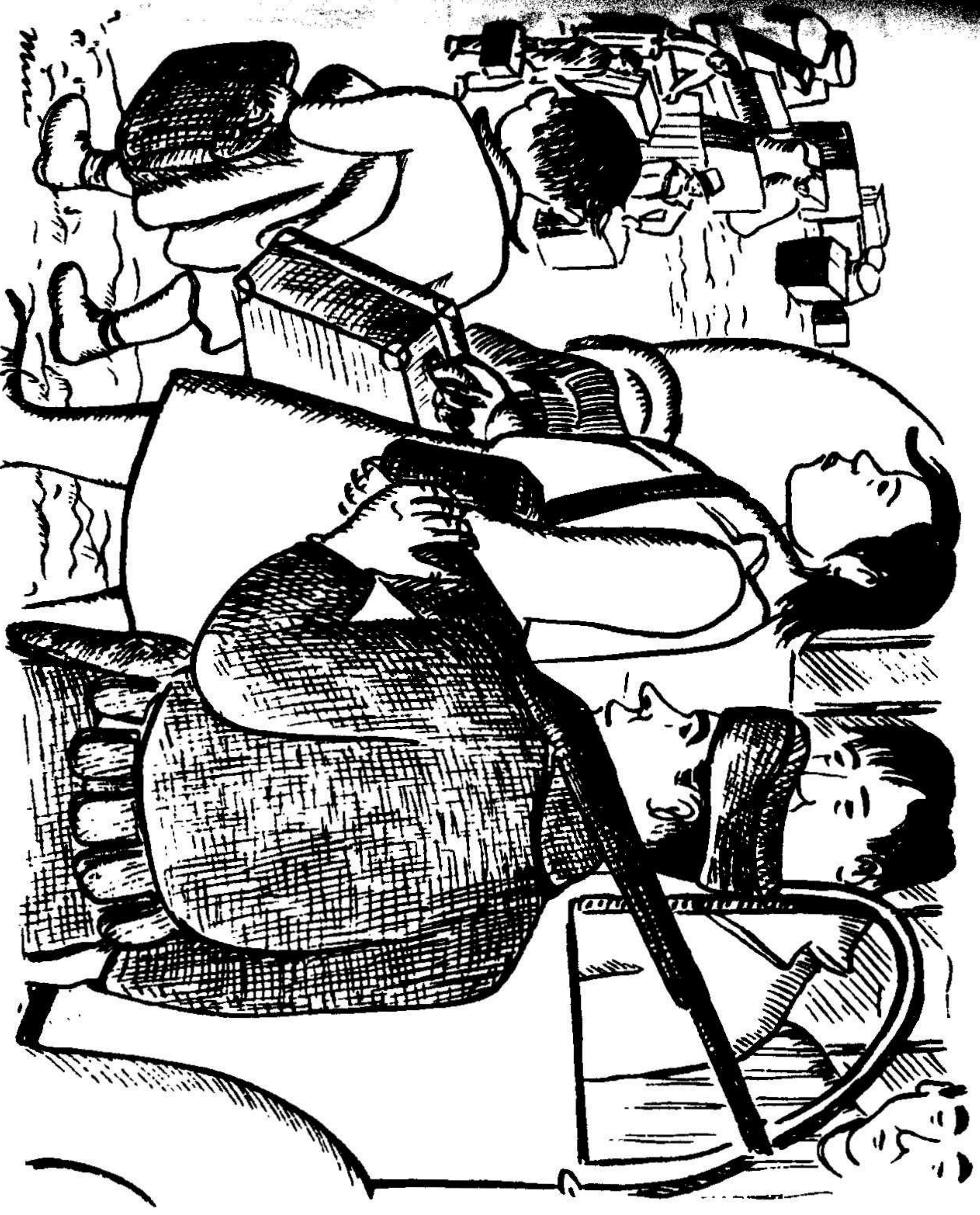
THE military police opened the bus door and we stepped into the bus as our family number was called. Many spectators stood around. At that moment I recalled some of the stories told on shipboard by European refugees bound for America. We were silent on the trip except for a group of four University of California boys who were singing college songs. The bus crossed the Bay Bridge. Everyone stared at the beautiful view as if for the last time. The singing stopped.



