

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 this evacuation 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.

BILL NISHIMURA**Camps: Poston 3, AZ, 25-14-C****Tule Lake, CA, Block 15**

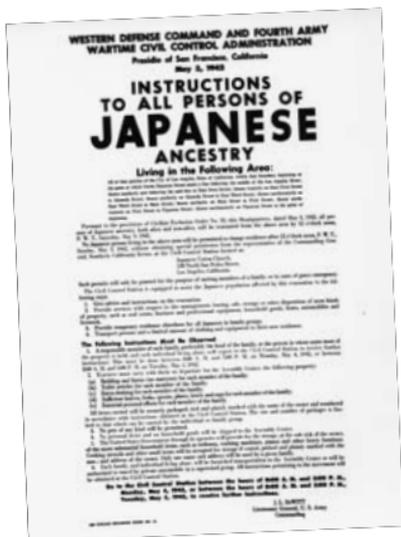
Tomio, my dad, was born about 1884, and my mother Sada about 1896, both in the city of Iwakune, Japan. My dad was in Tokyo, studying electricity, but came to the United States in 1907, because his dad felt there was a good chance of making money. Like many who expected a big fortune here, it didn't turn out. So he ended up on the farm, settling in southern California.

My sister Tomiiko was born in 1917. I was born in 1920 and given the Japanese name Toru. I started using the name Bill in high school.

We didn't speak English at home. In those days, Japanese parents sort of forced us to learn the mother language. I studied at the Japanese language school for two or three hours a day. Because of that, I had a difficult time learning English in the public schools in Lawndale, where we lived.

During the Depression, most of the farmers had a rough time. Whenever we were unable to pay the rent on the farmland, the owner let us grow sweet pea for the seed, which he took instead of cash.

I started working on the farm at 12 or 13. We had little time for playing around. On Sunday, the farmers all worked because we had to prepare our produce for the early Monday market. The land was right along the highway. People driving by constantly yelled at us, "Oh you money-hungry Japs, working on Sundays." That's how they thought we were. But we had good reason for working.



I graduated from high school in 1939, 13th in a class of 125. I wanted to be an aircraft mechanic, but cash was very low, so I never attended any other school.

When war broke out, December 7, 1941, my dad was fearful, because he was a volunteer for the Gardena Valley Japanese Association. It was nothing

subversive – no politics – It was just to help out the farmers, translate for those who had difficulty with English language documents. But, due to war hysteria, authorities thought whoever goes in and out of the Japanese Association must be planning sabotage or something.

Sure enough, the FBI came, turned everything upside down and took my father, saying, “He’ll back in about two or three hours.” About two weeks later, we were notified where he was interned. I went to visit him, and saw many familiar faces in there, a chain link fence all around, and three strands of barbed wire on top.

In spring, the government ordered all of Japanese descent on the West Coast to be evacuated. No date was set. The farmers naturally didn’t know what to do with their crops. It was too early to harvest. White people came along and hounded them. Farmers sold their crops at rock bottom prices. After finishing the August harvest, then we had to leave. I think the government knew all the way, and that was a really dirty trick.

My sister and her husband Shinichiro had to leave their grocery store, with much stuff they were unable to sell at the price they wanted. We owned pianos and clothing, a tractor and farm equipment. The government sent us a notice that belongings too massive to be taken to camp would be kept at government storage, but I didn't trust the government, so I decided to have my goods stored at the farm. After we moved out, the farm manager took everything valuable and just put the torch to it. This wiped us out.

We went by train to Camp Three of the Poston Relocation Center, Arizona, on August 8, 1942. There was a partition in the barracks for each family, but no side walls. We had to fill mattress covers with straw for our army-type cots. There were knotholes, and where the lumbers weren't fitting together, the wind and dust would come in. Poston was hot.

My dad eventually was released to join the rest of the family. I worked as crew chief at the mess hall, and then first engineer in the fire department. Each job paid \$19 a month.



Filling Mattress Covers with Straw, Poston 1942

A loyalty questionnaire came out: Question #27 asked if internees would be willing to serve in the military. I wasn't going to volunteer, so I put "no." On #28, asking if internees would deny allegiance to Japan and the emperor, I answered, "If my constitutional rights were restored." The camp administrator tried to change my mind. I yelled at him, "If you were in my position—what would you do?"

