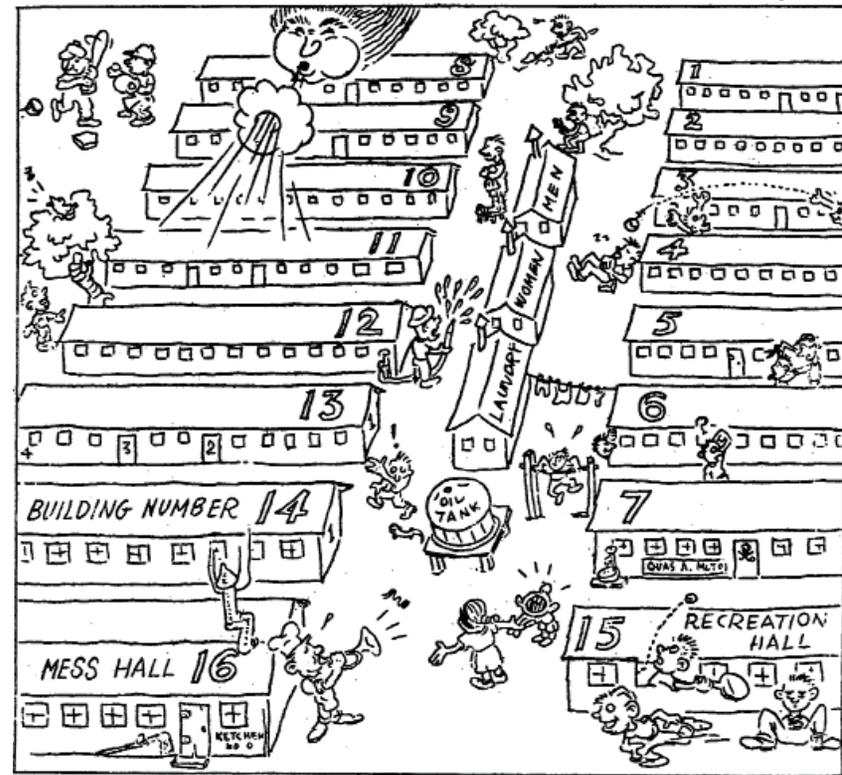






In 1942 the United States Government ordered over 110,000 men, women, and children to leave their homes and detained them in remote, military-style camps. Two-thirds of them were born in America. Not one was convicted of espionage or sabotage.

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)

# MANZANAR Free Press

## 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.



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## **SAM HIROSHI ONO**

**Family # 2964**

**Camp: Manzanar, CA**

**Address: 35-12-2**

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Most of us relating our experience in these "I.D. cards" are "Nisei" or the first native-born Americans of Japanese ancestry. We are all about the same age, therefore, most of our parents had entered the United States at about the same time and our beginning narrative will have a familiar ring. Our parents were born in Japan, "Issei", and came to the United States in the late 1890s or early 1900s. My father came from the Okayama prefecture and my mother from the Hiroshima prefecture of Japan. Like most immigrants from Asia, my father worked on the railroad and later as a farm laborer. I know not how my parents managed but at the time

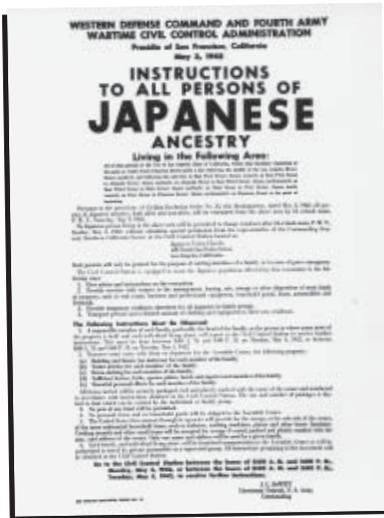
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**My mother died when I was six years old and my father was left to raise two boys...**

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of my birth they owned and operated a small neighborhood grocery store in Sacramento, California. My mother died when I was six years old and my father was left to raise two boys without the help of a caring wife and mother. I was

the younger of the two boys. With frequent moving prompted by my father's search for employment, my early childhood was void of a permanent home. My father established himself as a self-employed carpenter in the Los Angeles area in 1940 but that also proved to be temporary due to the outbreak of World War II.



