

2023

Orphans of Incarceration: Manzanar and The Children's Village (Episode 11)

Ashley Hinds

Rosie Ponce

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/otterpod>

This Podcast is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Behavioral and Global Studies at Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in OtterPod by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

Transcript for The Orphans of Incarceration: Manzanar and the Children's Village
Written and Produced by Ashley Hinds and Rosie Ponce

(0:00)(OtterPod Theme Music)

(0:01)This is an episode of the OtterPod from California State University, Monterey Bay

(0:11)Ashley : Hello, I'm Ashley Hinds

(0:15)Rosie: And I'm Rosie Ponce

(0:17)Ashley: And this is the Orphans of Incarceration¹: Manzanar and the Children's Village

(0:24)Ashley: In this episode we will be talking about the lives of the orphans of Japanese descent before and during the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.

(0:34)Rosie: We will also be examining the life of a white American who was living at Manzanar as a child, pulling the information from an article that was written by the woman who lived there because her parents worked for the War Relocation Authority.

(0:47)Ashley: We will be using sound clips from interviews with some of the orphaned children that were taken by California State University, Fullerton for an Oral History project and found on Denso as well as photographs from their time of incarceration. We will learn about what it was like for the orphans and how Manzanar had the only orphanage among the incarceration camps.

(1:05)(Fade out of the OtterPod Theme Music)

(1:10)Rosie: Manzanar was one of the ten incarceration camps spread throughout the United States where Japanese Americans were incarcerated during World War II and it is located on the east side of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, in the desert about 100 miles east of Death Valley.

(1:25)Ashley: Manzanar housed 10,000 Japanese Americans in one square mile radius, and among those 10,000 there were 101 orphans that would be included until the time of the camps closing in September 1945.

¹ We choose to use the terminology incarcerated because of an academic and morality aspect. We both believe that using the term incarcerated more accurately depicts what the Japanese Americans went through during the time of incarceration during World War II. Based on the JACL *Power of Words Handbook*, internment is defined as the confinement or impoundment of enemy aliens, whereas incarceration is to confine or imprisonment as a punishment for a crime, which the Japanese Americans were being punished for a crime that many did not commit.

(1:42)Rosie: During World War II if an orphan had even the smallest fraction, about 1/32nd of Japanese descent in their DNA, they would end up at Manzanar with the rest of the Japanese American orphans.²

(1:54)Ashley: Before the war in 1942, many orphans of Japanese ancestry either lived with distant family members, in foster homes, or in one of three orphanages. These orphanages were specifically for children of Japanese ancestry in California: the Salvation Army Home in San Francisco, the Maryknoll Home in Los Angeles, and the Shonien in Los Angeles. Nineteen of the children at the Shonien were of mixed race heritage.³

(2:22)Rosie: The Nisei and Sansei children that were sent to Children's Village had become orphaned before the war as a result of family hardships, economic instability, and racial discrimination. Depending on the circumstances a child could have been placed in a home due to their parents not being able to afford them or because they didn't have a way to provide care for them.⁴

(2:44)Ashley: For these Japanese American orphans, life changed drastically after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Rokuichi "Joy" Kusumoto, the director of the Shonien Home was arrested and sent to Missoula, Montana the day after Pearl Harbor. After Kusumoto was arrested the decision of who would care for the children was ultimately left to federal and military authorities as well as the California State Department of Social Welfare. Shonien board member Dr. T.G. Ishimaru and staff members such as Harry and Lillian Matsumoto advocated for keeping the orphans and their caregivers together during incarceration. Harry and Lillian Matsumoto would eventually become the superintendents of the Children's Village and would remain their caretakers during incarceration.⁵

(3:33)Rosie: In April of 1942, military personnel, the United States Children's Bureau, the Social Security Board, and the State Department of Social Welfare decided that staff from the Shonien and Salvation Army Home would relocate with the first group of orphan children. On June 23, 1942, staff members and the first group of orphan children boarded military buses heading to Manzanar and the three barracks called "Children's Village." The Children's Village was basically a camp, within a camp. It was composed of three barracks that were unlike the rest of the barracks in the camp having one be a place for the people who cared for the children with a rec room, kitchen and dining area, the second housed infants, small children and the girls, and

² Lisa Nobe, *The Children's Village at Manzanar: The World War II Eviction and Detention of Japanese American Orphans*.
<https://web.s.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=1c808f84-e080-4555-b025-394f8694a956%40redis>

³ Catherine Irwin, *Manzanar Children's Village*, *Densho Encyclopedia*, 14 July 2020,
https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Manzanar_Children%27s_Village/.

