



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.

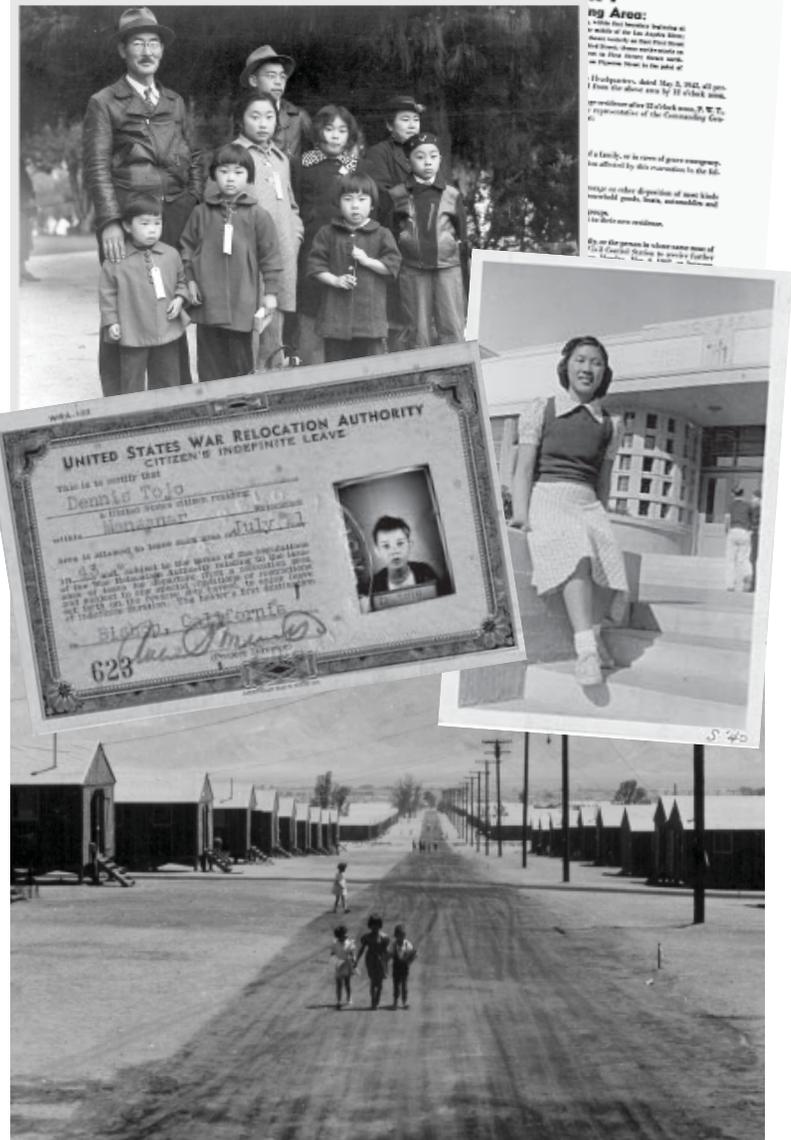
# Manzanar



## 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)

## **GILA RIVER**

**Location:** Southern Arizona

**Environmental Conditions:**

Located in the desert, temperatures reached 125 degrees, with summer temperatures consistently over 100 degrees. Dust storms were also a frequent problem.

**Opened:** July 10, 1942

**Closed:** Canal Camp: September 28, 1945  
Butte Camp: November 10, 1945

**Max. Population:** 13,348 (November 1942)

**Demographics:** Internees primarily came from Fresno, Santa Barbara, San Joaquin, Solano, Contra Costa, Ventura and Los Angeles Counties via Turlock, Tulare, and Santa Anita Assembly Centers. 3,000 individuals came directly to Gila River.

**Interesting/unusual facts**

\*The Gila River Indian Community objected to the selection and use of their land for a Relocation Center.

\*The center was divided into two camps, Butte and Canal. The two camps were about 3.5 miles apart and included a total of 1,181 buildings.

\*Gila River was so hot that the barracks had to have two roofs to protect people from the heat!

\*Only one guard tower was erected at the Gila River Camp and it was torn down because of staffing limitations. Within six months, the perimeter barbed wire fence around each camp was removed.

\*Japanese Americans at Canal Camp built model ships for the U.S. Navy to use in military training.

