

# 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

#### Residence Area:

1. Within the boundary hereinafter set forth, all persons of Japanese ancestry are to remain in their present homes unless otherwise ordered in their homes, those within the boundary to be in the area of

2. Disruptive, dated May 3, 1942, all persons from the above area by 12 o'clock noon or earlier after 12 o'clock noon, P. M. T., representative of the Commanding General.

3. If a family, or in case of grave emergency, is affected by this restriction to the above area, or other disposition of area lands, including public lands, schools, and other public property, to be in the area of

4. Do not be present in a home which must of Civil Control Authority to receive further instructions. War # 1942, or hereinafter.





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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## MOMO NAGANO

**Family # 1046**

**Camp: Manzanar, CA**

**Address: 6-11-5**

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My father, Kiro Nagano, came to the United States in 1918 from Sapporo, Hokkaido, Japan, and returned there to marry my mother in 1920. They left Japan the day after the wedding. My father leased land in Los Angeles and, as a teenager, hired farmhands and sold his produce at the wholesale market. In 1933 he opened his own business. The night of Dec. 7, 1941, the day Pearl Harbor was bombed, the FBI took my father in custody as a "dangerous enemy alien" and he consequently lost his business.

I was 16 when Pearl Harbor was bombed, and the FBI took my father away. The next day my friends and I had to go to school, and it was an uneasy time. We encountered one or two

unfriendly incidents, but generally we were treated normally. There were eventually reports in the daily newspapers that the government would remove us

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*Momo Nagano and Friends at Dorsey High School 1941*

from the West Coast. My younger brother was 14 and would not believe that it could happen to us, because we were American citizens. When evacuation became inevitable, my mother decided to go to Manzanar, as volunteers under the auspices of the Maryknoll Catholic organization. I remember on the last day at Dorsey High School when I was one of the first Japanese American students to check out of school, the geometry teacher said in a loud voice, that it was about time the government moved us away. It was very humiliating.

My father had begun building a new home for us in October 1941. We moved into the house in January 1942 and lived there only two months before we had to

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leave for Manzanar. My Mother was so upset that we packed all our personal things in boxes and left everything. Someone, a non-Japanese benefactor, found renters for it, saving our house for the four or five years before my family was able to return to Los Angeles.



*Boarding the Bus for Manzanar at the Lone Pine Station 1942*

We went by train and bus to Manzanar on April 2, 1942. We mainly took clothing. My mother took us to Sears and bought us sturdy and warm clothing, allowing me to buy a pair of cowboy boots, a thrill for me.

I had envisioned Manzanar as a camp of little white cottages for each family, like the cottages at Sequoia National Park where we had stayed during vacations. I can still vividly recall my dismay as

we pulled into Manzanar off the highway at dusk and saw rows of black, tarpapered barracks, some finished and others still being built, our home for an indeterminate future.

We were registered and then given canvas ticking bags and followed someone who took us to a barrack filled with straw. We were told to fill our bags, which were to be our mattresses on metal army cots. We walked to our apartment, which we were to share with another couple and their 2-year-old son. We eventually devised some privacy by hanging some sheets to divide our two families. My mother had brought a metal bucket and we found one outdoor faucet in the block, and filled the bucket. We used the water to wash up and to brush our teeth in the mornings. The latrine buildings were still not built and our restrooms were portable toilets.

My younger brother and I spent our days walking around the perimeter of the camp, looking out at the highway and watching the cars go by and spending time with friends until school was finally established in October. My neighborhood friends with whom I had grown up were sent to other camps, so it was a major disappointment not to be reunited with them.

Our classrooms were in a whole block set aside for the school. We sat in the unheated rooms on the linoleum floor, with no furniture, textbooks, or sup-

plies at the beginning. The teachers were recruited from L.A. and most of them were there because they wanted to help, but some were there for the paycheck. I remember one day in particular when we were handed fliers with the bill of Rights listed on Bill of Rights Day; it caused an angry exchange between the teacher and some of the students.

Our teachers did their best to make our school year as close to that at home as possible and organized dances, a school newspaper, a yearbook, and graduation ceremonies. After I left camp an auditorium



*Momo Nagano at Manzanar 1943*

was built, and my younger brother was graduated indoors. I remember feeling uneasy over that, because it seemed as if the camp were destined to become permanent.

I left Manzanar in February of 1944. The American Friends (Quakers) Service Committee had been active in recruiting students from camps for colleges in the Midwest, South and East Coast. There were many colleges that would not accept Japanese Americans. Wheaton College had a vacancy and I was offered a scholarship to attend. I was 17 and took a four-day train trip from Reno, Nevada, to New York City where my older brother met me and delivered me to Wheaton in

Norton, Massachusetts. We arrived at Wheaton at ten at night by cab, and my brother had to leave me, because the cab was waiting. It was one of the few more unsettling experiences of

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my life. When a pleasant student walked me into the dorm where I was to stay, I had to walk the length of a long hallway with students standing in each doorway to see what a Japanese looked like, since most people on the East Coast had never seen one. The student body president came to welcome me and mentioned that she heard I had come from a camp and pointed out to me that I was lucky that I

didn't live in Germany where the Jews were being treated so badly. I still regret that I didn't speak up and point out that I was an American citizen living in a democracy, but I was too chicken. I eventually earned my Bachelors degree in June of 1947.

I was a ceramist from 1962 to 1964 when I became a weaver. I have been a weaver ever since, exhibiting, teaching, running workshops and lecturing. In 1976 or so I had a sudden revelation that my love for weaving came from the days before school as established, and I worked in the camouflage net weaving project in Manzanar, which lasted only a few weeks because of political protests. I loved that job, as I love weaving now.



*Momo Nagano at Manzanar 2004*

# MANZANAR Free Press

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## **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.





*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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