Manzanar

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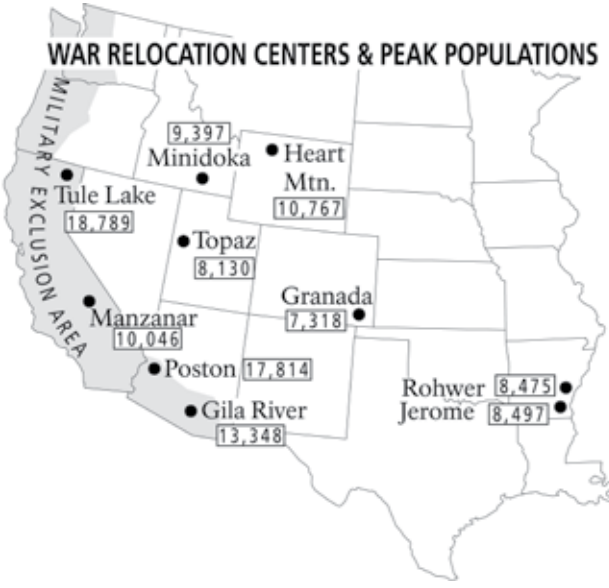

In 1942 the United States Government ordered over 110,000 men, women, and children to leave their homes and detained them in remote, military-style camps. Two-thirds of them were born in America. Not one was convicted of espionage or sabotage.

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

JOAN DaVALLE BEYERS
Camp: Manzanar, CA
Address: 7-2-4 & M-1
Administrative Housing

My mother Marjorie G. Mount, a teacher, and my father John P. DaValle were married in 1927, and bought a home in West Los Angeles. I was born in 1930, and my sister Shirley in 1931. The depression was a terrible struggle. Dad lost his pharmacy on Melrose Avenue, Hollywood.

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In February 1942, I entered 7th grade at Emerson Junior High School. One day all the Japanese students did not come to class. The teachers said the Japanese had to go away, but refused to talk about it further. I remember being very confused, and wondered why they were being so secretive.

My parents divorced in 1942. My mother needed to go

back to work. The only teaching opening was for a high school math teacher at a new war relocation camp for Japanese called Manzanar, in eastern California. Mother reluctantly accepted, at a salary of $2,000 a year.

Because of space limitations in our 1936 Plymouth, we could take only our clothes and a few small personal items on the eight-hour drive. My mother's sister had a small apartment behind her house, and let us store belongings there. We sold, gave or threw away many things, and rented our house. I was very sad to leave my friends at school.

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At first, we lived in the same tarpapered frame barracks that the Japanese did. There was one big room, with curtain dividers, an oil-burning heater and two double beds. Mom's schoolroom was next door.

In the winter, with a friendly greeting in Japanese, a little man came knocking at the door every morning to light and fill up the heater. After he left, my sister and I would stand around it, as we got dressed.

In the center of each housing block was a latrine with exposed common areas. I tried to shower when no

one else was there, and always tried to use the stall at the far end, so that no one would walk in front of me.

Not having a kitchen, we ate most of our meals in the mess hall. One Sunday, after a chicken dinner, everyone got sick with diarrhea. There were long lines just to get into the latrine, and it seems we were up all night.

We often walked around camp, and occasionally bought things at the general store there. I also rode my bike to the post office and library.

There were amenities. A Japanese woman did our laundry, the clothes always finely ironed. We had our hair done at the camp beauty parlor every week. A Japanese woman gave us piano lessons. We practiced in one of the schoolrooms that had a piano.

In all of our contacts, the Japanese were gracious, warm and friendly. The first year, there were just three teenage Caucasian girls, so we joined the Japanese Girl Reserve Group, an organization for socializing. There were meetings and refreshments, and just talk. We attended several plays and musical programs put on by

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I did not at first think too much about what had happened to the Japanese. To me, it was just how things were. We didn't talk about it very much. I was told they were in the camp because some might be traitors, and we had no way of telling who they might be. Some time later, after reading *Betrayal From The East*, I understood why our government had been so scared of them. To me, the worst part of what happened was that so many had their property taken from them.

School for Caucasians was outside camp. A bus picked us up at the guard station, and took us to Owens Valley schools, in Independence. The mess hall packed us a lunch to take each day. Later, we bought our lunch at the school cafeteria.

As I got to know people, I liked school very much. We joined a Girl Scout troop in Independence, and went to benefit dances. Another new girl at school, Mary Brady, became my best friend, and is to this day. Sometimes I would spend a few days at her house in town. A few years after camp, she introduced me to my husband-to-be, Bob Beyers, and was maid of honor at our wedding.

Nearly every Saturday, our family went to Lone Pine to buy fixings for Sunday breakfast on our electric grill. After shopping, we often had lunch at the corner drug store, and went to a movie, usually accompanied by another schoolteacher, Virginia Hayes, and her two children, Bill and Lynne.

