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Title: Ben Chikaraishi Interview
Narrator: Ben Chikaraishi
Interviewer: Anna Takada
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<Begin Segment 10>

AT: 00:58:51 And uh, what year did you finish your schooling?

BC: 00:58:55 My, I finished, I in uh May of 1944. And then I took my state board in July and then I got my license and after I got my license, I worked at Capital that then I opened my office, my office, and I made enough money saved up money so was able to open my office in 1945, right on Clark and Division.

AT: 00:59:39 What was the address there? Do you have

BC: 00:59:41 1200 North Clark Street. At that time, I guess because settlements of Japanese were in that Ellis and Oakenwald area from about 19, 1941, I mean 1942, and up to '45 and '45, '4 or '5 And then it was a small group that lived on the South Side where I was before in the 1600 block and then Clark and Division. But by that time there were a lot of people leaving Camp. It was towards the end of the war and then towards, uh in 1945. So they were a lot of them coming to Chicago. And at Clark and Division was probably the biggest settlement of Japanese people because from all the way from Chicago Avenue to North Avenue, East, North and South and East and West and it was about from Dearborn Street until uh to Wells Street. So it was a long area. And by that time I opened my office, my office, 1945 and I stayed til 1960. And the reason I had to move was because that whole area from Chicago to, uh, I mean, I'm sorry from Division Street, I mean the Clark and Division, yeah, Division street to North Avenue was to be demolished and, and, and urban renewal was going to set up, build a lot of high rises. And as you know that whole area is full of high rises with about 20. And, and the, and the, at the time from 1945 I was, but 1960, 1965 all the way through Clark Street and and on both sides of the street. Oh, probably every, every other, every other store or apartment was run by Japanese people. So there was quite a, quite a settlement there. And it was talking about a

Japanese, a Japanese, uh uh area probably that was the biggest, probably.

AT: 01:02:19

Do you remember any of the names of businesses?

BC: 01:02:19

Oh, there were a lot of stores. There was Son grocery stores and Toguri's and all those stores. And Hidaka's clear, clear, cleanings. And, and we had...I was upstairs, right on Clark and Division. We have myself. We had Jiro Yamaguchi was an attorney and here we had Dr. Hira, the dentist. And then there was a Tom Hira and there was--even JACL had, had a small office at that time for just a few times, few years. But, there were all kinds of restaurants. There was, um, it was a movie house right across the street from my office. There were grocer, drugstores and bowling alleys and, and so it was quite a community as far as community's concerned. And when, when that, when they started to demolish that area, all the buildings, every building was demolished. So people started to move from Clark and Division, those people that, well, in other words, those people on the east side of Clark Street were alright because they were, that they were in, and the, and on the west side of, of, uh, LaSalle Street was, were not going to be demolished. Yes. That's just the area between the LaSalle Street and Clark Street, and so those people had to move. And so those people most of them moved a little further north in that area that they call Oakdale to, to, uh, about the other side of Wrigley Field. And then the east and west from Southport all the way to Broadway. It was a diverse area. Geographically, it was a big area, not like Clark and Division, Clark and Division. But there were, oh, there were all kinds of grocery stores. You have--Kaneikos were there, they had a lot of rooming houses. Chiya Tomiya's father had buildings there. And, so there, it was a bustling area, really.

AT: 01:04:38

And I'm noticing you're remembering a lot of businesses by, by name. And the family's too.

BC: 01:04:46

Oh yeah. I was there long enough and we used to, we used to see a lot of the same people. So we knew most of the people that were there, I wouldn't say more but quite a few. Yeah Kei Kawahara had that beauty shop right across the street from my office and the Mark Twain Hotel. In fact, Mark Twain is probably the only 20, hmm Mark Twain is probably one of the only buildings that are still remaining from that time 'cuz all the other buildings have been demolished. New buildings have come up and new stores come up. And so that's about the only place.

AT: 01:05:31 And where were you getting most of your patients from? Is it just the area?

BC: 01:05:35 As far as myself is concerned, probably I was probably the luckiest person alive. Everything I did turned out well and uh and I was probably the earliest of the optometry, Japanese optometrists and there was about the same time that I started, ah the South Side, uh, uh, Randolph's Kai, Dr. Sakata, opened their office on South Side and I was, Clark and Division was on North Side and most of the people that came from different camps were mostly from Rohwer and Jerome in, in, in, in, uh, in the camp that was Rohwer. I was working an optometrist there. So when I was in Clark and Division, they all came to me and I was the only, then the Japanese Issei's came after their children were in Chicago, they brought their family and they couldn't speak any English, so they already, they were coming to me. So, so I was, from very beginning, I was very fortunate to, very, very busy, busy.

AT: 01:07:08 And uh,

BC: 01:07:08 See that, that area that at that Clark and Division. That's where the Chicago Resettlers, which is now the, ah, JASC used to have their first building, 1160 North Clark Street. And their primary function at that time was to take care of people that wanted to find housing jobs. And so they were very helpful for a lot of people that are looking for jobs in the city.

AT: 01:07:42 Did you ever use their services?

BC: 01:07:45 Pardon?

AT: 01:07:45 Did you ever use their services?

BC: 01:07:47 No. No, I never did have to, use. Uhuh.

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