⁴ Catherine Irwin, *Manzanar Children's Village*, *Densho Encyclopedia*, 14 July 2020,
https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Manzanar_Children%27s_Village/.

⁵ Catherine Irwin, *Manzanar Children's Village*, *Densho Encyclopedia*, 14 July 2020.

the third was split into one area for smaller boys and one for older boys, and also included a store room.⁶

(4:25)Rosie: One former orphan incarcerated Mary Miya Ito discusses her incarceration at the Children's Village:

(Sound clip from interview will be inserted here)

(4:35)CC: Well, now we can talk and put it out for everyone to hear you. Because it's important, people should know. So, you didn't go directly from Terminal Island to Children's Village. You went to an orphanage?

(4:54)MM: Yeah. We went to the Japanese Children's Home

(4:57)CC: How long were you there?

(4:59)MM: We were there roughly from February to July, I think it was. June or July. I remember when we came on the bus into Manzanar, there were all these people, they were all Japanese, and they were all brown from the sun. And here we are, we were all white because we were just arriving. And this is the desert, below sea level, Manzanar is. I remember that when we were going on the bus to Children's Village, Children's Village was directly the last thing in the back from the road. There was the hospital to this one side, then there was a road, and Children's Village was here in Block 29, in front of the hospital. They were right across the street from us.

(5:57)CC: Did they allow you guys to take any personal belongings?

(6:02)MM: Well, they just packed everything. They packed everything for us. But I think the evacuees were just allowed, whatever they could carry, that was it.

(6:13)CC: You guys had no choice on what to take?

(6:17)MM: We didn't have much anyway, so it didn't matter to us. When you're a child, you can get along with anything. You find that out. You don't have to have a lot of things. If you have clean clothing and a change, that's enough. As you get older, it's different. We just accumulate more worldly goods.

(6:45)(End of sound clip from Mary Miya Ito interview)⁷

(6:47)Ashley: Miya wasn't the only orphan who had become an orphan around the time of the bombing at Pearl Harbor. Many orphaned children had similar fates, including Kenji Suematsu. For Suematsu, he ended up at Shonien Home after the FBI picked up his father who was an immigrant farmer from Japan and then shortly thereafter his mother suffered from a nervous

⁶ Catherine Irwin, *Manzanar Children's Village*, *Densho Encyclopedia*, 14 July 2020.

⁷ "An Oral History with Mary Miya: Densho Digital Repository." *Densho*, 13 Mar. 1993, <https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-csujad-30-6/>.

breakdown, leaving Kenji and his siblings to be separated from each other in different orphanages.⁸

(7:15)Rosie: Like many wartime orphans, Kenji Suematsu's experience of separation was not an isolated incident, but rather a painful pattern repeated in different iterations over the course of his childhood. In June 1942, Kenji and 100 other orphans were relocated to Manzanar because of the "threat" that they posed to the rest of the United States. Many of the orphans had living relatives that were incarcerated elsewhere and some of the orphans were as young as six months old.⁹ (7:15)



(A young incarceratedee resting in a barrack of the Manzanar Children's Village. Courtesy of the Lawrence De Graaf Center For Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton.¹⁰)

(7:48)Ashley: A picture found through the Center For Oral and Public History at California State University, Fullerton, of a young incarceratedee in the barracks depicts the loneliness that some of these children might have felt during incarceration. Though the Children's Village was within the boundaries of Manzanar, the only time that the orphans were allowed to communicate with the general public was when they were at school. Despite the orphans being separated from the

⁸ Natasha Varner, *Manzanar Children's Village: Japanese American Orphans in a WWII Concentration Camp*, *Densho*, 29 November 2021, <https://densho.org/catalyst/manzanar-childrens-village-japanese-american-orphans-in-a-wwii-concentration-camp/>.

