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Title: Ben Chikaraishi Interview  
Narrator: Ben Chikaraishi  
Interviewer: Anna Takada  
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**<Begin Segment 7>**

- AT: 00:35:46 So I think now is it a good time to start talking about, um, what happened after you left camp?
- BC: 00:35:55 After I left camp?
- AT: 00:35:58 Mhm.
- BC: 00:35:58 Well I, I finally got my clearance to go to school and at that time, the only people that were able to obtain clearance were people that were accepted at universities or working in the fields for, for temporary jobs. And, so it was July the 3rd. I took my suitcase and walked through the main, main highway, which was about a half mile away. And I waited for the bus. The bus came. I went on the bus and then as the first time that are aware of the prejudice that the Blacks had, the in there where they lived in the South there because I, I paid by my fair and then I didn't know what to do. I looked up and all the Black people were back in the back. All the white people in the front. And I said to myself, gee, what am I supposed to do? But then I thought that gee, we were, we were, we were underprivileged and we had discrimination just like the Blacks and all that stuff. So I said, I sit in the back. So I went to the back and I sat down in it and the drivers just, she just sits, he just stopped the bus and he says, Hey, you said you can't stay back, sit in the front. So I didn't know what to do. I mean, let me go to the window front. So fine. I sat right in the middle. That was the first time I had that experience like that. Then I find out from the first time that the Blacks people discrimination so, so great that they couldn't even get in the bus or drink from water fountains or anything though.
- AT: 00:37:56 And where did that, where was that bus going?

BC:

00:37:58

Oh, my bus? That bus went through to Rohwer, which was a city of about 6,000 near...about 20 miles from our Rohwer concentration camps. And um, I, I, I boarded the train there and I went to, St, St Louis where I had a friend and I stayed overnight in St Louis. Then I went to train that took me to Chicago and landed up in Dearborn Station, which is not there now, but it was one of the main stations in Chicago. And then when I got out I was really, all I could do was just stare and wait because here I was from a small city and there were all these high buildings in the hustle and the bustle and the street cars going back and forth. And, after awhile I, well we both thought well, it's almost evening. So I, I, uh, my friend went who came with, came to meet me at the station, took me to the YMCA Hotel, which is on the 400 South and Wabash. I spent my first night in Chicago and, and the next morning, first thing in the morning I went to the War Relocation Authority office because I was told to do that. And then I registered there and told them I'm in Chicago. And then while I was there I asked them, where do you think I could find some accommodations? So, so the idea of the war Relocation Authority was to desegregate the Japanese or assimilate them as much as they can, so they told me to go this area, this area that way. And my friend who was aware of the situation, he says, he says, no, you don't even think about going to a place because they're too expensive and you can't afford and probably won't be even be accepted in that area. So. So he asked me, where do you think he want us to look for a house or not a house, but a room in a house. And at that time I guess the uh, the first settlement in Chicago was at around 42nd, I'm sorry, Ellis and Oakenwald from 42nd street to about 46th or 7th street. And there they had all the hotels, hotels, they had apartments and barber shops and restaurants and everything. And he asked me if I go over there because you could be sure to find some place to stay. But so I asked him where he lives. He said he lives on the 1600 block. And so I said, well maybe I'll go where you are, near where you are. So we went, and this is the area from 6000 South, one block South of University of Chicago. And there were, well it was just, it's just an area where just homes, there are no homes, I mean no stores or no restaurants or anything but just living apartments. And so we went up to three streets, streets about Kimbark and Woodlawn and, well just...So, I went up and down the street and, and every apartment building that had a sign that said, said sleeping room...I knocked on the door and then they looked at you and he says, well, I'm sorry, but I just rented that. And then this kept going on for about four or five places. And then, and then the last place I went there, I ask, gee he told me that he told me that same thing. That it was resented, it was just rented. Well, I told them, I got enough ner, nerve by that time

and said, "Why don't you just take the sign off?" And he says, "Well, I was just going to, but I just didn't." But those are the situations that, in fact some of them were not even that kind, they'd open the door, looked at your face, and slammed it...Finally I was able to find a sleeping room, which was a small room, and a little kitchenette in the corner, it was a little gas burner and the only reason I found that the room there, was because there was a Japanese couple of living there and they appreciated the fact that the Japanese people were very, very quiet, they paid the rent and then they didn't complain about anything. And so that was my first, ah room that had. Then that was the biggest, biggest surprise was that first night that I slept there because it was 4th of July, it was hot. It was in the 90s. So naturally, you just take your--sleep bare on the top part and then I went to sleep. And then what, 10 minutes later, I felt stinging sensations all over my chest. And then I have wonder what happened, so I put the light on, I found bug, little bugs that were crawling on my chest and then I took them and I pressed some of them and find blood, my blood, my good blood all over there. And that's my first encounter with bedbugs and it was, it was really something. And so I asked people, gee what do you do? He says well you can use chemicals, you can use sulfur to kill them, but it doesn't do any good if the building is infested then it's no use because that it would be the short time, before they come back again. So the only way way to leave your lights on and tried to sleep with the lights on. And that was my first night. And, and then I found out about, first time about bedbugs. And I've go into the city of Chicago the last couple of years, they were saying there were several areas that the troubles, bedbugs, anything.

AT: 00:45:00 And remind me where that building was?

BC: 00:45:03 Pardon?

AT: 00:45:03 Remind me where that building was?

BC: 00:45:05 Yes, that was right on, right on 67, 67, 6017 Woodlawn. And that was, there was a small Japanese community there. Not a community, but a few people living there and like I said, there were no stores, no grocery stores, no restaurants or anything just apartment. And there was a, I guess a lower-middle class area and um, and 66th street was very shopping center. It was a good shopping center, they have stores and restaurants, they had movies and such.

AT: 00:45:49 And then how were you getting around?

BC: 00:45:53 The only way we got around was--nobody had cars or anything like that. So they had street cars and they had the L, L, L. And so, uh, and also where I wasn't living from there, you can go a balanced days on the, what they call the Illinois Central Railroad. Those are the three main one. So transportation in itself was good. Yeah.

AT: 00:46:20 And the WRA office, you said you were instructed to?

BC: 00:46:26 Registered there, yes.

AT: 00:46:28 And where was that office?

BC: 00:46:29 That was in the city there, the city of Chicago. I forgot where it was but right in the city, yeah.

AT: 00:46:36 So it was like I'm in a city officer or something?

BC: 00:46:40 Yes, uhuh.

AT: 00:46:42 And did you only visit that office that one time?

BC: 00:46:51 I was able to call in after, so overnight when I moved a couple of times I, I called and that was dealt with all I did.

AT: 00:47:05 What was the reason for you calling?

BC: 00:47:07 Well, I guess all these people like us who had, who had fathers in concentration camps probably was a matter of security and they thought that perhaps it was just a secur, security situation and once they realized that we were going to school and everything and wherever you do register and know where you were and it was, it was okay. Yeah.

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