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Title: Ellen Watanabe-Huxtable Interview
Narrator: Ellen Watanabe-Huxtable
Interviewer: Anna Takada
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- AT: 00:39:45 All of this information that you have about your family history and experiences, how did you get interested in learning about that? Or was the process like for learning all of this information?
- EH: 00:40:03 My parents would always share everything and they would tell me about about family history. I know that my on my father's side, my, my, my great grandfather and my, according to family lore, immigrated from Japan to Hawai'i because she went to Yokohama Harbor, to see his friend off on the boat and decided he was going to jump on the boat and go with them and so and so that's how my, my great grandfather ended up in Hawai'i. He did work at, I think, owning a pineapple plantation and my grandfather, his son was evidently not much of a pineapple plantation farmer and ended up not following the family trade or the family business and I think that they lost. My understanding is they lost the plantation because not management, but so that's part of the family lore that, you know, my father would tell me about the stories about the past and um my parents, things would come up conversationally because as an only child I was always very careful that whatever was said in front of me as a child, the line was, don't repeat it. You got it. And so by, by having that degree of trust, I could hear an awful lot of things from my parents talking about things. And it was like, well, here's what's really happening and here's what so and so's did or has done or did and they would talk freely in front of me. So I just sort of sat there and listened and ended up finding out all sorts of things because because they were very comfortable and their friends, we're very comfortable talking in front of me. So I just learned just by listening to people what, you know, what things are like
- AT: 00:41:54 That's um, from what I heard and learned from speaking with people. That seems pretty unusual. The, you know, hearing about these experiences.

EH: 00:42:05 My parents very much felt that this was something that was important and of course until things like this exhibit came, um, many people had no idea. Maybe people still have no idea as to what happened because there's, the tour guide was so apt to point out the camps were very carefully located there in places that people didn't know about. And so that there was lots and lots of just lack of knowledge about any of this happening. And my parents knew that and they felt that if people didn't speak up about about what did happen, that the memory would be lost in therefore the experience would be lost and it was too important for, it was too important that that not be lost.

AT: 00:42:52 And how do you feel about that?

EH: 00:42:54 Well, I think that it is very important because in this, especially with all of the, the still latent fear and uncertainty and people being so afraid of difference and you can't blame people for being afraid of difference if they've never been exposed to or taught things, but I think it's important that the whole experience be remembered because people need to realize that yes, it can happen. Yes, it did happen. So that we as a society are going to be able to to cut it short, to avoid it. To say people can say, well, that will never happen, and the nice nice enough, the positive is that people can no longer say, that will never happen in this country. We know about the Holocaust and were it not for the Holocaust, we would people would say, that's impossible. How can people be so inhumane that can never happen, well it did. And then people can say, well, that kind of a profiling in segregation of a certain group that would never happen in the United States and and because of this we can say yes it can, and it did. So I think that's the part that's very, very important and that's what my parents very much wanted to have that remembrance. Not that it was anything that was family oriented only, but that there was bigger than that. This is something that was much bigger than that and that that collective society memory is not lost.

AT: 00:44:39 Do you feel a responsibility or any kind of obligation as a Japanese American or or daughter of people who went through this experience to keep that alive?

EH: 00:44:55 I think that, I think that's important. When people asked me about it, certainly, I share what my parents told me. I share their experiences that I know of. I definitely share it with my son because he, he's felt a very close affinity to my parents because my mom was alive when he, until the time he was in kindergarten and she was very close to where she was, old and frail, so she spent a lot of time staying with this for extended

periods, so he got to be very close to her and he felt by assimilation close to my dad because my son was, always loved baseball. My dad, of course, played a, you know, semi pro baseball and so he always has felt that affinity for him. And so because of that, he's always wanted to know more about the, about the grandfather he never got to meet you. He wanted to know more about the background for my mom. So that, and so that makes it very easy to share with them some of the, uh, experiences. And also we have some items that my parents did save because they said, I know there's some people said we're going to get rid of everything that reminds us of any of that time. My parents did save some certain things from their period. Uh, we have a couple of pictures that were painted in the camp. One of them has to be my paternal, my paternal grandfather and he was one of the people that went to Manzanar to build Manzanar. Because he had carpentry skills and there's a picture that was painted and of what I know is my paternal grandfather because I've seen pictures of him, it was a hand painted picture, cartoonish nature, and he looks just like Mario, in the Mario games. He was really short, stumpy size, very short, very stumpy, a mustache. He had the little slouched hat, he had little carpenter's apron and is carrying a big mallet in this, in this picture. Looks like a Japanese Mario. So I have things like that that there are pieces that my parents handed down to me and that my son has seen and when he's asked, he's done some school projects on Manzanar. And so when asked about school projects, I have the things that I have from my parents. I've shown them to him. So he knows what we have. I have the notebook my mom had when she was taking dressmaking at Manzanar. You mentioned how what did she do. They had lots and lots of opportunities for people to learn hobbies and so people that knew how to do something with would show others how to do, what do they knew. And so my mom took up dressmaking, which was wonderful. She was never very good at it. Her best friend was superb at it, which is really good, but my mother was never good at it, but she had detailed notes from her dressmaking class that I have her notebook and that has ended her address Manzanar is for her, her block in her barracks and unit number that she had.

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