



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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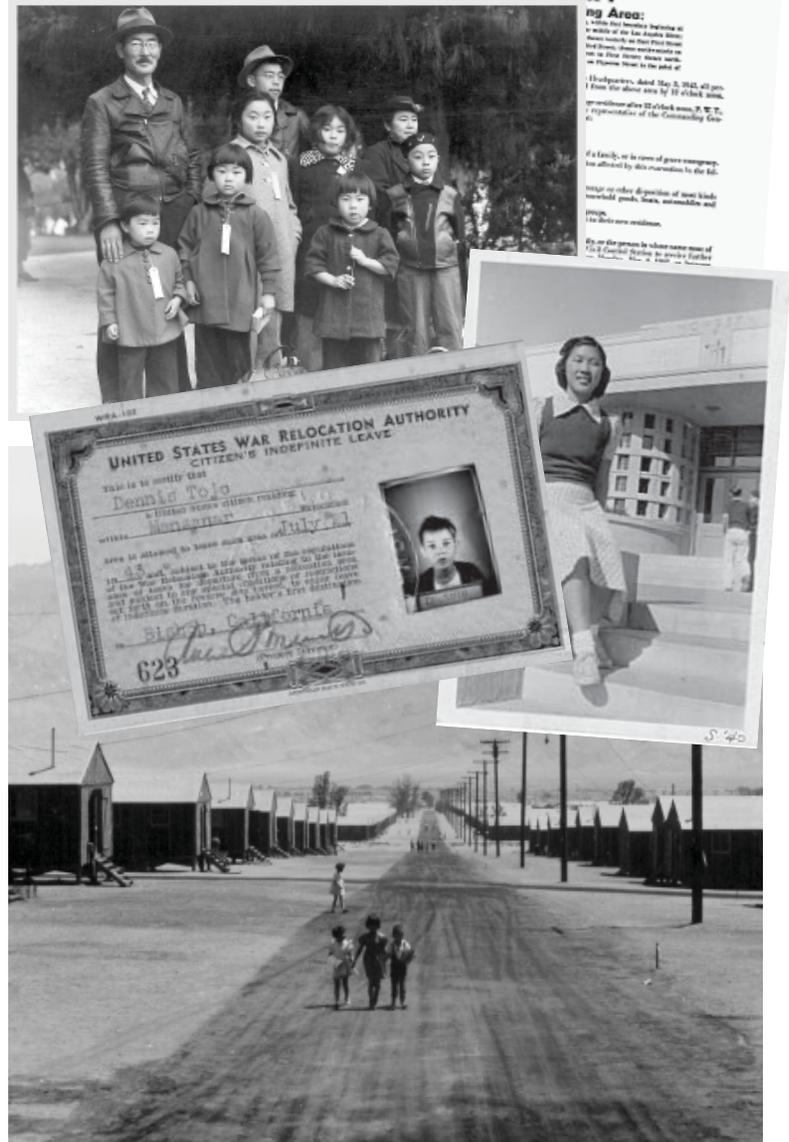
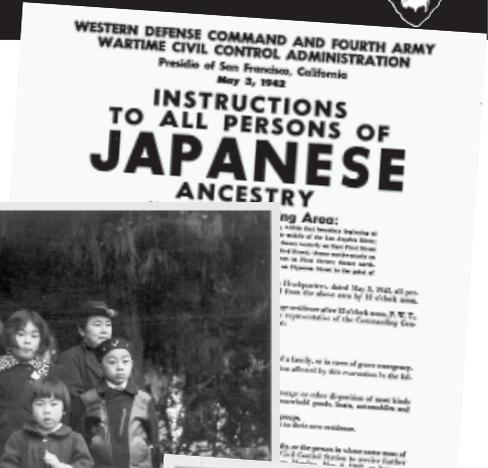
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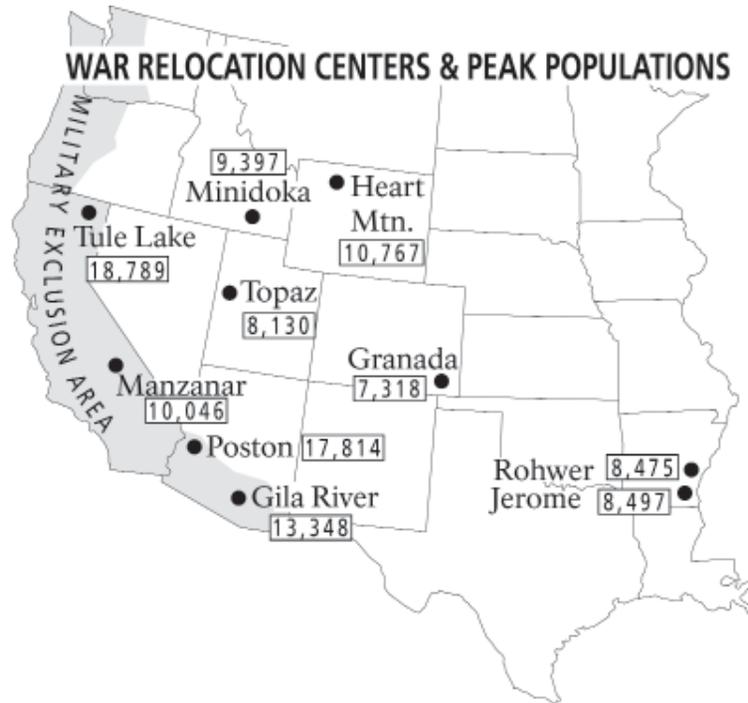
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# Manzanar



