

# Real life experience in obasan by joy kogawa

[Experience](#), [Personal Experience](#)



After the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor, Canada responded quickly by developing several concentration camps for Japanese civilians of any descent, including Canadians. The individuals at the camps were stripped of their homes, businesses, and even separated by their families. In the novel *Obasan*, Joy Kogawa shares the experience of a teacher of Japanese Canadian descent, Naomi, who slowly learns about the whereabouts and reasonings behind several of her family member disappearances. The novel shares a point of view with the readers, which demonstrates how the Japanese Canadian Internment affected survivors of the event.

The novel specifies on the event within British Columbia, and the how a large amount of Japanese Canadians living there were affected by the internment. In an article by Judith Roberts-Moore, she discusses the internment of Japanese Canadians in British Columbia, which had roughly twenty-two thousand Japanese Canadian living alongside the coasts, using the resources such as their industry of fishing showing their heritage. Their main source of food came from fish and their boats had been stripped from them taking away their livelihood and criminalizing them. The Japanese Canadian were forced to relocated and had been stripped from their identity following the Pearl Harbour bombing, December 1941. The canadian government stripped their rights by categorizing them under the “ War Measures Act” and “ Trading with the Enemy Act,” confiscating everything they had owned (2002 Moore). They were titled as aliens being racially discriminated against and put into internment camps which made them have to do labour work. They had been living in poor conditions, as well as being deported out of Canada, to Japan, without a Canadian citizenship. The hardships of this historical

event is similar in the book *Obasan* because Naomi reportedly had lost numerous family in the book, while these internment camps would often split families. Naomi's family had experienced this kind of treatment when they had to be relocated. Her father was talking to Mr. Grower about leaving behind their home and possessions in safe keeping. Naomi and Stephen are brought to an abandoned mining town in the forest of Slogon British Columbia. Realizing that in her family her grandpa and grandma was being detained at Sick Bay. This is where they would be "shipped off to road-work camps and concentration camps in the interior of the province" and all their rights had been stripped from them and discriminated due to their Japanese race (Kogawa 69). The imagery used in *Obasan* of the chicken pecking the baby chicks, show how the Japanese Canadians had been ill-favoured treating them wrongfully and how realistic the imagery shown represents the actual events (Kogawa 52). The pain of the baby chicks are parallel to the pain of the Japanese Canadians, suffering because of their tradition and many had been killed. The book also described Naomi's view on the "pool of water, but a prison at the exhibition grounds" (Kogawa 69) and "'protected area'-a hundred mile strip along the coast-were herded into grounds and kept there like animals until they were shipped off to work" (Kogawa 69) to visually communicate to the readers on how realistic their situation is. The description from Moore's article helps reinforce the reality of the experience and truth that the world should know about their treatment. Overall Joy Kogawa used imagery and written letters to show the pains of the Japanese Canadians, demonstrating how realistic this experience is through Naomi's view. While the article gave information on the experience these people

faced which shows how the author portrayed this historical event authentically throughout *Obasan*.

In the beginning, Naomi never necessarily considered looking into the missing information regarding her family's past. *Obasan* encouraged her to stay away from her past for many years, until Aunt Emily pushed her towards uncovering the secrets. Aunt Emily's letters and persuasion had a huge influence on Naomi, regaining interest in what had actually happened and the experiences she had gone through wanting to learn about her historical background. Naomi ventures through her memories learning of how she was molested by Mr. Grower, forced to leave her home and relocate elsewhere. Overall learning and seeking for the truth about her past, as well as understanding the historical events of Pearl Harbour and World War II. Resultantly, she was able to uncover a lot of information regarding her family due to how they were affected by the events. In relation to the event itself, the experience that Naomi is confronted with defines how survivors think about the event today. In an article written by Robert Krell, he starts off with saying "The majority of children who survived concentration camps have remained silent about their experiences. Their memories, rather than fading with time, have intensified" (Krell 1990). This gives an explanation as for why Naomi was never informed about the experiences that her ancestors have faced, and an idea of why *Obasan* kept her secrets. To elaborate, the novel gives the reader an emotional example of how the survivors responded and reflected on the concentration camps. Generally, they have shown that they would prefer to leave all the pain and suffering in the past, which is also expressed with how *Obasan* pushes those ideals for Naomi. Krell continues

later in the article with, ' The conditions in Japanese concentration camps defy description and although there was no outright policy of annihilation, disease, famine and physical cruelty took a heavy toll of life. An estimated 100, 000 or more were interned' (Krell 1990). The book relates to this with how Naomi's father contracted tuberculosis after being sent to the concentration camps, and inevitably died afterwards.

To conclude, the book *Obasan* portrayed the real life experiences that had happened in the scholarly sources in a realistic way. They had to face discrimination, poverty, and trauma throughout the book. The scholarly sources was able to prove that the experiences of Naomi and her family had been a mirror image of the historical event after Pearl Harbor. Joy Kogawa was able to provide real letters from individuals as well as real historical events to a fictional character.