

# Remembrances of Yosemite

By Leone J. "Lee" Snow #4244

22 May 2000

*Dear David,*

*I hope I can call you by your first name as I feel I am a friend with a common bond of Yosemite National Park.*

*I recently read an article that you are now the superintendent in Yosemite. I thought you might like to receive a different type of letter rather than a complaint or worse.*

*So, just in case you may enjoy a bit of past history and for your information, I submit this as a big step in time for me also, as I recall memories of Yosemite dating back to 1943 and World War II, then, also, a number of years thereafter.*

*I am now an 84-year-old lady who can look back to our wonderful Yosemite. I was a truck and staff car driver, a corporal in the Women's Army Corps stationed at Camp Pinedale, Fresno, California, during the terrible World War II.*

*I saw and enjoyed that mountain driving and drinking in that cool air before returning to the hot valley. We didn't have the luxury of air conditioning in vehicles or barracks back then.*

*Many may not know that Yosemite was also used as an R&R camp for troops as well as Army signal training. All was top-secret and questions were not asked.*

*I still recall our camp as "Western Signal Aviation Unit Training Center."*

*My job in the motorpool was to drive troops, supplies and officers there.*

*Now, I wonder how I managed to take large trucks around those then-narrow roads with no power brakes or steering or automatic trannys. Just double-clutching when necessary. I was young, brave and took my status seriously.*

*Many of my memories are dim now and names and times forgotten. There seemed to be only one very small store in the valley to purchase groceries, etc.*

*Nothing else to clutter up the valley floor.*

*I recall driving a chaplain, doctor, to minister to the troops there. It was a job for me and not a vacation, so I don't recall anything but military activities.*

*I did enjoy the challenge and beauty of Yosemite every drive I made, though.*

*After World War II ended, I remained in Fresno for a few years while our Army Air Corps camp was permanently closed. I remained to help in its closing, and a few years ago, I wrote about this event and enclose it for information and a memory.*

*I bought an old car and, with an army friend, learned to enjoy backcountry by hiking and camping—then very primitive, quiet and enjoyable.*

*Tioga Road was a very narrow dirt road. If you did meet someone else, you had to find one of the wide spots to allow passing.*

*I never got to Tuolumne Meadows and a trail to Pinwheel Falls(?), as a wolverine blocked the trail, with threatening flashing teeth. Back to the meadow area, there were a large number of deer grazing along with a number of black bears, all in perfect harmony.*

*With caution, we circled around them and returned to our waiting car, a bit frightened by it all as we were the only people around in this wild area.*

*Then, and I have never forgotten, there was the beautiful "Fire Falls" on Saturday nights from Glacier Point and falling so gracefully into the valley below, as an unknown soprano sang "Indian Love Call" to the small crowd gathered below.*

*Easter sunrise service beside Mirror Lake was another quiet, calm space in time. There was the fun of dipping, wading and swimming in the pools below magnificent falls. Just you, the roar of the falls and water, clear as a crystal. What simple fun it was.*

*Driving through the famous Wauwona tunnel tree and seeing deer, white-headed woodpeckers and other birds made one feel you were in a special cathedral, as all was so quiet, serene and undisturbed.*

*Then, above Badger Pass, as the snow was beginning to welcome spring, one would find a beautiful bright red flower peaking through the snow at the feet of those towering trees. I didn't know what the flowers were; it was just a thrill to see them popping through the remains of winter snow. Their bright red beauty remains with me today.*

*Now, almost 60 years later, I became curious and found them in an old wildflower book as a "snow plant" in all its beauty. It would be interesting to know if anyone else has seen them there? Would be quite a discovery.*

*Yosemite held, and holds, many fond memories. Sadly, I saw what I call, "the rape of a national wonder;" while unhappy to see and feel this happening, I*

*for one was able to see and enjoy the serenity of this beautiful place and was able to enjoy its primitive beauty, a place for me that even holds memories of a time at war that had its place in our victory.*

*Do I wish it could go back to what it was then? Yes. But I also realize it can't be in a world that doesn't know, care or understand that it, too, was bought for a price by those who trained there so we could later enjoy it with the freedom won in World War II.*

*I retired from the United States Air Force in 1966 and not living in California any more, but I do have very fond memories of this special place you are now directed to save for the future. Wisdom, good luck and prayers to you as you also serve our cuntry in this special National Park.*

*I have enjoyed talking to you and telling you my thoughts and memories.*

*Leone J. (Lee) Snow*

---

*Dear Leone,*

*Thank you so much for your insightful letter about your times in Yosemite. That was certainly another incredible period in Yosemite's amazing history.*

*Your letter has been passed on to David Forgang, our Cultural Resources Specialist for inclusion in our collection of social history.*

*It is always interesting to hear how much our Park has changed over the years.*

*Thanks again for taking this time to acquaint us with your experience.*

*Sincerely,*

*David A. Mihabi,*

*Superintendent, Yosemite National Park*