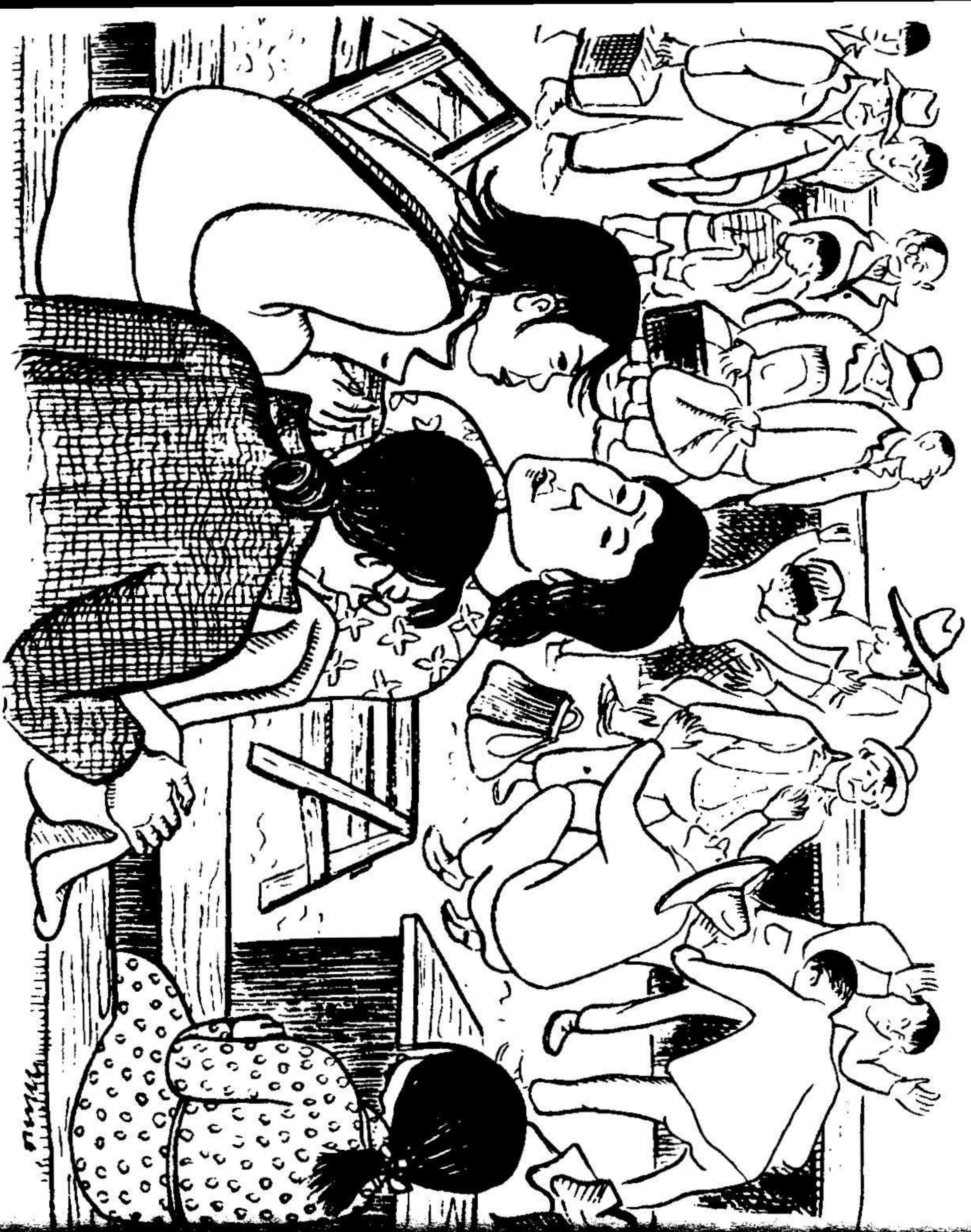
AT about 12:30 we arrived at Tanforan Assembly Center. The gates were opened by military guards and the bus drove into the Tanforan Race Track grounds.



