



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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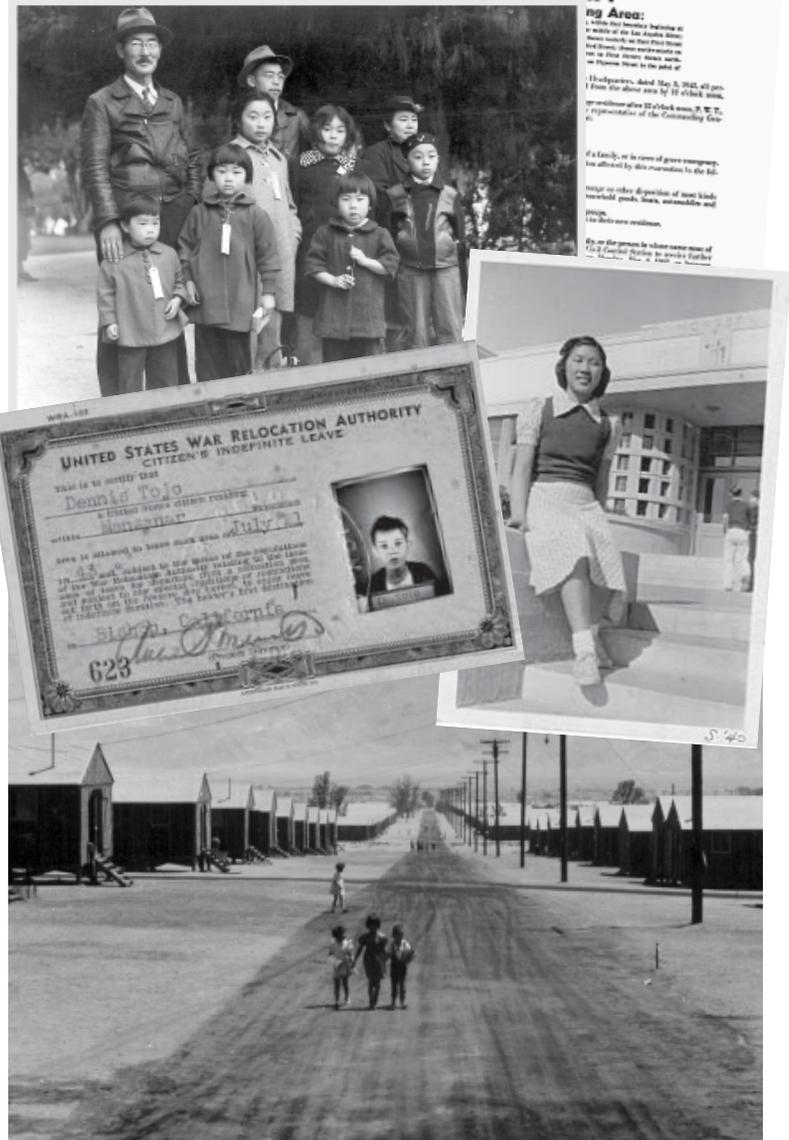
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Manzanar



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**





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)

probably prepared us for life, just as my mother's hardships had done for her. We learned from my mother to make the best of things. We attempted to learn about the people and the area, and put an emphasis on friendships as well as the magnificence around us. In looking back, I realize that it was a truly a unique experience. Mother was very much responsible for making it seem like an adventure. She was, indeed, a remarkable lady!

...it was a truly a unique experience... an adventure.

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.



SHIRLEY DaVALLE MEEDEER

Camp: Manzanar, CA

Address: 7-2-4 & M-1

Administrative Housing



“Shirley, run home! Run straight home!” These are the words I remember.

I was at my friend's home, when her father gave me this warning. I lived only about 3 blocks from my friend's home, but the distance seemed longer that day. As I hurried along the sidewalks toward my own home in West Los Angeles, I was steeped in fear. I knew something terrible had happened. Barely 10 years old, my life was about to change. It was Sunday, December 7, 1941, and Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Soon we were at war with Japan.

I don't believe we lived near any Japanese people, and I had no personal knowledge of what the Japanese were experiencing. But, soon we began to feel the effects of the war. We began to have blackouts at night, and, everyone became uneasy about what might happen next.

