

HEART ♥ MOUNTAIN

— THE ESTELLE ISHIGO STORY —

BY THOMAS IVIE, WYOMING STATE LIBRARY

Born Estelle Peck in 1899 to artist parents in Northern California, Estelle moved to Southern California at the age of 12. A teacher saw that she had an interest in art and recommended she attend the Otis Art Academy.

While there, she met her husband, Arthur Ishigo, who was an aspiring actor. They married in 1929. However, because of anti-miscegenation laws that didn't allow interracial couples to wed in the United States, they had to cross over the border into Mexico.

For more information and to see more images, visit newspapers.wyo.gov/heart-mountain/estelle-ishigo

World War II brought with it the removal of Japanese immigrants and Japanese-Americans from the West Coast. While Estelle

was caucasian, her husband was a Japanese-American. They had both lost their jobs because of their last name. He was ordered to report to the county fairgrounds in Pomona, California. Estelle didn't have to go with her husband because she was not of Japanese descent. However, they had been married thirteen years and couldn't imagine being apart. The decision was an easy one and she went with Arthur, first to the fairgrounds and then to Heart Mountain in Wyoming.

While at Heart Mountain, Estelle Ishigo reported on the daily life at the Heart Mountain Internment Camp through her artwork. She made numerous pencil drawings and later turned many of those into paintings.

Arthur and Estelle stayed at the camp until it closed so that Estelle could record the last days there. When they left, they each received \$25 and train tickets to go back to California. Life was not easy once they got back to California. They had nothing and lived in a series of trailer parks for many years. Arthur died in 1957. In 1972 Estelle published a book of her drawings, *Lone Heart Mountain*.

Later, she reconnected with friends from Heart Mountain who found her in an apartment where she was living in poverty and had lost both of her legs to gangrene. In 1984, those friends helped her republish her book and took care of her. A documentary of Estelle's life, titled *Days of Waiting*, was made by filmmaker Steven Okazaki in 1990 and won an Academy Award for Best Documentary Short. Unfortunately, Estelle passed away before she was able to see the film.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT ✂
Estelle and Arthur Ishigo, circa 1928; "Kite:" Rescuing a kite from a barbed-wire fence; "Wood:" Scavenging wood for tables and chairs

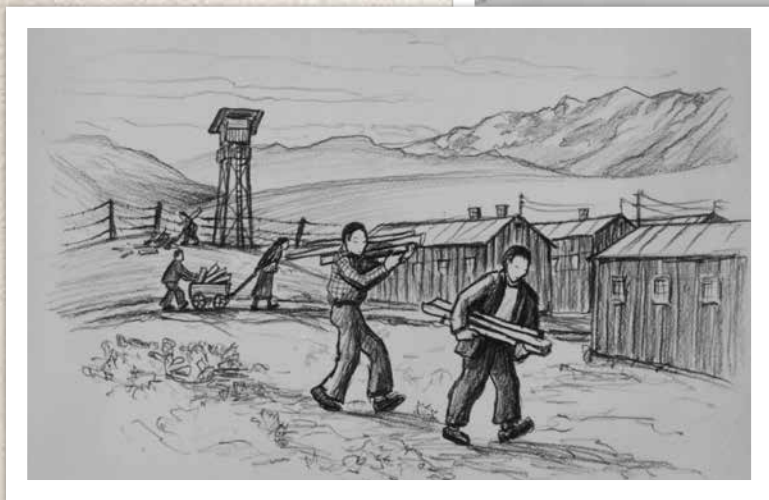


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