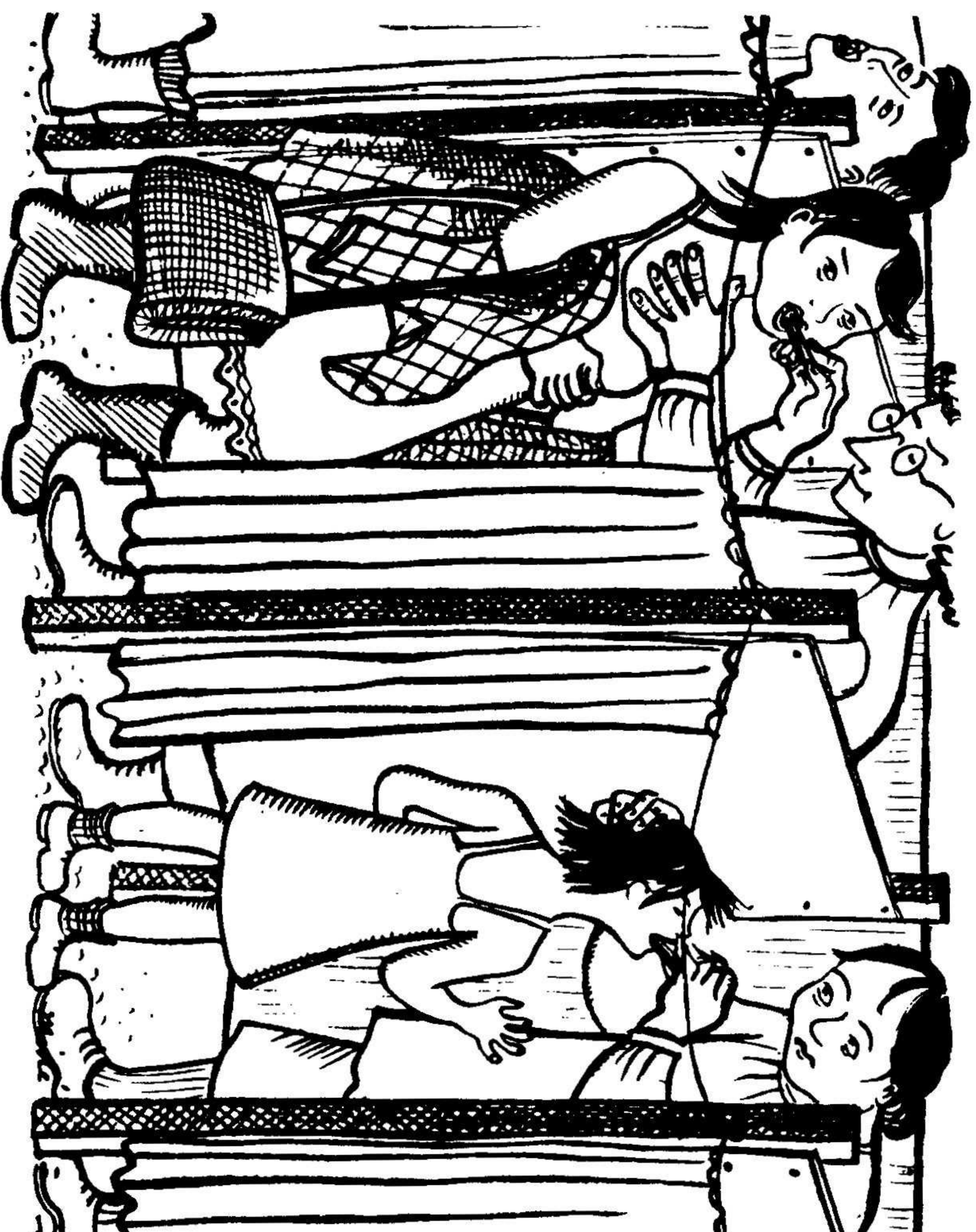
BAGGAGE of all sizes and shapes was piled high along the driveway in back of the grandstand, and earlier arrivals were searching among the stacks for their possessions. We waited in the parked bus for fifteen minutes; then the bus was driven around to the front of the grandstand.



THE soldier got out and opened the door and we fled out past him.



MY brother and I were separated at this point. I was asked to sit on the bench with the women and wait while my brother lined up with the men and was searched from head to toe for contraband. Straight-edged razors, knives more than four inches long, and liquor were considered contraband.



MEDICAL examination followed. I was asked to enter one of the slightly partitioned and curtained compartments and was ordered to undress. A nurse looked into my mouth with a flashlight and checked my arms to see if I had been vaccinated for smallpox. When I rejoined my brother I asked him what they made him do. "They made us strip," he said.