\*Butte Camp featured a baseball diamond designed by professional baseball player Kenichi Zenimura. It included dugouts, bleachers, and other features and could accommodate up to 6,000 spectators.



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## **HELEN MISHIMA**

**Camp: Gila River, AZ**

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My mother and father were born in Hilo, Hawaii. Dad was taken out of school when he completed the eighth grade, and went to work in the sugar cane fields to help support the family. He became a mechanic at 18. Mom completed only the third grade, and started domestic work. She had learned to read sufficiently to follow recipes.

My two older brothers and sister were born in Hilo. My younger brother and I were born in Calexico, California, near San Diego, where my father moved in 1928 to take a job as a mechanic. With three small children in tow, mother sailed to join Dad after he found a place to live. Mom found a job as a seamstress in a mattress factory.

Dad lost his position in Calexico as a result of the Depression. In the summer, after I completed kindergarten, we moved to Guadalupe, California, south of Santa Maria, where Dad's friend offered him a job. Once school began in the fall, Mom was hired as the cafeteria manager and chief cook at the Guadalupe Union Elementary School.

We were in church on Sunday, December 7, 1941. As soon as the service was over, we learned that Japan had bombed a place called Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii. How unbelievable! We hurried home to listen to the radio reports. Mom and Dad were glued to the radio. Silence prevailed in the living room as we all listened to the news.

Our neighbor had been whisked away on the night of December 7. We wondered if Dad would be taken away by the FBI too. But fortunately, he was an American citizen by birth, as was Mom.

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As soon as we learned that we would be placed in some sort of camp, Mom began to sew large duffel bags to carry as much as we could. We were

told to pack clothing, bedding, and even some tin plates and eating utensils. What remained was sold for whatever we could get; even my youngest brother's new bicycle that he had received for Christmas, and the new stove and refrigerator Dad had bought the summer before. The one thing I would not part with was my violin. My sister kept her typewriter.

Living behind barbed wire was an experience never to be forgotten. However, one cannot live in the past, and in my personal opinion, the experience opened up new horizons for most of us. We were scattered to destinations beyond our wildest dreams that opened up new avenues to pursue.

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*Gila River War Relocation Center, Arizona*

wanted to continue their education. The older folks, who now had time on their hands to be creative, started learning various crafts. They planted gardens, built fishponds and stocked them with koi, learned ranching and grew produce and flowers to beautify the camp. Much of this helped in preparation for life beyond the barbed wire

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**Many young men and some women went into the military service, both in Europe and in the Pacific.**

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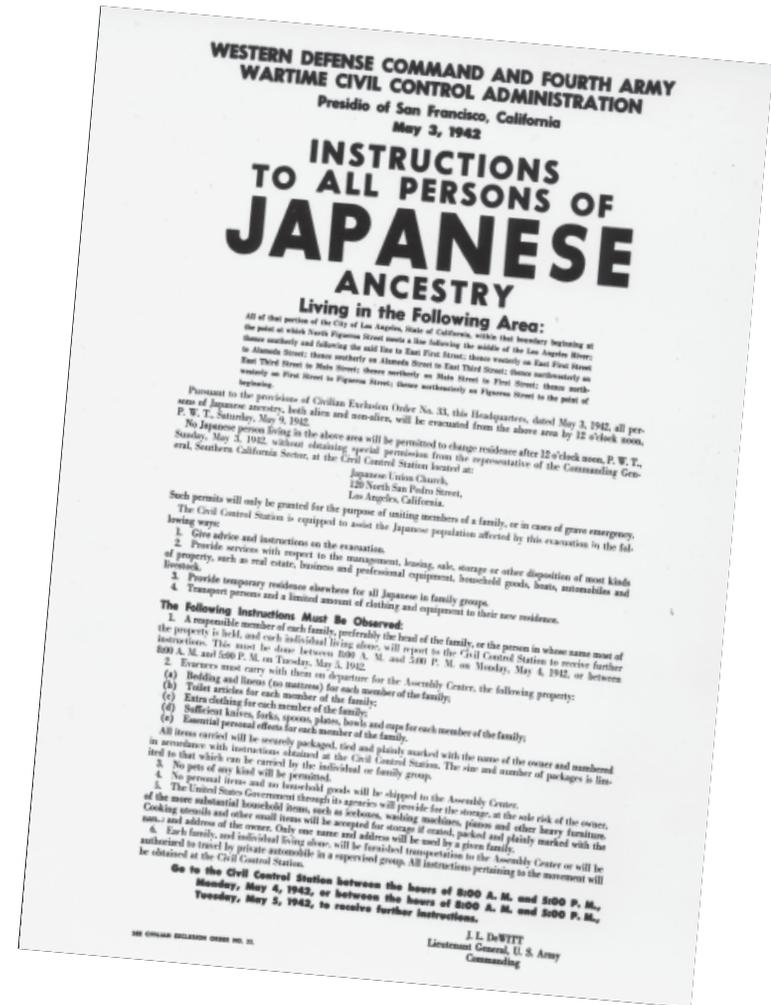
A friend who had moved to Detroit beckoned Dad to join him. There was an opening for a mechanic. Dad left camp before the rest of us to find a job and a place where we could live. I was anxious to return to school in order not to fall behind in class. So in September 1945, the rest of our family traveled to Detroit by train. Each was allotted \$25 and free passage.

