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Title: Fumino Tsuchiya-Knox Interview
Narrator: Fumino Tsuchiya-Knox
Interviewer: Anna Takada
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- AT: 15:59 And can you tell me about kind of, I guess, you know, you growing up in Boyle Heights, um, did uh, were you aware of your, your family's, experiences during the war and internment?
- FK: 16:19 I was, it was really interesting. Um, my mother was a lot more open about it. You know, my dad was very bitter about it and really kind of broken by the whole experience because of the fact that he couldn't get a good job afterwards. Um, but my mother, I think for her it was nice because she was with the community from Los Angeles that she had grown up with. So she had a lot of girlfriends that, you know, were also sent to Manzanar. Um, and, but one thing was really interesting before I started kindergarten, I remember she told me very specifically, she said, if they ever ask you where you were born, you should say, Manzanar War Relocation Center, Owens Valley, California. And a, it just always struck me. I'm sorry. Anyway, I think she just wanted to say, you know, there's nothing to be ashamed of. Sorry.
- AT: 17:46 No, no. You can let me know if you want me to stop filming.
- FK: 17:57 No it's okay, it's funny, I've never really cried about this before. But it was a powerful seeing the exhibit here.
- AT: 18:10 And is that something that, did you take her advice? Did you
- FK: 18:14 I did. I always, yeah. Um, yeah, that was kind of strange. Um, you know, I did talk with her about it and she said that, uh, all the Japanese had to go there. Um, you know, but somehow we were not there anymore and that, I just remember it was around the same time when, um, there was talk about how Russia was such an enemy of the United States. And I mean, I must've been older than kindergarten, but I was still very young and in grammar school. And I remember talking to her about

that because I said, I thought the Germans were our enemies in World War II. And she said, yes, but now the Russians are enemies. And the whole thing about the camp kind of struck me the same way that it was something that, you know, it was one way then and now it's different now. Um, so anyways, kind of interesting. Uh, when I got started school in Los Angeles, um, there was still a lot of prejudice, you know, um, I don't think I experienced it really badly, but I know some of the kids in the school, their parents had been in the military and all and um, they would be wearing like Army jackets or that type of thing, you know, or those jackets from Japan at that time that had all this embroidery on it and were very flashy that, you know, their fathers had gotten them when they were in the military there. Um, and then I remember my sixth grade teacher, so this would have been in about 1955 or so, um, were talking about the camps and you know, he was a wonderful teacher, we all loved him, but he said, well, you know, that the Japanese were sent there for their own good. That, um, the government was protecting them by sending them to the camps. And, you know, I just, uh, have always been struck by that, because I didn't think that was the case then, but I certainly wasn't going to say that to him.

- AT: 20:53 Um, were there other, um, were you around other Japanese Americans who have been incarcerated?
- FK: 21:03 Uh, yes, we were. And in fact, another boy, um, in my class was also born at Manzanar. And we were friends with his family and yeah, every one who was Japanese American that we knew had been in camp. Yeah.
- AT: 21:23 And in that class specifically were you, were there, other Japanese Americans?
- FK: 21:26 There were a few, um, but you know, Boyle Heights, uh, you know, it had been, um, a place where a lot of Japanese Americans lived before the war. But like I was saying, by the time we were there, it was mainly, um, Mexican American. So there were just maybe four or five of us in the class, but there were others, you know, it wasn't like I was the only one. And then it was interesting from Boyle Heights, which was not that great a neighborhood. Um, when I was starting junior high, my parents moved to Gardena, which is a suburb of Los Angeles. Um, I remember my mother asking the realtor if Japanese were allowed to buy homes in Gardena. And the man said, Oh yes, no, we don't like Negroes, but Japanese are welcome, very welcome here. And uh, that community in fact was heavily Japanese. The high school was about a third Japanese, um, kids

in the school. So it was, it was a very different experience from Boyle Heights, which was very poor. Um, and uh, mainly like gardeners and you know, that type of thing. And whereas Gardena was more a lower middle class suburb, everyone had homes and very neat.

- AT: 23:04 Umm. I'm still thinking about, um, what your sixth grade teacher said.
- FK: 23:12 Oh yeah.
- AT: 23:16 I know you said that you didn't, you know, say anything, but what was, what, what was, do you remember what was going on through your mind, when he said that?
- FK: 23:26 Well, I was thinking a little bit that, that I hadn't thought before what it would have been like if we had stayed and that, yeah. In fact, it might've been kind of dangerous, you know, so that was part of it. But the other part was that I knew it was wrong that they did that and that was what he wasn't acknowledging with what he said, you know, so it just, it was hurtful. It was very hurtful. Yeah.

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