As we had never encountered any problems with the Japanese, we were completely surprised the night of the "Manzanar Riot," a demonstration where two internees were fatally shot by nervous MPs. When we heard all the noise, we cracked open our door to see people march by with torches and loud chanting. We were a little scared, but they did not seem to be threatening us. We did not know what it was all about.

The next morning, we had to leave camp, and were put up for several days in a small, stark, cold jail cell in Independence. Although we were not locked in, I hoped no one would think we were the culprits. The troublemakers were soon identified and sent off to other camps, and we returned.

During the first summer of 1943, new housing for Caucasians was completed, and the Hayes family and ours, as the early arrivals, were given some of the first units. Families now had a living room, two bedrooms, a kitchen and bathroom. Camp Director Ralph Merritt had a much larger unit, perhaps the only one given air conditioning.

With a kitchen, we could fix our own lunches and breakfasts, but still ate dinner in the mess hall, except for an occasional steak bought with our meat stamps. On hot summer days, I would take a book to read or some mending, and sit on the grass in the shade of the washhouse. This building had tubs, and we now did our own laundry.

With the better housing and more Caucasians arriving, I finally began to like living in Manzanar. Three more teenage girls arrived: Ann Causey, LaPriel Strong and Mildred Berriman. Since there were not a lot of us, we became close friends and enjoyed activities together. At first it was only hide and seek around the housing area. Later teen parties were organized for us, held in one of the classrooms, where we danced and had refreshments. There was also softball with the younger Caucasian adults, a wood shop class and movies at the camp outdoor theater.

One year, there was a large Christmas dance in the auditorium. Soldiers from the nearby army camp were invited. I also remember going to square dances for Caucasians.

Sometimes we went swimming at a place across the road called the Sand Trap. A group of us once packed lunches, hiked back to the foot of the mountains and had a picnic by a stream. We exited the camp near a guard tower, and the MP on duty invited us into the tower to look around. All the MPs were very friendly, gave us rides in their jeeps and flirted with us girls, in a very polite and proper manner.

Near the new housing was a section for Victory Gardens. Each family had its own plot that was cared for by the Japanese. There were beautiful formal Japanese

gardens alongside some of their barracks, amazing sights in the middle of the desert.

By the summer of 1945, so many internees had been allowed to leave that the camp school would not open that fall. Thus, we had to leave. Once again, I was sad to leave my friends.

My mother secured an eighth grade teaching position in West Covina, California. We sold our former West Los Angeles home and bought a small house in a new tract in Azusa. In my new high school, I met a Japanese girl that I had known in Manzanar. We did not talk too much about camp, and she soon became less friendly. Perhaps her parents objected to her making friends with anyone associated with Manzanar.

In the 1960s, we were passing through the Owens Valley on vacation, and I went back to look at Manzanar. It was actually sad to see nothing much there.

Although it is sad that there was a Manzanar, it was mostly a good experience for me. The job enabled my mother to begin saving a little each month. The war bonds she bought sent my sister and I to college. I think by having gone to Manzanar, I learned to accept changes in my life, and that changes were even something to look forward to.

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MANZANAR Free Press

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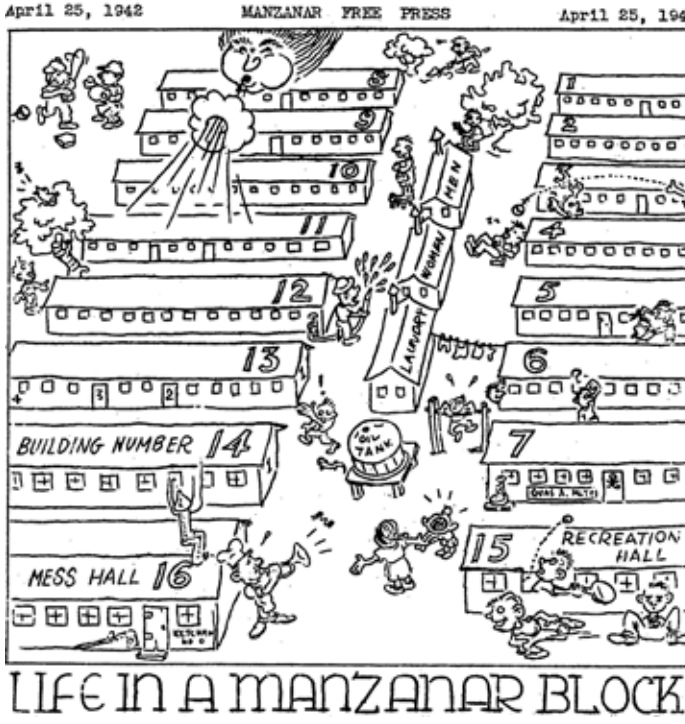
Location: Inyo County, California, at the eastern base of the Sierra Nevada.
Environmental Conditions: Temperatures can be over 100 degrees in summer and below freezing in winter. Strong winds & dust storms are frequent.
Acreage: 6,000
Opened: March 21, 1942 as a Reception Center and June 1, 1942 as 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.



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 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.

3/08