

# 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

#### Excluded Area:

1. Within the Excluded Area there shall be no Japanese American property or other facilities of any kind.

2. All persons of Japanese ancestry shall be removed from the area of the Excluded Area by 12 o'clock noon on the date specified in the order.

3. If a family or its members are exempt from removal by this regulation to the Excluded Area, the family shall be notified by the War Relocation Authority.

4. No person shall be permitted to enter the Excluded Area for any purpose other than that authorized by the War Relocation Authority.

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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.

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**PHYLLIS MIZUHARA****Camp: Poston I, AZ****Address: 4-5-A**

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In 1903, my father Kumajiro Hirata came to the United States from Fukoaka, Japan. He landed in California, and worked up and down the state, doing farm work. He settled in San Bernardino, and sent word to the village he came from in Japan that he was looking for a wife. In 1913, my mother Same Watanabe sailed from Japan to join my father. They were married in San Francisco, after my mother was released from the immigration station on Angel Island. I had three sisters and one brother.

Briefly, they ran a hotel and a small farm in San Bernardino, and then opened a general store. You could buy hot dogs, hamburgers, beer, canned goods, gift items from Japan, as well as fruit, fresh eggs, tooth paste, stationery and even postage stamps at my parents' "mini-supermarket." We sold penny candy to local kids who came to watch movies at the nearby theatre. It became a successful business. The home my parents bought was put in the names of my older sisters, Edith and Helen.

There were enough Japanese families in San Bernardino to have a Japanese Association, where folks congregated socially. My father was a vice-president of this group. There was also a Japanese Christian Church, overseen

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by a Caucasian woman by the name of Pansy Ham, affiliated with the Protestant Church.

I was aware of places Japanese people couldn't go in San Bernardino, like

restaurants and the public swimming pool. There was a first-run Fox Theatre down the street from our store that was off limits too. We had a second-class theatre called the Rialto, which we nicknamed the "Rathole." Mrs. Ham once took us to the Fox, and they let us in.

On December 7, 1941, I was 11, and a sixth grader at Jefferson School, in San Bernardino. When I heard the radio broadcast about the bombing that Sunday, I could not understand what it meant that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. I saw that my parents were highly upset and concerned, as were my two older sisters, who were in their twenties and already out of college. We were fearful of what was going to happen to us. Looking back, I didn't think we, Japanese Americans, would have to go away.

On Monday morning, I did not know what to expect at school. Before the teacher even started class, a boy named Leroy, who was a new student in my class, jumped up and said, "Are there any

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**My teacher explained to the class that... the Japanese military... was not to be confused with the people of Japanese ancestry who lived in our country.**

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Prior to evacuation, my parents hastily sold our “mini-supermarket” for a mere \$1000. We sold our automobile too. My older sister was able to locate an honest realtor, who rented our house for us during the time in camp. We stored personal items in our attic. Mrs. Ham stored possessions in her bedroom and garage. She gave us much support and encouragement during this difficult period, as did the Quakers. Mrs. Ham drove us to the bus station on the day we were to leave for an unknown destination.

In May of 1942, we were evacuated by bus to the Poston War Relocation Center in the Arizona desert. The windows on the bus were covered with shades, so we could not look out, and people could not see us. I felt queasy all the way, as I was always prone to getting carsick. I was happy to get off the bus, but as I looked around, all I saw were rows and rows of tarpaper-covered barracks. There were no trees or anything green around



us. There was nothing but sand, sand, and more sand. I felt sick again!

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After our family of six was registered, we were assigned to one room in the end of a barrack. We found six cots in our bare room. We were told to fill canvas bags with straw, and these were our mattresses. I did not sleep well that night, and for many nights thereafter. We lived in a block with neighbors and friends from San Bernardino, Colton, and Riverside, but I also met a lot of new people. I'm still in touch with some of my classmates from Poston.

My father worked in the Agricultural Section, raising chickens and watermelons. Mom worked in the mess hall, as did many women in camp. My older sisters, having graduated college, were teachers.

I went through Junior High School at Poston. I liked school and had a good time learning, although it was strange that all the boys in my class were Japanese Americans just as I was entering the boy-crazy stage. I played volleyball and basketball, and attended dances in the recreation hall and later in the Poston Auditorium. The last year at Poston we ordered roller skates from the Sears catalogue, and skated the walkways of the new auditorium and school. Summers were hot, and they dammed up an irrigation canal to create a swimming hole for us.

In September 1945, just before my 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, mom, dad, my brother Jack and I left Poston, and returned to San Bernardino. Helen and Edith went back to Los Angeles, and another sister, Masako, moved to New York. Luckily, we had a house to return to, unlike many other families who had to sell or abandon their homes and businesses at the beginning of evacuation.

