

Densho Digital Repository  
Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and  
Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS)  
Oral History Project Collection  
Title: Ben Chikaraishi Interview  
Narrator: Ben Chikaraishi  
Interviewer: Anna Takada  
Location:  
Date: October 31, 2017  
Densho ID: ddr-chi-1-11-5

<Begin Segment 5>

AT: 00:24:15 And so you, you went back to Stockton with your family and then from UC Berkeley?

BC: 00:24:23 No, no, I didn't go back to Stockton at all. In fact, my brother was the only one because he had a small orchard and somebody have us taking care of the orchard. And so he went back to the orchard. My father and my two si- si- sisters stayed in Rohwer until 1945. And then they came to Chicago where I, I, I, I left camp. In fact, I went to Rohwer and it was 19 of August of 1942 and, and then I stayed there and as far as myself was concerned- like most of the people in any of the concentration camps, they, they went to work and I was lucky enough that I was able to work, to work in the hospital. And at that time we had, Rohwer, we had a little over 8,000 inmates there. And, and there was just one optometrist and since only I had three three- three more months of graduation they allowed me to work with the, with the optometrist. And so I was able to receive the salary, monthly salary of, of a \$16 a month and and the wage, wages that people worked, I mean, for- were, were for the people that were the lowest bracket, which where the wood cutters, the kitchen help, the kitchen people and, and such. They only got 16 dollar, 16 dollars a month. She got 16 dollars and then those people in the, the chefs and the truck drivers and the people that worked in these stores and such, they were, they were getting 16 dollar, 16 da- 16 dollars a month. And, and, no 12 dollars. And we were the professionals. We got the highest scale of \$60 a month. So I, I worked there with the optometrist to take care of 16,000 people that many of them wanted a, a need, need lenses. So, so we were very busy at that time. And then after- and in- and I, I thought that perhaps I should finish my education and so I started to make negotiations for a release to go. So I, I had- I wrote to school, the school accepted me, but then I wouldn't get my clearance from the WRA, the War Relocation Authority, they wouldn't

give you clearance. And because- I was wondering why because I, I would get it all my- other people that had asked for clearance to go to school, they got within three weeks to a month. Mine took about three months. And finally I found out that, well, this was after I went to Chicago that one of my friends said they were going to go to deep archives that that Washington, DC to get their records. So that, that for 10 dollars they can get your record- a copy of your record. So I gave them 10 dollars. Then I found out why I was retained so long because, because of my father was put in the concentration. And and my father was a very humble man. He- he never, never, never was associated with any organization-Japanese organization in the city, not a teacher or anything, was a hotel manager. And, and most of the years that he was there, he had to take care of mother, her husband, wi- wife, because she had high blood pressure and she was bedridden for the last seven years. And- and and I found out that the reason I was retained and all the people, most of us, some of us in the city where we're over in Kendo, Kendo is fencing, Japanese fencing. And that's more like in Japan, they call it a sport. Well, what happened is that, that, the organ- the kendo organization came around to various houses that, that kendos- like Kendo teach- students were. And they, they asked for donations for- to make a book. It wasn't really not a big book--sort of booklet--and in the booklets, the last page there was a picture of Toyama Mitsuru. He was- he was- the head of what they call Dra- Black Dragon Society in Japan. And he was- designated one of the six enemies of the United States. So every name, a person name in that book was all, all the fathers were put into concentration camps right away.

AT: 00:29:53 And as far as you and your, your siblings, were you all at Rohwer together?

BC: 00:30:00 Yes, we were all evacuated to- we went to- in April, April 16th, we were told to get your belongings- which was- all you can carry in, in two ha- two hands on your suitcase. As far myself- myself is concerned- I wore two stockings, two pants, two shirts, two of everything, and to carry, to carry two su- suitcases and we- went two blocks where the trucks were waiting for us and loaded all our belongings that we brought in- were put into a bus and brought into the- county fairgrounds. And that county fairgrounds was, was our our home for- from, from April to- to August. And we were put into a ho-horse stall, and all these, all these assembly centers were setup, well, the order came in April that the Japanese are going to be evacuated, and we were put into, I mean, the order came in and what was it? February 9066. And then we were sent to these camps and in, in April. So

they only had two weeks, two months to clean the stalls and these were, we were all hall stalls, ah horse stalls, and what they did was just cans, cans of water paint, and they put straw on the floor and they hardly cleaned the place. So the moment you went into one of these stalls it was just smell of horses that when you and they had four beds, cots, cots, side by side, that was our home for-- from May, April to August.

**<End Segment 5> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**