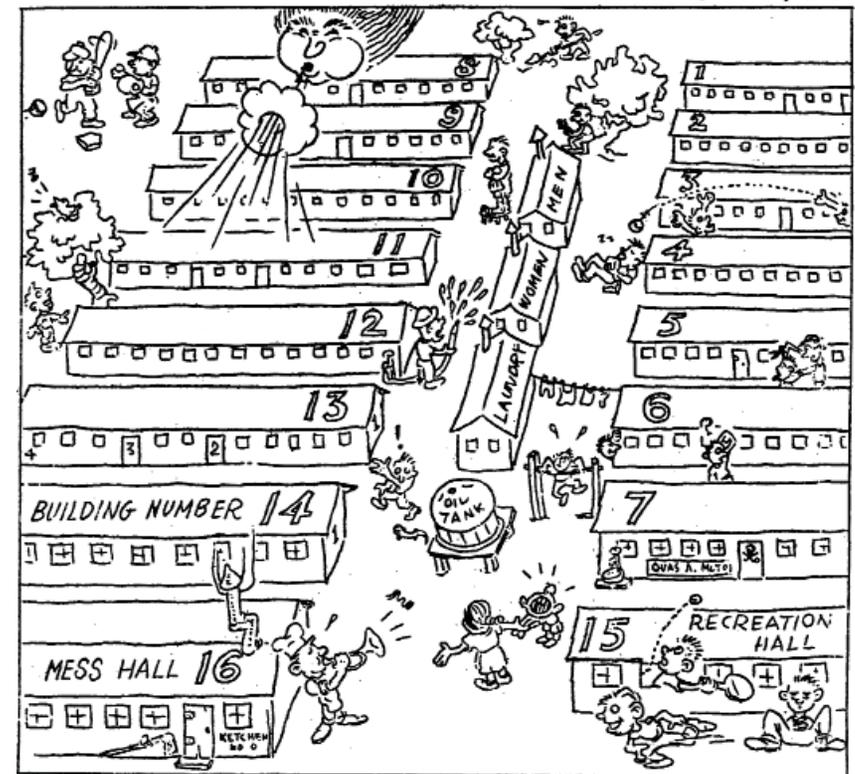
## ID Card





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)



## **ROHWER**

**Location:** Desha County, Arkansas

**Environmental Conditions:** Rohwer War Relocation Center was located five miles west of the Mississippi

River in a swampy area intertwined with canals, creeks, and bayous. Forests had once covered the area, but by 1940 had been replaced by agricultural fields. Rohwer was at an elevation of 140 feet.