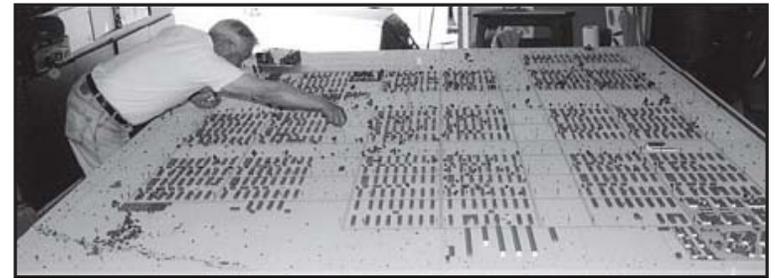
*Evacuation poster, 1942*

After war had been declared with Japan, we who were of Japanese ancestry living in California, Oregon and Washington were treated as the enemy regardless of our status as U.S. citizens. We were subjected to a curfew and our travel was restricted to a five-mile radius from our residence. Since my father's work required he travel beyond this

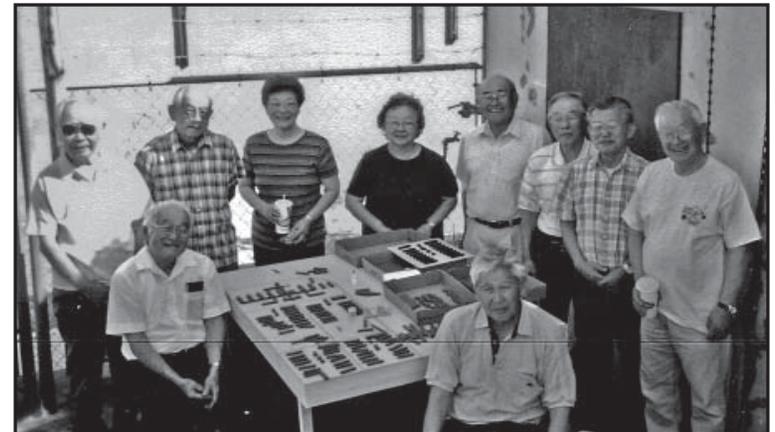
limit, we were left without a source of income and dependent on our meager savings. Shortly thereafter, all ethnic Japanese living in the three western coastal States were told that they would be evacuated from the area and be detained at undisclosed locations. Because we were allowed to take with us only what we could physically carry, we were forced to make hasty arrangements for the storage or sale of family belongings and property and for some families that meant within a period of 48 hours. Unscrupulous people aware of our plight, swarmed through the Japanese American community preying amongst the unfortunate people, looking for bargain purchases. Even after we were evacuated from the area, vandals broke into the buildings where irreplaceable family possessions were stored. Because of the actions of a few unthinking people, many of us have been deprived of mementos from our early childhood.

## **"Model" Citizens**

In Spring 2004, Sam led a dozen of his friends from the Manzanar High School classes of 1943, 1944, and 1945 in an effort to create a detailed scale model of the camp. Together, they volunteered over a thousand hours. Their model is permanently on display in the Manzanar National Historic Site Interpretive Center in Independence, California.



*Sam puts the finishing touches on the West Firebreak. Each square represents a 20' x 100' barracks where up to 32 people lived, "home" for 10,000 people.*



*Sam (far right) & his fellow model makers. Photos by Archie Miyatake.*

with Japan through my parents but that feeling soon passed with the realization that I had little in common with Japanese nationals. The only exposure I had with their culture was the celebrating of some of their festivals and even then without a complete understanding as to the significance of the events. Placed in their midst, I would have been as much a foreigner as anyone else born and raised in the United States and most likely would have been treated as such.

