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Title: Ellen Watanabe-Huxtable Interview
Narrator: Ellen Watanabe-Huxtable
Interviewer: Anna Takada
Location: Chicago, Illinois
Date: November 11, 2017
Densho ID: ddr-chi-1-14-13

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- AT: 00:51:39 Are there ways that you, do you think that there were any kind of lasting impacts or or legacies from the experience of the incarceration that we're kind of passed down to you or that you experienced in your own life?
- EH: 00:52:04 I think that if it's something that had a profound effect on the identities of the Japanese American community. That the community always, even though they often have enclaves like Japantown in Los Angeles, that the, the, the overall philosophy, overall mindset of the Japanese community was was one of assimilation integration, not to give up the things that are that are Japanese, like the Obon ceremony and in, in LA. Not to give those things up but to but to be part of the American culture, which is why, for example, the Nisei Ambassadors were a Japanese group that was very engaged in this very USA activity. Most of the drum corps of the time were run by the VFW Halls. And so this, there was always this feeling I think, of, of wanting to be good US citizens. I think that that was, that was intensified by the experience in some cases. In some cases, no, there are people that after the war that my parents knew that said I'm going back to Japan, so that, but for some, for one part of the community, part of it was that, no, we are, we are Americans. We're going to prove our loyal to the 442nd of course. We are Americans, we're going to prove our loyalty, we're going to be American. And I think that was something that was always there. There's also the recognition that there is a, there was at the time, certainly a racial bias. The people that were successful as adults in the broader community after the war were very circumspect. They were very much the ideal employee and as children were raised too very much to be the ideal child. And so I think that kind of thing was always part of the Japanese, uh, expectation. I think that, that, that, that expectation though was, was sustained because we want the community very much wanted to prove that they were US citizens. One of the things I remember from childhood was when I was about six or seven in

the Rush Street neighborhood. We lived off of Chestnut, there was a rash of fires. We had a pyromaniac in the neighborhood and buildings are being torched every few nights and they were major fires. The person was very good at it, unfortunately, and one of them was a multistory residential buildings that was three doors down from where we live and there was an arson investigation because this was arson, and things are going up every night. And the arson investigators were making inquiries and they, they asked about my family because the, the, my, my parents and myself and my uncle were the only Japanese and that in that area. And so they asked about. They're asking the neighbors about our, my family. Do they think that somebody in the family was the arsonist basically? And God bless there was a Italian woman in the building and she was very outspoken and she wrung the people out and said, no, that's a family, they've been here for many years. They're upstanding citizens. They're not who you're looking for. They're not the arsonist. And she got very mad at them, uh, for, for having that kind of prejudicial thinking. They did find the arsonist actually, and it was interesting because back then technology was pretty smart. They took pictures of the crowd watching the fire and they looked in the crowd pictures. There was somebody who was in all the pictures that would look really abnormally happy and they, that was the arsonist. The person was setting the fires so that he could watch them. But the, uh, the prejudice that was there, except Rosa was that this family is not white. Um, is there somebody in that family that is setting, setting these fires? So that was one of the things that did, was a, a racial stereotyping, prejudice. Still at that time.

AT: 00:56:28 What are some of your hopes for your children and maybe eventually grandchildren, for future generations in general. And if you could have, you know, pass down any kind of message or legacy, what would you want to pass down?

EH: 00:56:47 I think that what I see is that there are two things that are important. One certainly is that we're all part of a larger society. We're all part of the United States. We're all part of a world actually, we're part of a world, a world nation now. The world is very small now. We're all part of a world community and that's important. I think it's also important to celebrate the things that are unique to each culture, each, each nationality, each, each, each culture has very unique things that should be celebrated. And I think what is important is that we as a world nation get to appreciate the differences and not be fearful of them and not be biased toward any one set of tendencies, any one culture and any one background. Any one ethnicity that everybody has great contributions. Every culture, every individual has great

contributions to make. And that by celebrating those we were all richer for it. Uh, that the, that, the fear, that the lack of understanding based upon a lack of knowledge, it is something that we can't afford the capability in this day and age of blowing the whole thing up. It's very, it's very simple to, to wipe us all out in this day and age is very simple and that is going to be a product of fear and hatred and lack of understanding. I think that what the whole experience is should teach us and hopefully will teach us all is that differences that they're to be celebrated, that we're all richer for this, that this is something that makes the can make the United States a very great country or can rip this apart and that polarization, which is something that right now is was very, very prominent, which is unfortunate. That polarization is destructive and it will destroy it. There's no, there's no way around that, but I think that the, the experiences as being in a minority culture is that every culture has great things to contribute and that we all need to appreciate that which is sometimes hard for people to do.

AT: 00:59:25 Well, thank you so much again for taking the time to speak with me. Before we wrap up, is there anything else that you'd like to add or that I might've missed?

EH: 00:59:36 Not really. I think that I appreciate you taking the time to do the interviews and I hope that this is something that becomes a richer and richer project, because it's the experience of one group at one period of time, but there are things in there that are universal. And there are things in there that are important to capture because things history repeats itself. And if you can establish things so that the good things repeat and the things that are unfortunate, don't repeat them. It's worth it. So thank you for the time.

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