Right after, in January, 1944, they sent my father and me to Tule Lake Segregation Center. My first impression was smoke from coal stoves darkening the sky. When the snow melted, it was a muddy, messy place, but my block had an *ofuro* (outside hot tub). When the snow was coming down, it felt so good.

My former Fire Chief Evans at Poston arrived on a business trip, looked me up and got me a special job as an inspector on the fire department there.

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homemade pickles.**

Our mail often had holes where censors chopped out words. Some people would smuggle notes to us, in balloons inside jars of homemade pickles.

A Mr. Okomoto was fatally shot in the stomach by an M.P. who had fought at Guadalcanal, and didn't like Japanese people at all. Camp workers representing us asked the government not to have any more guards who had fought against Japanese soldiers. The MP was fined \$1, and that was it. Case closed.

Actually, I hoped Japan would win the war at that time, but I didn't know, because Japan was retreating. In our block there was a radio technician who made his own short wave. We got the news that way.

In Tule Lake, I renounced my citizenship and asked for repatriation. In that era, you think, "Is there a hope in this country?" Before the war, *Nisei* (second generation Japanese people) would graduate college, and have a menial job like working at a fruit stand or nursery. Americans would not hire us. And then, being put in camp like that, without any due

process before the court. I just thought the only place I could go was Japan, and start over there.

If I went to Japan, I had to know the language or else I would get nowhere. I joined a volunteer group called *Hoshidan*, formed to train everybody to keep our health intact and our minds sharp. We created our own citizen's school. We studied Japanese geography, history, and language, and learned to respect the emperor and our elders. People who went to Japanese school didn't go to the official camp school. We read stories in a Japanese children's book to small children.

The group grew. The government was concerned it would not be able to handle them if something should come up.

All members of the organization, about 200 people, were picked up and sent to a special internment camp in Santa Fe. Only men were there. I went there in January 1945. Later, my dad came with another group. When you worked there, it was without pay — it was voluntary. After my dad was hospitalized with stomach ulcers, I volunteered as an orderly.

I renounced my citizenship and asked for repatriation to Japan. In that era, you ask, is there a hope in this country? . . . Americans would not hire us. And then, being put in a camp like that...

The government announced, "If you wish to stay, you may do so." My feelings just turned 180 degrees. I felt that the U.S. did have some warmth in its heart.

I was in Santa Fe when the war ended. During that time, I always thought that I would be deported because of signing the repatriation request and being in the *Hosbidan* group. But as people left for Japan, the government announced, "You are not being deported.

It's your choice. If you wish to stay, you may do so." My feelings just turned 180 degrees. I felt that the U.S. did have some warmth in its heart. I was so appreciative. And from then on, I thought of U.S. as my country.

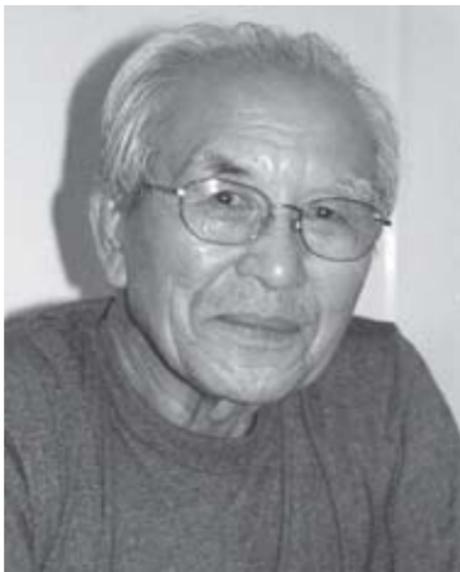
Most of the *Hosbidan* group were released before Santa Fe closed, April 18, 1946. Remnants of the group, including Dad and me, were sent to Crystal City Internment Camp, Texas. That was really a heaven. It was for family reunions. Rooms had a sink, stove and other things there! Shower, bathroom and tub were still outside. It was a soothing feeling to again be among families talking to each other.

