



Manzanar Cemetery, Winter 2002.

This booklet was developed by the park rangers at Manzanar National Historic Site in partnership with the individuals profiled and their families.



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Printing was made possible by a grant from the California Civil Liberties Public Education Program.

Manzanar



ID Card

WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY
 WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION
 Presidio of San Francisco, California
 May 3, 1942

**INSTRUCTIONS
 TO ALL PERSONS OF
 JAPANESE
 ANCESTRY**



Big Area:
 Within the boundary indicated on the map of the Los Angeles District, persons born in that district and their blood relatives are to be placed under military control in the public interest.
 If the person is not a citizen, all persons born in that area are to be placed under military control as a representative of the Commanding General.
 If a family, or in case of grave emergency, are affected by this instruction to the full extent of the disposition of such kind of property, such persons, and their families, are to be placed under military control.
 If the person is a citizen, such person is to be placed under military control as a representative of the Commanding General.





In 1942 the United States Government ordered over 110,000 men, women, and children to leave their homes and detained them in remote, military-style camps. Two-thirds of them were born in America. Not one was convicted of espionage or sabotage.

In this booklet, you will read the story of a person who lived this history, in his or her own words.



LIFE IN A MANZANAR BLOCK

Wind and Dust

This wind and dust I have to bear
 How hard it blows I do not care.
 But when the wind begins to blow --
 My morale is pretty low.
 I know that I can see it through
 Because others have to bear it too.
 So I will bear it with the rest
 And hope the outcome is the best.

-- George Nishimura, age 16 (1943)

TOPAZ

Location: Millard County, 16 miles NW of Delta, UT.

Environmental Conditions: elevation 4600 ft, within the Sevier Desert – high desert brush with high winds and temperatures ranging from 106 degrees in summer to –30 degrees in winter.

Acreage: 19,800

Opened: September 11, 1942

Closed: October 31, 1945

Max. Population: 8,130 (March 17, 1943)

Demographics: Internees were primarily from the San Francisco Bay Area, predominantly from Tanforan Assembly Center.



ALBERT MIZUHARA

Family # 22687

Camp: Topaz, UT

Address in Camp: 31-7-B



Al Mizuhara, 1945

My grandfather Hyusuke Mizuhara immigrated to San Francisco in the late 1880s with his second wife, Kin. Their four children, including my father Katsui Mizuhara (1889-1942), soon followed. Before immigrating, my grandfather was a sea captain who sailed mainly around Japan. It has been speculated that he left Japan to avoid being conscripted into the Japanese Navy.

In 1924, my father returned to Japan to marry my mother, prior to the enactment of the discriminatory Immigration Act of 1924, which prevented further immigration from Japan to America. My father's business, which my grandfather started in 1889, was repairing antiques.

I was born in 1930 in San Francisco during the Great Depression. I had three older brothers and a younger brother.

When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on Sunday, December 7, 1941, armed soldiers and sailors suddenly appeared on street corners in my neighborhood. They were posted to maintain peace because there was a large Japanese community there. Newsboys hawking their papers were

yelling, "War! War! America is at war." I was 11, in the sixth grade at the Raphael Weill Elementary School. Nothing changed there. Teachers and classmates were all still very friendly. Because most of us had been going to school together since first grade, the teachers and students all knew each other pretty well.

Every Japanese home was eventually visited by an FBI agent and a policeman. The agent interrogated the male Issei adults, and the house was searched. "Potentially dangerous enemy aliens," mainly community leaders, Japanese language teachers, certain priests, and businessmen were picked up within a few days after the start of the war. My father was questioned. He was still a citizen of Japan, since a federal law prohibited him from applying to become a U.S. citizen. Many western states also passed laws stating that a person could not own land or a house unless he was a citizen. It was a catch-22 situation. My father was not arrested because he did not belong to any organization and had lived at the same address for the past 35 years.

A Caucasian lady attacked my brother and me. We couldn't understand why she blamed us for the war. We were just kids. But it didn't matter. Suddenly we were the enemy.

my younger brother and me as we walked by. She spit on us and called us "dirty Japs." We ran. We couldn't

The only bad experience that occurred to me happened on a street corner only a half block away from my home. A Caucasian lady attacked

made an arc welder that kept blowing fuses, plunging the barrack into darkness.

My family left Topaz as we entered it, with only what we could carry. We returned to San Francisco September 20, 1945, poor, fatherless, and on our own. My first impression of the "outside world" was totally intimidating. Our first "home" was ironically, a single room again, even smaller than the room we left in Topaz. My mother and two oldest brothers eventually found work, and after a few months, we rented two small rooms in a crowded flat.

I found work in the evening after school as a dishwasher. Half of the eight dishwashers were elderly Chinese men who wouldn't talk to me because I was Japanese. So even though the war had ended, and I was only 15 years old, I was still being blamed for the war and considered an enemy.

All of the Caucasian kids in my freshman class in high school appeared so mature, self confident, well dressed and rich. I still had my camp clothes and felt very self-conscious about my appearance. While they talked about family vacations, skiing and weekend trips, I was going through a culture shock. Most of us ex-inmates were in a survival mode, and lived day-to-day.

I was going through a culture shock .