fence when it became necessary to leave the camp and relocate throughout the United States. Many young men and some women went into the military service, both in Europe and in the Pacific.

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The day of evacuation, I remember the American Legion Auxiliary women served donuts and coffee for the adults and cocoa for the children. There were soldiers armed with rifles as we boarded the Greyhound buses that would take us to the Tulare Assembly Center. I remember walking to the end of the bus and looking out the back window. I

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**In camp, I corresponded with one of my former Caucasian classmates. Then, in her last letter, she stated that her father forbade her to write to that 'Jap' girl.**

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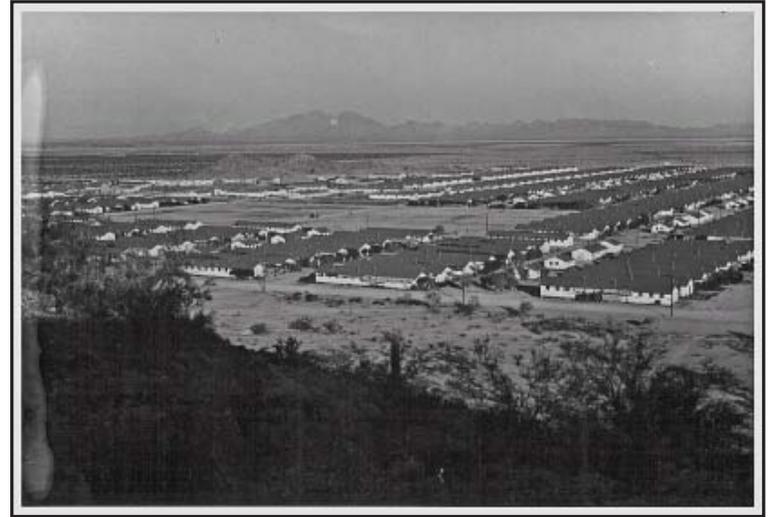
watched Guadalupe recede into the distance, trying to retain the image and wondering if we would ever return.

In camp, I corresponded with one of my former Caucasian classmates. Then, in her last letter, she stated that her father forbade her to write to that 'Jap' girl. Oh, how that hurt.

In the summer of 1942, we were herded into buses,

and transferred onto a train that took us from California to the Gila River Indian Reservation in Arizona. The camp became known as the Gila River War Relocation Center, and was composed of two separate units, Butte and Canal.

Gila was hot, dusty, dry and full of desert critters such as rattlesnakes, Gila monsters, and scorpions. The camps were unfinished, with open trenches where water pipes were to be set. In each block, there were several barracks that all looked the same, a mess hall, a men's and women's shower/restroom, a laundry room and an "ironing room" (later used to store food products). There was one socket for a lightbulb



*Gila River War Relocation Center*

in each barracks room, and army cots for beds. Sheets were hung up as room dividers.

Dad first worked collecting garbage from the mess halls, and then as a mechanic at the motor pool. Mom was hired, even before we moved into a barracks, as a mess hall supervisor. She was the only woman supervisor that I am aware of in all the ten centers. Later she became supervisor of the special diet mess hall.

The evacuees did not wallow in self-pity. They made the camp come to life. The youth

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