**Acreage:** 10,161

**Opened:** September 18, 1942

**Closed:** November 30, 1944

**Max. Population:** 8,475 (March 11, 1943)

**Demographics:** Most people interned at Rohwer War Relocation Center came from Los Angeles and San Joaquin counties in California, via the Santa Anita and Stockton assembly centers.



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## **TAKAYO “ROSE” MATSUI OCHI**

**Family # 12732**

**Camp: Rohwer, AR**

**Address: 12-9-F**

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*Takayo Matsui*

My father Yoshiaki Matsui was born in Kumamoto, Japan in 1900. After Chinese indentured laborers built the railroads in the West, Japanese like his father and uncle were brought in to work in the roundhouses. My father followed them, but he went to college and later worked for a Japanese trading company. My mother Mutsuko Matsukawa was born in 1908. She came to America as an “arranged bride.”

I was born in East Los Angeles on December 15, 1938. When we got the evacuation orders, I was a very young girl, but my sister Michiko was a young lady who was living in a nice home, going to private school, had a piano and lovely clothes. It was very hard on her to lose all that and go to camp.

My brother Yoshikazu was two years older than me. He, like many former internees, never stopped being angry about internment. Another brother Takeshi was born retarded in the internment camp, and died in his teens. Many women were depressed and tried to avoid having children in camp. That was Takeshi’s case.

I don't remember much of the train ride to Rohwer, Arkansas. I remember a lot of people crying because they were leaving their lives behind and did not know what was going to happen to them. There were many rumors. Although Japanese people are pretty stoic, it was clear even to a young girl like me that this was a very frightening time.

In camp, I remember little things, such as going to the swamps, and seeing all kinds of creatures and animals. For a child, it was a good time. I realize how fortunate I am that my parents were very strong and focused on how to survive, while shielding us from their worries and fears.



*Takayo, her mother, father & brother*

I don't think that people in Arkansas had any anti-Asian history. At Christmas, the poor and rural townspeople would give us gifts from Santa. The teachers, nurses, and doctors were all very kind. Yet, they were certainly intent on making us *Americans!* I was growing up in a household where I spoke Japanese, and we had Japanese names. Mine, Takayo, is a beautiful name, meaning "child of high ideals." And I was renamed Rose! Well, I should not complain. I could have gotten Petunia.

Upon release, what little money my parents had was exhausted. They had been in this country on a business visa, and laws at the time prevented them from becoming citizens. Thus, they were subject to deportation.

Americans." So, it is important to memorialize this episode in our history because there's so much misunderstanding. It is reassuring to know that hostility and hatred can just melt away when people are faced with truth.

I've always been a person who believed in possibilities, and in the promise of this country. To

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just have a small role in keeping the government honest, so to speak, is important. That is why I have dedicated over 30 years to creating and preserving Manzanar National Historical Site.

I want the story to be told, how in times of crisis, Constitutional protections are often ignored, and it's the responsibility of all Americans to protect the vulnerable. I want the future generations to understand there was



*Rose Ochi, 2002*

a grave injustice, and that we need to learn from it. Manzanar and Redress are messages that this country is willing to acknowledge past injustices. As part of our legacy, Japanese Americans have a moral duty to ensure that this story be told so that our nation's "Past is not Prologue."

Reagan.” I was happy that bringing this to his attention might have helped our redress efforts.

The National Park Service was looking at designating Manzanar as a landmark, and approached Mayor Bradley’s office because the city’s Department of Water and Power owned the property. I worked for passage of legislation to establish Manzanar National Historic Site. That included gaining support in Inyo County, the City of Los Angeles, and in Congress. After the enactment, and the land transfer, I served as the chair of an Advisory Commission, assisting the National Park Service in preserving the site and telling its stories.