My father, John DaValle, had come from a large Italian family and was born and raised in northern California. My mother, Marjorie Davalle, largely of English and German descent, was born and raised in San Dimas, California. Her father did well as an engineer. However, she lost her mother at the age of 3, and I believe she learned very early to do things for herself and to make the best of things. This may have been a factor in dealing courageously with what would lie ahead.

Mother was a high school teacher when she met my father. They married in 1927 in Los Angeles, and my father became a pharmacist and my mother a homemaker. They had two daughters, Joan in 1930 and Shirley in 1931. My parents were struggling from the Depression years. We

had developed strong friendships with our schoolmates and neighbors. I was shielded from my parents' concerns and had no particular worries of my own, and then the tragedy struck.

"Off to Manzanar," we were all shouting. It was before dawn in September 1942 when my mother, my sister, and I drove by our best friend's home. We said goodbye and were, indeed, off to Manzanar.

My father had left the home, and my mother was faced with becoming the breadwinner for her two daughters and herself. Teaching jobs were not plentiful, but she was offered a job teaching high school mathematics at the Manzanar War Relocation Center in eastern California.

My mother was an incredible woman. She had to leave her home and sell or store most of our possessions. We stored much of our furniture in a room adjacent to my aunt's garage, but our dining room set was too large and had to be sold. Mother was about to go with her two young girls to a place and a situation that she knew little about. Even so, she had a positive attitude and seemed happy and confident, at least in the presence of her children. We were simply off on an adventure.

My sister and I heard very little from our mother about how she felt about the evacuation of the Japanese. I was leaving my home, my friends, and my possessions, but I

...we saw rows and rows of barracks. Barbed wire fences surrounded the camp, and guard towers were at the corners.

the entrance of the camp where two small stone houses

accepted it completely and even looked forward to the experience.

When we arrived at the camp, we saw rows and rows of barracks. Barbed wire fences surrounded the camp, and guard towers were at the corners. Military Police were in the towers as well as at

Since the camp would be closing soon, we made our departure from Manzanar in the summer of 1945. Again, we had to leave the friends we had made, but Joan and I have kept in touch with some of the Caucasians we met there. My friend, Lorna passed away recently, but I am still in touch with Sylvia.



We returned to the Los Angeles area, and Mother accepted a teaching job in Covina in the San Gabriel Valley. We bought a house in Azusa and I graduated from Citrus Union High School. I then attended UC Santa Barbara and graduated from USC in 1953 with a Bachelor of Science degree. I taught 2nd grade, married twice and had three children.

As an adult in later life, I learned more about the evacuation of the Japanese. I now believe that it was a grave injustice that they were sent to the camps. It must have been a very traumatic experience for them to be uprooted from their homes and jobs. I am sure that many of them suffered financial losses, and they all had to endure extremely offensive living conditions.

It had been over sixty years since we first went "off to Manzanar," but some of the memories are still vivid. I have driven by the camp several times, but never stopped. The first time I went by, I was startled to see that only

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a few buildings were still standing: the two small stone structures at the entrance of the camp.

The changes we faced by going to Manzanar were not unbearable, and the hardships we endured

Joan and I attended games and other school functions in Independence. I think the schools were quite good.

As we waited at the camp entrance for our school bus, it was often very cold, and the MP's invited us into the larger of the little stone houses in order to stay warm. We got to know the soldiers and enjoyed our chats with them.

We went to Lone Pine about every other Saturday to shop and sometimes take in a movie. Gasoline and a number of food items were rationed during the war, so we had to think about our priorities when shopping for and using these items. Since mother wanted us to have as many positive experiences as possible, we saved our gasoline stamps and took a number of wonderful trips around the area.

The mountains around us were glorious. When they were covered with snow in winter, it was breathtaking. One winter it snowed so heavily that they had to close the schools. We had wonderful snowdrifts outside our apartment, and we played in them for hours. There were interesting sights to see within the camp itself. The Japanese were very artistic, and some of them made beautiful Japanese gardens next to their barracks.

