

SWEET TREAT OF MINIDOKA

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My one memory of camp food is of a sweet treat. No memories of Vienna sausages or canned foods in the communal mess hall come to mind. Other incarcerated have stories about the long lines to wait for meals or of bread with moldy taste and smell. At the age of five, my memory is different.

In a barren, kitchenless, barrack at block 32 at Minidoka Relocation Center, without cooking utensils or supplies, my Aunt Mary managed to gather a pot and granulated sugar. With these sparse and limited ingredients and a pot belly stove, she turned a heaping mound of sugar, mixed with water into an incredible treat.

No candy thermometers were used – just a pot and spoon. Careful watching, stirring and the pouring of this sugary syrup when it reached just the right temperature must be the trick.

A sweet mixture of small, tiny bubbles started to form at the bottom of the pot. I watched and waited. Soon the bubbles grew larger and larger as they rose to the top and popped when they hit the air. Faster and faster, the bubbles burst as they seemed to bump into each other. Each bubble gave off a scent of a heavenly, sugary smell.

At just the right temperature, my aunt spooned out the viscous syrup and dropped them on waxed paper to cool. In no time they hardened into round shiny, transparent rounds, glistening in the daylight. They were so pretty, but yet I can't recall if they were crystal clear or colored. I wonder if there was a stick placed in the middle. Once eaten, the smooth morsels, similar to a clear lollipop melted in my mouth as a delicious, yummy treat.

I'm still looking for the sweet treat of years past. I'm still searching for a taste of the almost forgotten sugary mouthful that impressed me so...so simple, yet so attainable.

Even today, I enjoy an occasional Dum Dum or Tootsie Roll Pop. None meets the sweet delicate confection Aunt Mary stirred up in the camp barrack. I still yearn for the smooth drops of the hardened sugar. The aroma of boiling sugar remains engraved in my mind. I'm not sure if I'll taste the Minidoka candy again, but the culinary sweet treat is forever etched in my memory.