In 1994, as President Clinton’s appointee in the White House Office of Drug Control Policy, and later, as the first Asian American woman to serve at the Assistant Attorney General level under Janet Reno, I was in a key position to work with the Department of Interior and Congress on many issues.

Gaining community support for Manzanar was a major effort. At a public hearing, there was an elderly World War II vet, wearing his American Legion hat and jacket with medals. He said he was sent there to oppose us, but that he could not because he did not know until

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then that the interned were Americans. People came to understand that there were many, many Americans of Japanese ancestry who fought heroically in the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team. “Gee, they fought as

Meanwhile, they had four American-born children. Because there were American lawyers willing to fight, my parents successfully overturned the deportation orders.

We returned to East Los Angeles, moving in with an uncle and cousin’s family. We were pretty crowded. One man took up gardening; another worked as a dishwasher. My father would put on a hat, shirt and tie, and then go out and do whatever work he could find. My mother had a Victory garden in the back yard, and took in sewing, so we managed to eat.

When my parents were finally allowed to become naturalized citizens, in 1952, they needed to have American citizens attest to their good citizenship. Our neighbors, a family of Scottish extraction, had a son who had been shell-shocked in the war. When we went roller-skating, we had to walk on the grass past their house, because if he heard loud noises, he would hide under a



bed. It was that family that stood up for my parents.

I was a tomboy. I related to my brother and my dad, and thought they had a better deal: No cooking and cleaning. My parents would say, "You're a girl, child. You're supposed to be a good wife and mother." But I'd come home with good grades, athletic trophies, class office, and my father would turn to my mother and say something in Japanese, like, "What a waste of these attributes on a girl." But what I heard was a kind of indirect positive reinforcement. "Hey! She's good!"

My dad taught my brother *kendo* stick fighting, and I asked, "What about me?" Dad said, "Girls don't do martial arts." I insisted. He relented. So I learned *kendo*. But what I really learned was less about martial arts than about being willing to get hit, and the courage to face your own fears. At the Lorena Street Elementary School, my brother and I were among the first Japanese Americans there. People called us names like "Dirty Jap." I had fights all the time, and it was actually a good thing. It serves you well. If people know you're willing to fight, they tend to leave you alone.

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My brother went to college and then volunteered for the army. He married a Caucasian, and while my parents had some difficulties accepting her, when the grandchildren were born, that brought them together. In school and college, we had dances, and it was all mixed: Caucasian, Jewish, Latino, and Chinese guys. I think

my parents were surprised, when I ended up marrying a Japanese American, Tommy Ochi.

I graduated from UCLA in 1959, and became a gym teacher for seven years. It was my school PE teachers who had encouraged my leadership potential. I got my M.S. in Education and was ready to get either my Ph.D. or administrator's credential, but decided to go to law school, at Loyola, to focus on education reform. I received a poverty lawyer fellowship and was assigned to the Western Center on Law and Poverty, a public interest, law-reform firm where I served as co-counsel on the landmark *Serrano vs. Priest* education case.

After we won at trial, in 1974, I went to work for Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley. I became a legislative research coordinator, and eventually executive assistant to the mayor, heading up the Criminal Justice office. I stayed there 20 years, and it was a wonderful base, because it allowed me to be involved in the community: Manzanar Committee Counsel, the redress and reparation effort, the President's Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy, among other things.

History is made by people, and personal relations can affect the outcome. At the signing ceremony for the Redress bill (which gave surviving camp internees \$20,000 each), President Reagan said, "Rose Ochi sent me an article..." He proceeded to read from the article, about an Army captain presenting a medal to a Japanese American soldier's mother, and how the blood spilled on the beach was all of one color. And then he, in his own style, said, "and the name of the captain is Ronald