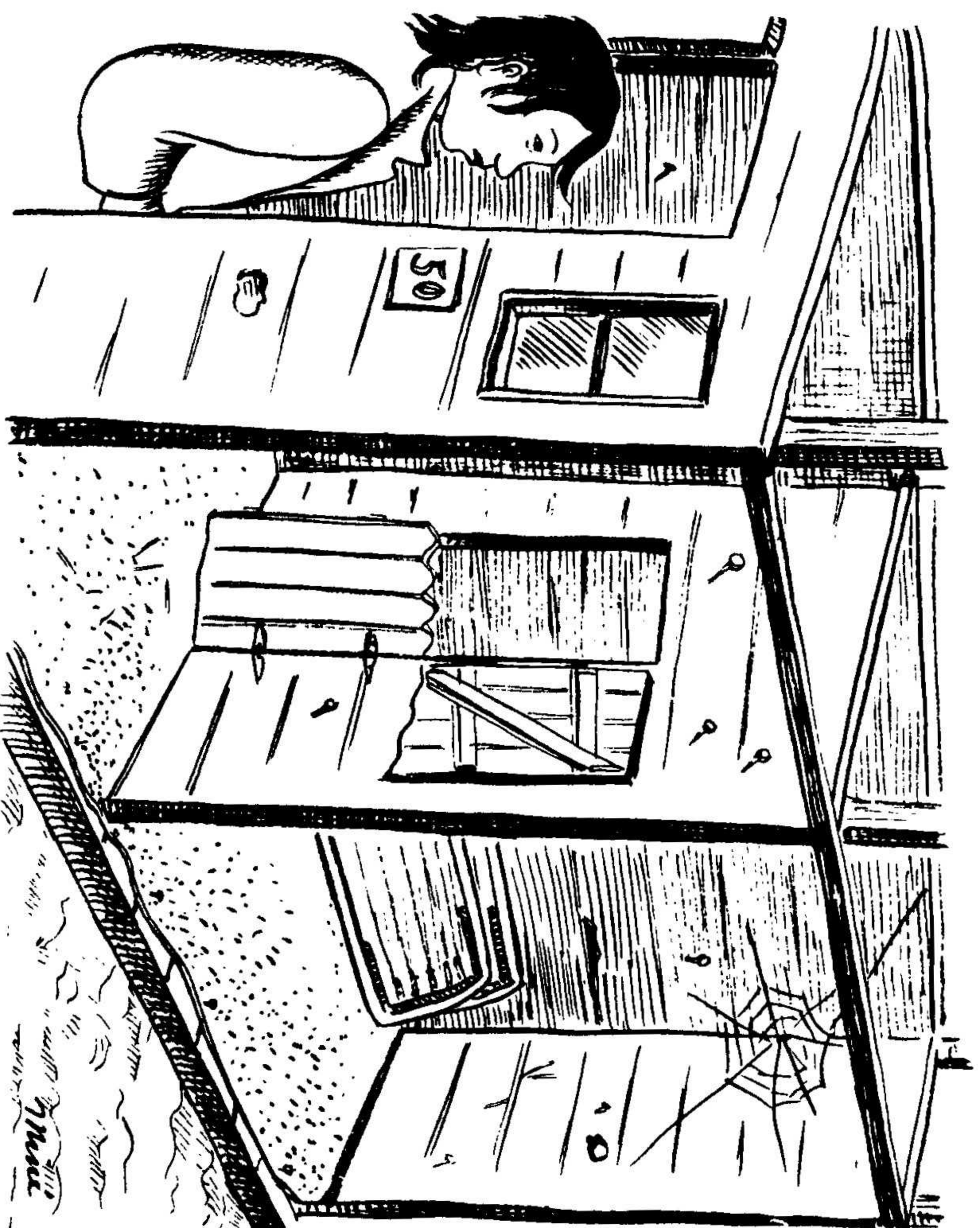
As head of the family I took the okayed slips from the nurse and presented them at the desk where rooms were being assigned. The girl who took the slips said, "Sorry, but we will have to send you and your brother to separate bachelor quarters. We are short of rooms for small family units." I told her that my brother and I had come as a family unit of two and that we intended to remain that way. I had to argue the point with each of the girls at the desk in turn, but finally they decided to let us remain as a family unit.



A guide was called to take us to our home, Barrack 16, Room 50. We went practically halfway around the race track and then diagonally across the center field through sticky mud and tall weeds. The ground was wet from the downpour of the day before. Those who had come on that day were drenched and their baggage was soaked. Friends who had entered the camp the previous week had warned us what camp was like so we came prepared with boots. When we arrived it was not raining, but now it started to sprinkle.



WE followed the guide past the race track to the other side where the horse stables were. We passed many stables before Stable 16 was pointed out to us. It was an isolated building surrounded by tall weeds and standing high above the ground. It was the only barrack with a raised walk and railing.



THE guide left us at the door of Stall 50. We walked in and dropped our things inside the entrance. The place was in semidarkness; light barely came through the dirty window on either side of the entrance. A swinging half-door divided the 20 by 9 ft. stall into two rooms. The roof sloped down from a height of twelve feet in the rear room to seven feet in the front room; below the rafters an open space extended the full length of the stable. The rear room had housed the horse and the front room the fodder. Both rooms showed signs of a hurried white-washing. Spider webs, horse hair, and hay had been whitewashed with the walls. Huge spikes and nails stuck out all over the walls. A two-inch layer of dust covered the floor, but on removing it we discovered that linoleum the color of red-wood had been placed over the rough manure-covered boards.