



Lesson One Mits Inaba Oral History

Mitsuru “Mits” Inaba was a young boy when his father was arrested and his family was forced to evacuate to the Manzanar Relocation Center. They were later moved to an Immigration and Naturalization Services camp in Crystal City, Texas where they lived until 1946 when they returned to their family farm in Riverside.

Mits Inaba (MA) is being interviewed by Allison Campbell (AC) of the [Riverside Metropolitan Museum](#)

MI: I don't recall when we left the farm. I can recall we left L.A. and we got on the train and they took us up to Independence, California. From there they took us by Greyhound bus to Manzanar. I can remember the ride from Independence to Manzanar because our bus had a flat tire on the way. (chuckles) Then we had to transfer buses to get us up into camp, but by that time it was dark, I can remember that part. The next morning we got up and I got lost. (chuckles)

AC: Do you remember your first impressions of Manzanar?

MI: It was really rank. I mean, it was all tarpapered barracks. The floor had quarter inch gaps in it, in the planking. What we slept on the first night I think it was straw mattresses, if I'm not mistaken. So we just threw whatever that was that we slept on on the floor. And it was cold, that I can remember. But then the next day my aunts and myself we were going down to the entrance, or the administrative offices, and I got lost. Being only the first morning there, I can remember being panicky. Where in the heck are they? But I finally got to them, I think down at Block 1 where everybody was still coming in by the busload. It was a miserable place. The wind blew. And most people did something to their barracks to make it more hospitable, but if you didn't have some nail to pound nails and whatnot, you lived with what you could live with, which was a bare barrack with a door that didn't close very good. When the wind blew, the whole place was nothing but a dustbowl, and you lived within this dust storm all the time. That's all I can remember, being a young kid. I had a ball because there was a whole bunch of friends there I made within the block, and we played together.

AC: What did you and your friends do for fun? How did you keep yourselves busy and out of trouble?

MI: We used to play kick the can. After we got settled in the camp, then the three or four seasons of marbles, yo-yos, whatever other – tops we used to have. We used to play with those toys like that, keep us occupied after school and whatnot.

AC: Was it a big adjustment? It seems to me – I don't know, I just imagine it must have been difficult for your family. You lived on this farm, you didn't have neighbors that were real close, all of a sudden you're in camp where there's people all around you. Was privacy something that was difficult to get used to? Or lack of privacy, I guess?

MI: I guess it was pretty bad for the women folks who had a common community shower. I think at first it was all open with nothing but spigots coming out of the wall, and then they finally put petitions in there for the women folks. But the men folks it was just one room where the water was just coming. You took a shower and did everything with everybody else. But, yeah, it was a communal shower and everything else. There was no such thing as privacy at first. I think they fixed that as time went by.

AC: Do you remember the food in the mess hall, what that was like?

MI: Oh yeah. That was a game we used to play. We'd ask around what they're going to serve at the different blocks, and being kids we'd try to sneak in. They're going to have fried chicken at this one place and they're going to have liver at another place, we'd go to the fried chicken place. We'd get about six or seven kids and be running around within about a four block area. We'd see where the best food was and we'd try to sneak into that mess hall. We tried to be enterprising as to what we wanted to eat.

AC: How long were you at Manzanar before you and your mother and siblings were moved to Crystal City?

MI: I think if you look at some of the records there, our time at camp I think it was about fifteen months. Then we spent about four years at Crystal City. Finally when we got out it was sometime in January of '46. It was a good time to get out and to get the crops in before the spring months came up. That was hell, I'll tell ya, starting out from almost zero. But we made it. I don't know what kind of psychological scars it made on anybody. I don't think that redress money covers everything that we'd like to see covered. The only ones that got it were the survivors of the whole internment. I don't have too many bitter feelings to what had happened. We did the best we could with what we had. But it was an internment camp. (chuckles) I'm sure my older sisters, it had some effect on their attitude growing up.

I look back on the time we spent in camp was somewhat a waste of time. In other words, we languished what, about four and a half years doing nothing, just barely surviving more than anything else, just having no hope, didn't know when we were going to get out. I kind of hoped there was no such thing as war, but it has happened. As I look at it, my life is coming to an end, just like anybody else's.