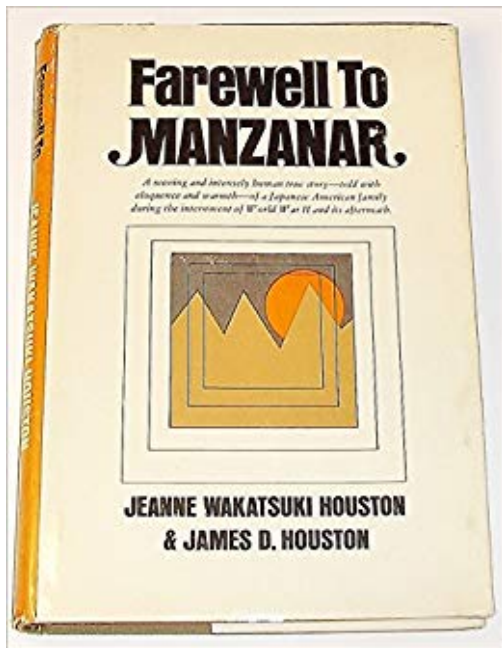


Farewell to Manzanar;: A true story of Japanese American experience during and after the World War II internment *by* Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston



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Jeanne Wakatsuki was seven years old in 1942 when her family was uprooted from their home and sent to live at Manzanar internment camp--with 10,000 other Japanese Americans. Along with searchlight towers and armed guards, Manzanar ludicrously featured cheerleaders, Boy Scouts, sock hops, baton twirling lessons and a dance band called the Jive Bombers who would play any popular song except the nation's #1 hit: "Don't Fence Me In." *Farewell to Manzanar* is the true story of one spirited Japanese-American family's attempt to survive the indignities of forced detention . . . and of a native-born American child who discovered what it was like to grow up behind barbed wire in the United States. *From the Paperback edition.*



Reviews of the **Farewell to Manzanar; A true story of Japanese American experience during and after the World War II internment** by **Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston**

Granigrinn

The WWII Japanese Internment camps represent a sad, embarrassing chapter in American history, which is probably why I never read about it during my time in school. Over 110,000 Japanese people were forcibly sent to 1 of 10 camps throughout the West. The majority of the internees were actually U.S. citizens, some 2nd or 3rd generation. The author was only 7 when her family was bused from Los Angeles to Manzanar in a remote corner of the Eastern Sierra between Mt. Whitney and Death Valley. The camp wasn't even completed yet when the first internees arrived. Families were assigned half of a flimsy barracks building with no walls for privacy. They ate communal meals and used communal toilets.

The climate was hostile, with heavy winds howling down off of the mountains kicking up dust constantly. The cold winter weather penetrated the thin tar-papered walls of the barracks buildings. In spite of the remote, hostile environment, the inhabitants worked to make their temporary home more comfortable, by decorating and building partitions. They cultivated vegetable gardens and harvested fruit from the orchards. Kids went to school; babies were conceived and born at the camp. In short, life went on. However, the camp life led to an inevitable deterioration in the family structure. Meals were communal rather than family events, and parents had no way of providing for their families in the traditional method. Jeanne's father had a very difficult time in camp, and deteriorated into alcoholism. As she wrote in the book though her life started in camp, her father's life ended there. He never recovered his fishing business or his sense of self worth.

The book provides an insightful glimpse into the daily life in the camps as well as the emotional and economic toll extracted from the inhabitants. They lost their businesses, their homes, their way of life and their dignity. In a sad commentary on the personal havoc wreaked by the camps, the author noted that the last to leave were the elderly people; they had nothing to return to, and no energy or confidence to go back into their old communities and rebuild so they hung onto camp life until forced to leave.

I had the opportunity to visit the desolate, remote Manzanar camp in 2012. Only a couple of barracks are left, but there is an excellent visitor center that faithfully recreates what it must have been to live there. You can drive around the roads and see how large the camp was. The magnificent mountain range looms large on the horizon, with tantalizing beauty and freedom, which was denied to those inside the barbed wire fences.

Farewell to Manzanar is a beautifully written important memoir since there is so little written about that time. Pay no attention to the number of 1 and 2-star reviews. It appears that most of those are written by school age children who were forced to read the book and do a review, and probably didn't appreciate the cultural significance of the internment camps.

Binar

In the 1960s, when I was young, in California, no one Japanese would talk about this. We weren't taught about it. The one time I asked a close co-worker whether she knew about it, not realizing how rude that I was being, she declined to do more than to say the topic was a source of shame and embarrassment to her. I later learned that it was to many who were forced into "internment camps," really prisons. This excellent memoir goes far to share the complexities of having had to grow up under such circumstances and then figure out its impact on the author and her family. Gripping, a page-turner, and disturbing in its clear evidence of governmental abrogation of the civil and human rights of its citizens and their families. A must-read.

Legionstatic

A personal account of how devastating it was for Japanese-Americans to be rounded up and interned during WWII. Previously I had only a vague notion of the facts. Reading this book was like living the fear, shame, and deprivation right along with the Wakatsuki family. After Pearl Harbor, when a new Federal policy labeled Japanese-Americans as undesirables and exiled them to remote desert camps, the plucky Wakatsukis, and over a hundred thousand more like them, struggled daily to preserve their family life and their self-respect despite degrading conditions and helpless dependence on handouts. As the war drew to a close the camps were shut down, but their effects on the interned Japanese-Americans were lifelong and reached into the next generation. This small but powerful book is a page-turner.

Wymefw

I read this book with my three boys (ages 13 and a pair of 12 year old twins) as an adjunct to *Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank. I read *Diary of a Young Girl* as a pre-read for the twins' 7th grade literature assignments coming up this school year. The book was dreaded by the boys but ended up being "not so bad." As an additional perspective on WWII, following the recommendation of the twins' academic counselor, we read this book, which was very good and a bit more relevant to half-Chinese kids growing up in California.

Farewell to Manzanar is a memoir, written by a woman who was 7 when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. She is a Nissei, which is a first-generation Japanese; her father left Japan as a young man to try his luck in the U.S. The story starts with her memories of December 7, 1941, and moves through the multiple relocations and forced evacuations and mysterious arrest and imprisonment of her father. She describes Camp Manzanar, and reflects poignantly about her father's emotional challenges and her own struggle with racial and cultural duality.

This is a lovely, low-commitment read which lends touching insight not only into the terrible way Japanese-American civilians were treated by the American government, but also, more broadly, the challenges I believe all Asian cultures face - the dilemma of assimilation v. individual rights. Racial bias exists in the oddest places and often, when encountered, is either innocuous or ridiculous enough to warrant disbelief, dismissal. However, the stain of personal shame is unavoidable in all of these situations, and *Farewell to Manzanar* eloquently depicts this exquisite conundrum.

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