

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: 86

I moved to Ohio at the age of 85 a year ago to be with my son, who lives, works and is active in Yellow Springs community. Unlike almost all, if not all Ohioans, I spent two years incarcerated in Manzanar Evacuation Camp during 1942-1944. Unfortunately, I happened to have parents born in Japan. I was born in California, so I was an American Citizen. However, that did not stop President Roosevelt from designating all Japanese as Aliens (all Japanese and Chinese Nationals were aliens because of a California law that forbid them from becoming citizens of the United States). President Roosevelt declared all Japanese and Japanese Americans a security threat to United States in 1942, and incarcerated them.

He commanded the General in the Western Command to incarcerate all Japanese and Japanese Americans. In March of 1942, I along with 110,000 other Japanese and Japanese Americans gathered at bus stops and train stations awaiting to be shipped to what were called various names like relocation centers, evacuation camps, etc. We were permitted to bring with us whatever we could carry in our arms.

My father could not help because had been arrested soon after the war began and incarcerated in an unknown place where we could not contact him. Since my father could not assist us, my then 16 year old brother and I, 14 years old, did what we could to pack and store all our furniture and clothes, whatever we could not carry in our arms. Fortunately a family friend helped us buy luggage and footlockers to store stuff, as well as in other ways.

One early morning in 1942, we trooped to the bus stop along with 50 other families. The bus drove all day and much of the night to carry us to our new home, in Central Valley desert. The nearest village was aptly called Lone Pine. When we arrived, we were greeted with a frightening sight: the wind blew sand and dust so one could barely see a few feet. Outside, no friendly street light greeted our bus. All I could see were images of what might have been bodies from sci-fi movies. People dressed in black jackets (which turned out to be Navy Pea Coats) and huge goggles to protect their eyes from the blinding sand, but which looked frightening to a boy who grew up in Santa Monica, California where it seldom rained or got cold enough to require a heavy jacket and never required goggles to protect the eyes from sand driven by high winds.

We climbed out of the bus and gathered our luggage. My aging and somewhat ill mother required some assistance to walk anywhere. The attendants directed us to a barracks that stored mattress covers stuffed with straw. One was more than a 14 year old could handle and certainly not with luggage to carry. Somehow we managed, with assistance, to gather into a 20'x20' room containing eight cots and a coal stove, like the Benjamin Franklin stove. At one end, a shelf was made so that we could stash our luggage. This was one room of a 20'x100' Army barracks.

What a surprise when we learned a family of five (mother and four daughters, three teenagers) had to share the tiny cot-filled 20'x20' foot room with a family of three (mother and two teen age sons); There was much squealing and crying by the poor girls. My brother and the older girls soon devised hanging a blanket over a rope to provide some privacy for the girls to change.

The camp had about 20 blocks of barracks, each consisting of 8 barracks, 20'x100', on each side of the central area, which consisted of three buildings: a men's bathroom, a women's bathroom and a clothes washing room. The mess hall was a double sized barracks.

We ate American meals, because that is all the cooks could prepare. Having eaten Japanese meals all my life, meat loaf and oatmeal were strange, new and not very appetizing. Fortunately this introduction meant American meals were not strange when I went to boot camp in 1944.