

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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National Park Service website at <a href="www.nps.gov">www.nps.gov</a>. To learn more about Manzanar National Historic Site, please visit our website at <a href="www.nps.gov/manz">www.nps.gov/manz</a>.

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# **ID Card**

INSTRUCTIONS
TO ALL PERSONS OF

JAPANESE

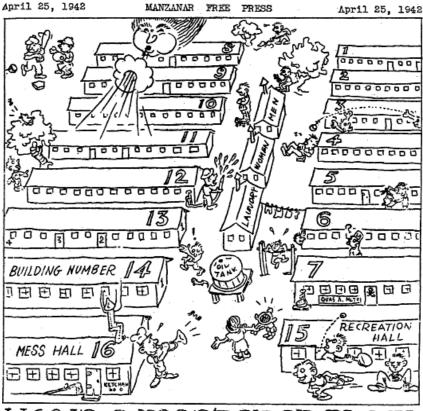
ANCESTRY





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.



## **MANZANAR**

**Location:** Inyo County, California, at the eastern base of the Sierra Nevada.



### **Environmental**

**Conditions:** Temperatures can be over 100 degrees in summer and below freezing in winter. Strong winds & dust storms are frequent.

**Acreage:** 6,000

**Opened:** March 21, 1942 as a Reception Center and June 1, 1942 as a War Relocation Center.

Closed: November 21, 1945

Max. Population: 10,046 (September 1942)

Demographics: Most internees were from the Los Angeles area, Terminal Island, and the San Fernando Valley. Others came from the San Joaquin Valley and Bainbridge Island.

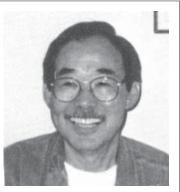
#### **GEORGE MORESHITA**

Family # 1340

Camp: Manzanar, CA

**Address: 5-11-3** 

My father emigrated to the United States in 1906, his fare financed by pay for serving in the Japanese army during the 1904-05 war between Japan and Russia.



George Moreshita

In 1924, in order to beat the deadline of the "Japanese Exclusion Act," my father returned to Japan to bring my mother, my brother, and oldest sister to the United States. But my brother was too ill to make the journey, so my parents left both children with relatives, hoping they could bring them to the U.S. later. That never happened. My brother died at age 16 in 1933, and my sister died at age 34 in 1955. It was heartbreaking to hear from a relative that my sister "just didn't seem to want to live anymore."

I was one of four children born to my parents in the U.S. and the only one who spent time with our older sister in Japan. I was stationed in Japan and Korea during the Korean War (1952-1954).

My father first brought my mother to Seattle, Washington, but she complained about the cold and dampness so he told her about a much warmer and drier city. Shortly after arriving in Los Angeles, my mother took up barbering and did this until her retirement in 1961. My father settled into restaurant work, first as a dishwasher, then a cook.

I was born in 1931. Before the war, I grew up in a Los Angeles neighborhood that was about 80% Mexican and 20% Russian ethnicity. Nearly all of my friends were Mexican Americans.

On December 7, 1941, as I was leaving my neighborhood movie house, men were standing around talking about the war. I felt uneasy as I heard the words "Japan" and "Japanese." Back then, many in our country didn't see the difference between a Japanese national and an American of Japanese ancestry. This blurring of identities was reinforced and magnified by some in the media and some of our political leaders.

...many in our country didn't see the difference between a Japanese national and an American of Japanese ancestry. Our family did not react immediately to the notice that "Japanese" were to register

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Some boys yelled, "Jap" at us while we were walking...

Shortly after leaving camp I had a strange experience: I entered a very small store for candy and saw that the proprietor still had a couple of war-time ration coupons on the cabinet shelf. Seeing them reminded me that I was denied the chance to participate in this war effort.

Shortly after the war, my parents purchased a 20-room motel with two offices and a den house on Hewitt Street, near Little Tokyo. My mother ran her barber shop in one of the offices. I moved from my sister's house in Long Beach to my parents' hotel in February 1946. The hotel was in serious disrepair, and for the first year or two, I spent most of my free time working, painting, etc.

My father was 63 years old when the war ended, so finding employment was a challenge. My parents' decision and ability to borrow money to buy the hotel was a turning point for them, economically and socially. Although not affluent, they became financially comfortable. The increase in prosperity from pre-World War II to the years after the war was true for our country as a whole.

At war's end, my father made plans to go to Los Angeles to explore housing. I wanted to be one of the first youths to leave camp and come back to tell my friends what I saw, so I convinced my father to take me with him. I told him I did not want to miss

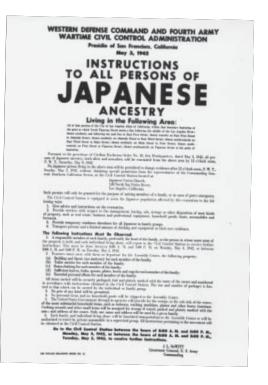


A young man on his way to a camp.

any school time. I stayed in West Los Angeles with the family of one of my mother's barber customers in camp. I was there for two weeks and went to school the whole time. Then my father took me to Long Beach, where I lived for about five months with my oldest sister, her husband, and two young sons. My father brought my younger sister a little later, and she stayed there for a while after I moved to Los Angeles.

I experienced prejudice shortly after leaving Manzanar. Living in West Los Angeles, my father accompanied me to my first day of school. I asked the bus driver if he made a particular stop. As soon as he said "no," an elderly gentleman said that my father and I should get on, adding that he would tell us of our stop if the driver didn't know it.

for relocation. I pestered my mother about our need to comply. On a Wednesday afternoon, our family went to register, and for the rest of the day and into the night my parents were scrambling to get our affairs in order. We boarded the train the following morning.





Arriving at Manzanar, 1942

Wearrivedat Manzanar on the afternoon of April 2, 1942, and it was my home until August, 1945, a couple of weeks after the war ended.

After meeting my new neighbors and making friends at Manzanar, I



Manzanar War Relocation Center, 1942

found that I was a little different and had to adjust. One day, my 16-year-old sister Tosh came storming home and yelled at me. My father was present and questioned her. She told me, "You may think that the older boys enjoy your company, but it is really because they find your speech amusing!" They were calling me me 'Tosh's Mexican kid brother.'

Early on, dust storms were frequent, but this condition was somewhat improved by lawns planted between many of the barracks and by people watering down the ground frequently. Our block had a number of apple trees, but we also had a grammar school, so we never saw ripe apples in our block. One day, two friends and I headed for the outdoor "theater," and wandered through a block that had a couple of trees loaded with red, ripe apples. We went bonkers! We found it strange that a couple of boys stood nearby, just watching us pick. Suddenly a man came charging out of an apartment, swinging a broom at us. He stopped chasing and swinging when

the last of "my" apples fell to the ground. Later my friends and I had a good laugh.



Playing baseball between the barracks at Manzanar.

Probably like many other boys my age, I hold some fond and special memories of Manzanar.

Some of the things we did could not have been experienced during short visits from far away. We went swimming in a couple of the creeks, hiked up to the base of the Sierra, and climbed to the top of the Alabama Hills. We went running

Probably like many other boys my age, I hold some fond and special memories of Manzanar.

and leaping all the way down after seeing a small building and a sign warning of a fine and jail term for trespassing.