⁹ Natasha Varner, *Manzanar Children's Village: Japanese American Orphans in a WWII Concentration Camp*.

¹⁰ Natasha Varner, *Manzanar Children's Village: Japanese American Orphans in a WWII Concentration Camp*.

rest of the camp, the underlying agenda of the orphanage was clear.¹¹ These children were taught to be model American citizens, and were also taught to be good housekeepers.

(8:23)Rosie: Among the students that the orphans went to school with was a young white girl named Erica Harth. Harth moved to Manzanar from New York in 1944 due to her mother having a job at the camp. While there she attended first grade with the Japanese American children at the camp. Her mother was a social worker in New York City for the Department of Welfare and was hired by the War Relocation Authority to be the “relocation counselor” for the incarcerated.¹²

(8:52)Ashley: Though Harth was living in the camp, the living conditions of the Japanese Americans that were incarcerated in the camps were a stark contrast. She lived in one of the administration buildings that were white bungalows, and the Japanese Americans lived in the barracks that were brown. She lived in a small house that had a kitchen and bathroom but also had her own room. In the barracks a family of four lived in a 20'x25' space¹³.

(9:16)Rosie: Harth recalls her mother telling her about her coming home and feeling “reverse discrimination” because she felt that the teachers favored the Japanese Americans over her. It is something that she has learned to understand that she was outnumbered 15 to 1. Her mother coached her not to be “prejudice” and to be “tolerant” and to never say the word “Jap”. Her parents were against discrimination and against the incarceration camps.¹⁴

¹¹ Natasha Varner, *Manzanar Children's Village: Japanese American Orphans in a WWII Concentration Camp*.

¹² Erica Harth. *Children of Manzanar* - JSTOR. The Massachusetts Review, 1993, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25090449>.

¹³ Erica Harth, *Children of Manzanar*.

¹⁴ Erica Harth, *Children of Manzanar*.



(9:41)Rosie: This next photograph found on Densho is of thirteen incarcerated at Manzanar Children's Village. It appears that the children were outside playing when stopped to pose for a photograph that would be added to a collection for the War Relocation Authority.

Photograph inscription: "Left to right: Sunny, Haracy (?), Tatsue, Shizuko, Kazuye, Susumi, Yetsuko (Yetsudo?), Tadashi, Dickie, Hideko, Kindo (?)." ¹⁵

(10:13)Ashley: For some of the orphans who were placed in the Children's Village at Manzanar, they were lucky enough to be reunited with their families while still in camp. While this is something that one might think is exciting and a joyous reunion; Kenji Suematsu recalls it being different and strange because of their time away and even stated that it was hard because they were "broken" from the separation. ¹⁶

¹⁵ DDR-CSUJAD-29-354 - [Group Photograph of Children at Manzanar Children's Village]: Densho Digital Repository." *Densho*, <https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-csujad-29-354/>.

¹⁶ Natasha Varner, *Manzanar Children's Village: Japanese American Orphans in a WWII Concentration Camp*.

(10:36)Rosie: While these orphans were incarcerated with the rest of the Japanese Americans, they were kept separate from the other incarcerated and only really saw them when they were at the schools. Throughout their time of incarceration, Lillian and Harry Matsumoto would remain the head caretakers of the orphans.

(10:53)Ashley: In an article written by Lisa Nobe titled *The Children's Village at Manzanar: The World War II Eviction and Detention of Japanese American Orphans*, Nobe quotes this statement made by Lillian Matsumoto, the Assistant Superintendent of the Children's Village "The whole experience of the internship was something no one else had experienced. It was ours alone. Those of us who lived that phase of our life at the Children 's Village also had a very, very unique experience in that we were part of the whole evacuation, but also we were with the Children 's Village, and that was something different. No one else had that."¹⁷

