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Title: Ellen Watanabe-Huxtable Interview
Narrator: Ellen Watanabe-Huxtable
Interviewer: Anna Takada
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- AT: 00:16:19 And when they came to Chicago, what kind of work did they do?
- EH: 00:16:24 My father was working in a brewery, they worked wherever they could find. My father worked in a brewery and afterwards he said, did you know how they make beer? You said you would never touch the stuff again because of course at that time it wasn't quite the same thing as Anheuser Busch with the beautiful horses and the Clydesdales, it was probably very, very basic and so he said if you don't know how the conditions under which brewery's, you'd never drink it again. And so he worked at brewery at first, then went to work in the floral industry. He was a floral designer when I was born in 1953. He was a floral designer, whereas before what would that time was Anna Flower Shop, which was the preeminent florist in Chicago. They did the cotillions, they did all the social engagements. They did the flowers for Holy Name Cathedral was a very eminent, a florist in Chicago. My mom worked again as a secretary. So my mom got a secretarial positions. She had clerical skills and typing skills. So she worked in a secretarial position?
- AT: 00:17:27 Do you know where she did?
- EH: 00:17:27 Not initially. I don't know where she worked initially. Um, so I, I can't remember where she worked initially, I don't know.
- AT: 00:17:36 And then the floral business, do you know where that was located?
- EH: 00:17:41 That was on the North Side of Chicago actually, and my dad was able, was able actually to walk toward from, from where we lived. And so it was, um, but that was where he went ultimately when I was born, when I was born and little. That's where he worked for, for that period of time.

AT: 00:17:59 And do you have any siblings?

EH: 00:18:01 Nope. It's just me. The, the North Side of Chicago was interesting. There was, besides myself, my best friend in elementary school was Japanese American, also Sansei. And so there was the, my family, her family. Um the Kawasaki family with three sons, and ah the Higashigawa family with one son. And so there was in a school that was very small, we had a good number of Sansei all going to the same elementary school at the time. So that was very interesting.

AT: 00:18:35 Which school was it?

EH: 00:18:35 That was the William B. Ogden school, which was on State Street in Walton. And so there was a cluster, a significant cluster of Japanese Americans that lived there. Toguri Mercantile was just down the street. And uh, of course Mrs. Toguri was there. And uh, was a member of the community and people knew that that was her background is Tokyo Rose had been, but it was something that was just part of the past and we all knew that and was accepted as, as just, just the fact of the past.

AT: 00:19:10 Do you recall any other Japanese American businesses or um?

EH: 00:19:16 It was fun to right within walking distance of there, there was, um, there was Clark Restaurant which was run by three Japanese brothers at the corner of Clark Street and Chestnut. And they were the Joichi brothers and there was Rowland Joichi, Oscar Joichi and Chester Joichi. Three brothers ran a greasy spoon restaurant, it was very efficient. The one brother had the breakfast shift, the one brother had the lunch shift and the other brother had the dinner shift. And so they were very well established. Um very popular with the Chicago Avenue Police District because any officer that came to their restaurant, no matter what day it was, a dollar and coffee was always free. There were the safest restaurant in all of Chicago. And so that was one of the businesses that was there. Um, Star Market was the, was the grocery store that was there and uh, that was a little bit further away, but, uh, that, that was when the neighborhood grocery stores. Of course, totally Toguri Mercantile was there. And um, so those are the Japanese businesses that I remember being in the area.

AT: 00:20:34 And then uh, what about for doctors and dentists? I know a lot of folks were going to Japanese American services when possible?

EH:

00:20:49

Actually my parents really didn't. We used, I was born at, at, at a Wesley Memorial Hospital, which is part of the union, of the Northwestern campus now, but all of our doctors were pretty much a Caucasian. All of our professionals, pretty much Caucasian at the time.

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