Any bitterness I feel today is not for the treatment I received but for the anguish and mental suffering that my father and other parents must have endured in attempting to hold families together during a time when the future was so uncertain. We who have survived the humiliation of internment have received reparation and a President's apology but that cannot erase from memory or forgive what has transpired.

This booklet that you receive has no monetary value and is not meant as an item to be traded like baseball cards. Those of us who have participated in this project have divulged a small part of our lives and emotions to make evident to you that we were, and are, people no different from you. Mask our faces and we become just as "American" as anyone else. I hope your experience in learning about Manzanar will etch in your memory that a total of 120,000 people, 2/3 of us U.S. citizens, were imprisoned without due process. The legacy we former residents of Manzanar and the nine other camps leave with you is the responsibility that such an injustice will not be tolerated or be permitted to occur again.

Manzanar was the "unknown" location to which my family was sent. After a daylong bus ride, I had my first glimpse of Manzanar. In the light of dusk, I saw brown smoke from oil burning stoves hanging over black tar paper covered Army barrack like buildings. The first



*Arriving at Manzanar, 1942*

order of business upon leaving the bus was to register as a family then be assigned living quarters, receive blankets and stuff a sack with hay for our mattress that was placed on an army cot. Our living quarters were hastily constructed rooms with bare wooden

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**Our living quarters were hastily constructed rooms with bare wooden floors and walls with exposed rafters for a ceiling.**

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floors and walls with exposed rafters for a ceiling. Little protection was provided from the dust that sifted through the cracks between the floorboards. There was no indoor plumbing

or sanitary facilities in the rooms. Restrooms and laundry rooms were provided in centrally located community buildings in a block of 14 residential barracks. Each barrack contained from three to five rooms.

When we first arrived, many of the buildings were still under construction and several families were forced to live in the same room. Our unit consisted of a bachelor, a husband, wife and child, a widow and her adult daughter, my father, my brother and I. Blankets were used to partition the room for visual privacy. As buildings were completed, each family was given private living quarters.

Having experienced a rather nomadic family life in my youth, I attended seven different schools in the grades from Kindergarten through tenth grade, finally graduating from Manzanar High School in the summer of 1944. Manzanar High School classrooms were wooden, tarpaper covered buildings constructed exactly like the buildings in which we lived. In the beginning, classrooms were void of furniture and students had to sit on the floor. Educational material such as books, laboratory equipment, blackboards and generally most of the material necessary to conduct classes were virtually nonexistent. The teachers were a dedicated group who chose to be in this desolate environment to help educate a people segregated and imprisoned for no other reason than their ethnicity. Things did improve with time but the material conditions would never approach the standards of schools enjoyed

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**The teachers were a dedicated group who chose to be in this desolate environment to help educate a people segregated and imprisoned for no other reason than their ethnicity.**

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by students “outside.” Even under these trying circumstances many of us managed to receive an education that

qualified us to attend college. Getting an education takes effort and is as much your responsibility as it is for those who are attempting to teach you.

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**Getting an education takes effort and is as much your responsibility as it is for those who are attempting to teach you.**

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I left Manzanar to attend Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa. After completing one semester I was sent “greetings from the President” and drafted into the Army. I served in the Medical Corps and fortunately was not exposed to combat. After an honorable discharge from the service, I resumed my education by taking advantage of the G.I. bill and enrolled in the School of Architecture at USC. I transferred to UCLA to pursue a career in Engineering, a profession more to my liking. Eventually I became licensed as a civil engineer in the state of California. The better part of 45 years has been dedicated to the profession with the last nine years of employment as Chief Engineer for a major roof structures company in Southern California. I am now enjoying retirement and my wife and I are proud parents of three adult children and grandparents to two grandchildren.

My contemporaries at the time of evacuation were teenagers and we, for the most part, approached what ensued with a sense of adventure. We were young and resilient and made the best of a bad situation. Up to that point in life, I had been sheltered from the ugliness of discrimination and prejudice having been raised in a community surrounded by my “own kind”. Initially there was a sense of shame in my association