

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston (1934-) *Beyond Manzanar*

Manzanar, which means “apple orchard” in Spanish, was the name of a large internment camp which the U.S. government built for Japanese and Japanese Americans in World War II. It was in eastern California, in the Owens Valley, on the eastern side of the Sierras. Along with her mother, brothers, and sisters, Jeanne Wakatsuki was taken there in 1942, from their home in Long Beach. Her father, a commercial fisherman, had been arrested earlier and sent to a camp in North Dakota, having been falsely accused of communicating with Japanese submarines off the California coast. They were part of the 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry moved from homes on the West Coast by the War Relocation Authority.

In 1973, assisted by her husband, the writer James Houston, she published a powerful memoir of the experience, *Farewell to Manzanar*. It tells of the pain and humiliation of the internment, the consequences to her family, her father’s shattered pride and heavy drinking, the makeshift arrangements people made, and the difficulties the family had in starting over again after the war. It also tells of ballet classes, baton twirling, picnics, and other more normal childhood activities. A movie based on the book has been broadcast on television.

This autobiographical essay, which was written in 1978, is both a sequel to the book and an independent exploration of the ambivalences in being an American woman of Japanese descent. On one side is the example of her mother, who, though independent enough to have married for love, fully accepted Japanese ideals of wifely and motherly behavior. On the other side are the ideals of personal fulfillment, not through sacrifice and cooperation, but through self-assertion and competition. The conflict is further complicated because the two sides are internalized and felt in different ways at different ages and in different moods. Friends, brothers, sisters, and children also give conflicting advice and evoke different impulses.

The essay is reprinted from *Beyond Manzanar: Views of Asian-American Womanhood* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1985), pp. 7-25. More information about Houston can be found both in *Farewell to Manzanar* and in the essay she wrote for the *Gale Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, vol. 16.

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