(11:30)Rosie: For many of the children that were sent to the Children's Village, they were used to communal life due to the fact that they had already been living in orphanages prior to the mass evacuation of Japanese Americans. They had a schedule that they stuck to much like the one at Shonien Children's Home in Los Angeles. They would start their day with breakfast and a Christian chapel service and then would go to school from there. After school, boys and girls studied and did homework, took classes in arts and crafts, and participated in organized recreation. Dinner was served at 5:00 pm. Children and staff would eat together in the Children's Village dining hall. The younger children went to bed at 7:30 pm, and the rest of Children's Village had a curfew of 9:00 pm.¹⁸

(12:18)Ashley: When their time of incarceration came to an end in September 1945, leaving the Children's Village would end up being more traumatic for these orphans. For many of these children, they were leaving the only home that they had ever known.¹⁹

(12:32)Rosie: For some of these orphans, they had come to the Children's Village with no appointed guardian to claim them when the time came for them to leave Manzanar. Due to important records being lost during the process of evacuation and incarceration they had no way of finding any guardians that the children may have had.²⁰

¹⁷ Lisa Nobe, *The Children's Village at Manzanar: The World War II Eviction and Detention of Japanese American Orphans*.

¹⁸ Catherine Irwin, *Manzanar Children's Village*.

¹⁹ Catherine Irwin, *Manzanar Children's Village*.

²⁰ Catherine Irwin, *Manzanar Children's Village*.

(12:50)Ashley: Due to the loss of these records, camp authorities had to go through the process of finding parents or any living relatives for the children to be released to and would also have to determine if the children were legal residents of the United States.²¹

(13:05)Rosie: Children who were wards of the state would have to wait until there was a foster home for them, an adoptive family, a wage home, or another form of placement in order for them to leave the Children's Village.²²

(13:16)[Fade-in OtterPod theme music]

(13:16)Ashley: Today, Manzanar is a Historical Site that the national parks system have been working hard to restore, on top of having a large museum where you can learn more about the Children's Village and Manzanar as a whole. You can walk through the old barracks that have been restored already and you can see the Children's Village and volunteer to help restore such an important part of history that must not be forgotten.

(13:40)Rosie: Thank you for listening to *The Orphans of Incarceration: Manzanar and the Children's Village*. If you are interested in learning more you can visit the website for Manzanar's Historic Site, as well as finding interviews and photographs on the Densho website.

(13:55) Ashley:[OtterPod credits] "Executive producers of the OtterPod are Dr. Sara Salazar Hughes and Dr. Chrissy Lau. Theme music by Eric Mabrey [May-bree]. Hosted by Ashley Hinds and Rosie Ponce. Audio editing and mixing by Ashley Hinds. Script Written by Ashley Hinds and Rosie Ponce. We would like to add a special thanks to the Densho organization and to Cal State, Fullerton and their oral history project for the interview and information found to help make this podcast."

²¹ Catherine Irwin, *Manzanar Children's Village*.

²² Catherine Irwin, *Manzanar Children's Village*.

Bibliography

- Irwin, C. (2020, July 14). *Manzanar children's village*. Manzanar Children's Village | Densho Encyclopedia.
https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Manzanar_Children%27s_Village/
- Nobe L. N. The children's village at Manzanar: The World War II eviction and detention of Japanese.. *Journal of the West*. 1999;38(2):65-71.
<https://search-ebscohost-com.csUMB.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ets&AN=2053464&site=ehost-live>
- Varner, N. (2021, December 20). *Manzanar Children's village: Japanese American orphans in a WWII concentration camp - densho: Japanese American incarceration and Japanese internment*. Densho.
<https://densho.org/catalyst/manzanar-childrens-village-japanese-american-orphans-in-a-wwii-concentration-camp/>
- Cardenas, C., & Miya Ito, M. (1993, March 13). *DDR-CSUJAD-30-6 - an oral history with Mary Miya: Densho Digital Repository*. Densho.
<https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-csujad-30-6/>
- California State University, Fullerton: Center for Oral and Public History. (n.d.). *DDR-CSUJAD-29-354 - [group photograph of children at Manzanar Children's village]: Densho Digital Repository*. Densho.
<https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-csujad-29-354/>
- Harth, Erica. "Children of Manzanar." *The Massachusetts Review* 34, no. 3 (1993): 367–91. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25090449>.