As a child in Manzanar, I accepted what happened to the Japanese. We didn't hear it discussed often, but we knew that it was fear that prompted our government to evacuate them. We thought the evacuation was justified. The Japanese were more crowded than we were in the barracks, but not unduly mistreated. As children, we did not understand their underlying problems, and it seemed that they were getting along reasonably well. As the war came to an end, the Japanese were moving out of the camp. We had come to know that they were mostly good Americans. It was especially moving to learn that many of their families had boys serving in the American military services.



stood. Some soldiers emerged to greet us.

We had planned to move into a furnished barrack, but the furniture had not yet arrived. We then returned 10 miles south to Lone Pine, and stayed in a very nice hotel. That was the last time we would taste any sense of luxury for a long time. When we returned to camp the next day, the wind was howling and a sand storm was in full rage.

I will never forget our first 11 months in Manzanar, mainly because of our living conditions. Our first "home" was a barrack no different than what was provided for the Japanese. We were in number 7-2-4, which stood for block 7, building 2, and room 4. The thin walls of the barrack provided some protection from the elements, but the wind howled and the sand sifted through. Our one large room was sparsely furnished, and an oil burning stove stood near the front. We attempted to partition the living area from the sleeping area. There was electricity but no running water. We had a hot plate to use for quick meals, but there was no real kitchen or bathroom. Not having a kitchen was acceptable, since we had most of our meals in the Caucasian mess hall. Not having a bathroom was a different story.

The latrine was in the middle of the block. It had communal showers, so we soon learned to go there when no one else was around. We sometimes walked over for

showers and were stung by the blowing sand on our way back home. I often wondered how clean we really were by the time we got back.

We soon learned that the Japanese in Manzanar were made up of three factions. A large majority were either *Issei* or *Nisei*, first and second generation, respectively. Most were pro-American. The third faction was *Kibei*, those who had some or all of their education in Japan. Some were pro-Japan, caused trouble in camp, and had to be removed. We had only been in Manzanar a few months when a large crowd of *Kibei* stormed the guards around the jail. They marched right by our barrack. In addition to their underlying hostilities, they were upset that a certain person was being held at the jail. The crowd had to be broken up with tear gas. There was trouble for several nights, but after the first night, the Caucasians were evacuated to nearby towns to ensure our safety. Some of the Caucasians had friends they could stay with or managed to secure hotel rooms, but our only option seemed to be the women's section of the county jail in Independence. There were no women prisoners at the time, and we could come and go as we pleased, of course.

After almost a year of unpleasant living conditions, we welcomed our move into a new apartment. We had a living room, two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. It was heaven to have a bathroom with running water!

It was heaven to have a bathroom with running water!

Also, we enjoyed having nice lawns and flowers. A washroom was conveniently close by, where we each washed our own clothes.

We made friends quickly with the other children. In summer we would hike to nice spots outside the camp for swimming and picnics. We loved a swimming spot known as the Sand Trap, which was adjacent to the Los Angeles Aqueduct. Sometimes we

went to the rear of the camp and climbed the barbed wire, where the soldiers in the tower waved us through. Once we were invited to climb up in the tower, which we did. We enjoyed going to our Victory Garden, where we picked the most delicious tomatoes and watermelons. Occasionally there were outdoor movies or planned



square dances and other dances. For a period of time, Joan and I belonged to a group called Girl Reserves, which had mostly Japanese girls as members. We all got along very well.

Mother made friends with many of the other teachers, in particular Virginia Hayes and Chloe Zimmerman. Mrs. Hayes and her children, Lynne and Billy, became our closest friends. Mother also knew several Japanese quite well. One of the most memorable people we met was a little old Japanese man that came to put the oil in our stove. He spoke no English, but he always greeted us with a big smile and said hello in Japanese. Mother got along well with her students and was very dedicated to them. We went to her classroom and were impressed with the display of beautiful geometric designs done by her geometry students. Today, I sometimes browse through a Manzanar High School annual that belonged to my mother. It is heart warming to see the kind words written to her by her Japanese students. One boy in particular thanked her for pounding geometry into his head.

The Caucasian children, my age and up, were bused 6 miles north to schools in Independence. I attended school there for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. The classes were small, which was quite a change from being in a large class in Los Angeles. Joan and the others went to the high school.