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As we approached our home, suitcases still in hand, a group of children watched us, chanting, "Oh so solly, so solly," and bowed to us in a mocking, oriental fashion. We tried to ignore their chants. Two older boys came by and shooed the kids away, saying, "That's not nice. Go home!" Then the boys said to us, "Hello. Welcome back." They sure made me feel a lot better!

Coming out of camp, my father felt defeated that he didn't have his store. He first worked in the potato fields, but longed to be his own boss. He tried to start another store, but was unsuccessful.

The camp experience was devastating to our family financially, but socially we got to meet many people. I have no bitterness over what happened to us, but Japanese Americans shared an experience we hope will never happen again. I thought my Dad was going to be bitter, but he told me once he was happy the United States won the war because they treated their former enemies so kindly during the occupation and reconstruction

of Japan. I helped my parents study for their naturalization tests, and in 1952 they became American citizens.

I graduated from San Bernardino High School, and attended UC Berkeley, where I met my husband. Since 1948 I have been living in the Bay Area. Initially, I had a difficult time talking

to Caucasians about my camp experience because I didn't want to make them feel guilty for it. I'd tear up when anybody talked about camp. Gradually it has gotten easier. Recently I participated in making a quilt with a group of internee women, depicting our Poston Experience. The project was documented in a video called "Piecing Memories."

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## **POSTON**

**Location:** La Paz County, AZ (Yuma County during WWII and until 1983)

**Environmental Conditions:** elevation 320 ft – lower Sonoran desert – perhaps the hottest of all the camps.

**Acreage:** 71,000. Poston was the largest of all the camps.

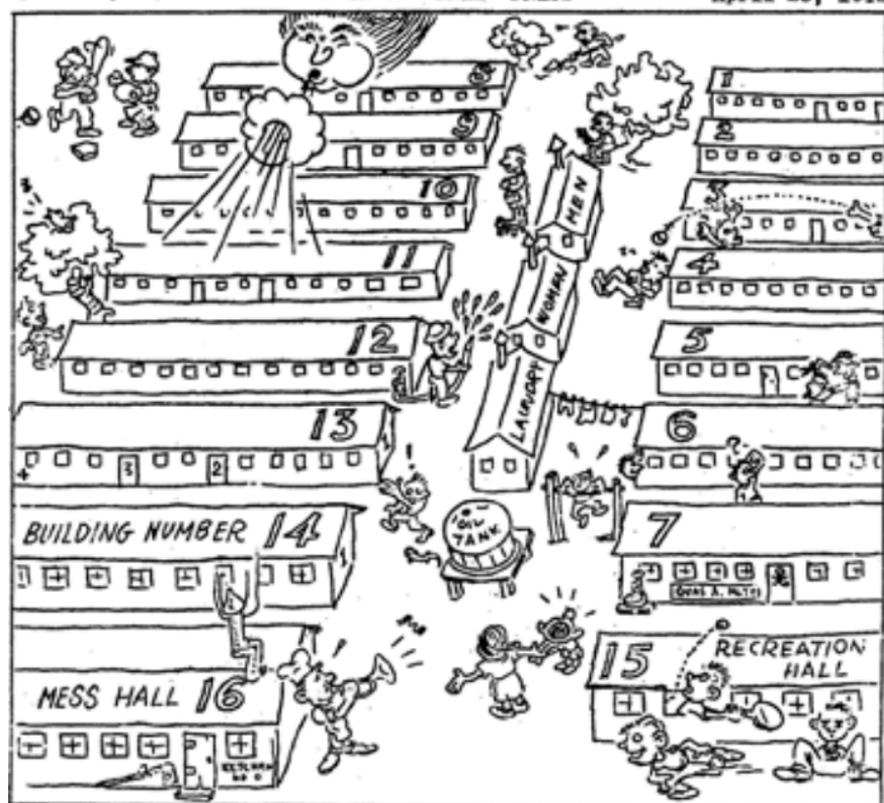
**Opened:** The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) administered the center when it was an Assembly Center, and after it became a Relocation Center until December 1943 when the WRA took full control. Date of first arrival was May 8, 1942.

**Closed:** November 28, 1945

**Max. Population:** 17,814 (September 2, 1942)

**Demographics:** Internees were from Kern County, Fresno, Monterey Bay Area, Sacramento County, southern Arizona, southern CA (including San Diego). They came from the Mayer, Salinas, Santa Anita and Pinedale assembly centers.





## 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 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.



The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. To learn more about your national parks, visit the National Park Service website at [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov). To learn more about Manzanar National Historic Site, please visit our website at [www.nps.gov/manz](http://www.nps.gov/manz).

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