It took a while, but with every passing year things got better for us. As for my brothers and me, eventually three of us became engineers, one a pharmacist and one opened a dental lab.



Topaz War Relocation Center, Utah

refused to serve him because he was a Japanese American, even though he was in his army uniform.

About a year after camp opened, a 63-year-old man, Mr. Wakasa, walking his dog by the barbed wire fence, was shot dead by an MP in the guard tower. The MP claimed that the man was trying to climb through the fence, and ignored orders to stop. It turned out he was hard of hearing.

There was a positive side to my Topaz experience. I enjoyed reading books and magazines in the library, participating in the Boy Scouts, playing baseball in the Pee Wee League and making toys from junk parts salvaged out of the motor pool. People I met there turned out to be lifelong friends. I'll never forget the unusually beautiful Topaz sunsets created by the fine dust suspended in the atmosphere from the dust storms.

Eventually security was relaxed and we were allowed to hike freely outside camp. We frequently hiked the 3½ miles to Little Drum Mountains. We would catch lizards and scorpions and keep them as pets.

With junk parts from the motor pool, I made a crude steam engine and nearly set the barrack on fire. I also

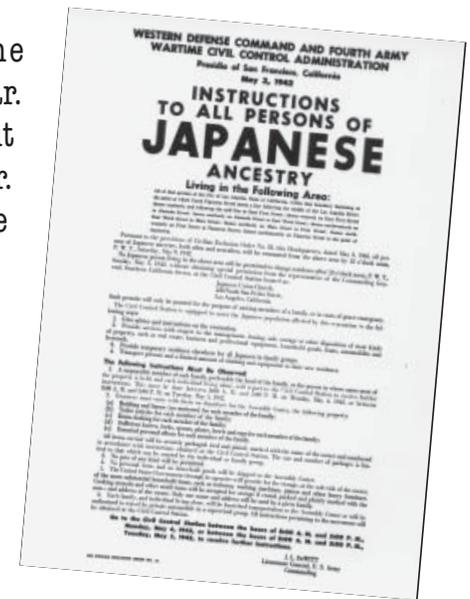
understand why she blamed us for the war. We were just kids. But it didn't seem to matter. Suddenly, we were the enemy.

Armed with Executive Order 9066, signed by President Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, the Army started posting large signs on telephone poles

in our neighborhood. The signs ordered all Japanese aliens and non-aliens to prepare to be "evacuated" from their homes into "Assembly Centers" (imprisoned). Anyone with as little as one-sixteenth Japanese blood was considered an enemy, and given only ten days to store or sell everything he owned, prior to being incarcerated.

My father had trouble selling furniture, since everyone else was also trying to sell belongings. Buyers offered only pennies on the dollar. Much of our personal property was abandoned in our rented home. A roomful of expensive antiques from my father's antique repair shop were smashed and buried in the yard. We were sad to leave our pet parrot and dog with our neighbors. The dog was destroyed when it bit their boy, but we did get our parrot back when we returned.

We received small pox, typhoid and tetanus shots before leaving. On May 10, 1942, my last day of freedom, I





Horse stalls and barracks at Tanforan Assembly Center, 1942

had to wear an I.D. tag on my shirt, marked with my family serial number, #22687. I could take only what I could carry, which included tin plate, cup, fork, spoon, clothes, bed sheets, etc., all stuffed into a cloth bag that my mother had made. We were taken by bus to Tanforan Assembly Center, south of San Francisco, which was a horse racing track converted into a prison camp, with barbed wire fences and guard towers.

Many families had to live in horse stables. A bare, single barrack room with cots would serve as our temporary “home.” The food was terrible. Most of us got diarrhea. An acute shortage of toilet paper added insult to injury. When school started, my sixth grade class was located beneath the grandstand in a large open horse race betting area.

After five months at Tanforan, we were herded onto an old, decrepit train for the long trip to Topaz, Utah. Topaz, with its barbed wire fences and guard towers, was a concentration camp in the middle of a bleak desert for 8,000 inmates like myself. A barrack room, 20 X 24 feet, barren like the desert outside, would be home for the six

of us for three years. With no insulation, the barrack was boiling hot in summer and freezing cold in winter. The ground outside was a fine powder dust that billowed up with each step, choking us. We shared a community mess hall, toilet and shower. Skinny and ill clothed, I was always cold in winter and hungry between meals and at night.

My father, ill with tuberculosis, did not come with us to Topaz. He was confined to a sanatorium in Redwood City, California, where he died a month after we arrived. He was only 53 years old. I’m sure his early demise was hastened by anxiety and stress stemming from his family being taken to an unknown location.

We were devastated.

At Topaz, I started junior high school in the seventh grade. The faculty consisted of a mix of Caucasian teachers and inmate teachers. The school was very poorly supplied. The textbooks were inadequate and in short supply, and the science classes lacked even the most basic equipment. The teachers were all dedicated, and despite the hardship, managed to carry on and make the best of the situation.

I had managed to bring along my tiny pet turtle from Tanforan, letting it swim in the washbasin on the train. When I got to Topaz, the drinking water was so bad, probably over chlorinated, that it killed my poor turtle.

A next-door neighbor, on leave from the army before going overseas, took me for a soda to the Army canteen in the Military Police compound. However, the soldiers