I did typing work for the camp manager, including petitions that people wrote asking for release. People were released, a few at a time. I was held until May 27, 1947, longer than most. I had talked back to the officials at Poston, and that had a lot to do with prolonging my release, I think. Dad was released a month later.

Our family worked for a farmer in Visalia, California, for three years. Then we bought a house in Gardena, where I'm living now. I started a gardening business, and got married in February 1952 to Michiko Kamikawa, who I had met at Poston. I have two daughters, Lynne Midori and Donna Reiko, and grandchildren.

I returned to Tule Lake on a Japanese American pilgrimage in 2000. The interest shown by many of the younger generation really amazed me. My heart completely changed. Tight-lipped before, now I want to talk to help the younger generation understand the situation, how I felt at that time, and how I managed to overcome this bad feeling and become a good citizen.

Before the war and going through all that misery, truthfully, I didn't appreciate the country all that much. But now I am really grateful for having the family, being able to raise my kids to go through college, have a good job, and lead a good life, because of Uncle Sam. Citizens



Bill Nishimura, July 2002

I want to help the younger generation understand the situation, how I felt at that time, and how I managed to overcome this bad feeling and become a good citizen.

should appreciate the U.S. If they lived in other countries, no way they would have this type of opportunity.

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.



TULE LAKE

Location: Modoc County,
California, near the Oregon
border.

Environmental Conditions:

Located on flat and treeless
terrain with sandy soil.

Winters are long and cold and summers hot and dry.

Acreage: 7,400

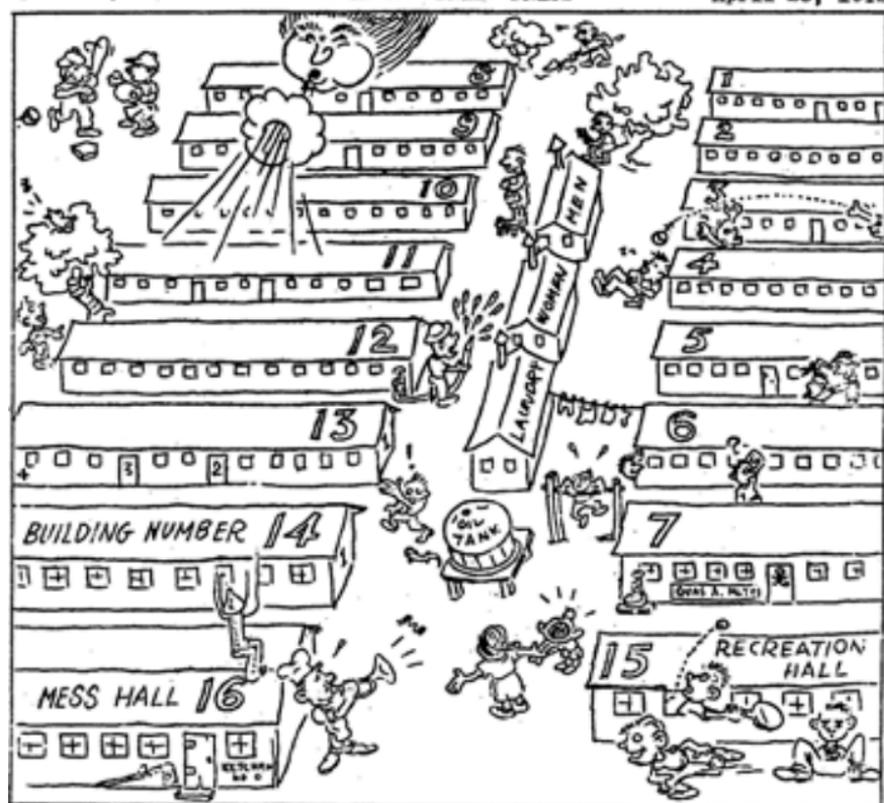
Opened: May 25, 1942

Closed: March 20, 1946

Max. Population: 18,789 (December 25, 1944)

Demographics: Originally, more than 3,000 people were sent directly to Tule Lake from California assembly centers. Once Tule Lake became a segregation center, the population came from all five western states and Hawaii.





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.



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