

Densho Digital Repository  
Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and  
Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS)  
Oral History Project Collection  
Title: Ryoko Kobayashi Interview  
Narrator: Ryoko Kobayashi  
Interviewer: Anna Takada  
Location:  
Date: November 16, 2017  
Densho ID: ddr-chi-1-16

**<Begin Segment 1>**

Anna Takada:	<u>00:00:00</u>	To start, can you state your full name?
Ryoko Kobayashi:	<u>00:00:03</u>	Ryoko Kobayashi.
AT:	<u>00:00:05</u>	And where and when were you born?
RK:	<u>00:00:07</u>	I was born in Seattle, Washington. September 20, 1926.
AT:	<u>00:00:15</u>	And, what did your parents do for a living?
RK:	<u>00:00:20</u>	Well, in Seattle? Well, my mother was a housewife and my father, he worked for the farmer's market. He had a little booth with apples or whatever he had to sell those days. It was a great depression.
AT:	<u>00:00:38</u>	Did he farm the produce or just sell it?
RK:	<u>00:00:42</u>	He sold uh, just what he had like maybe if it was apple or oranges and then trying to make a living that way.
AT:	<u>00:00:51</u>	And did you grow up with any siblings?
RK:	<u>00:00:54</u>	I have two brothers, one older and one younger than me.
AT:	<u>00:00:59</u>	And, can you tell me a little bit about, what it was like growing up in Seattle? What kind of city it was at the time
RK:	<u>00:01:11</u>	It was a, it was very depressing because the great depression and, we lived in a house where cold water flat, like, you know, no water, hot water. So my mother had to boil water for everything, cooking, bathing, and uh, a very depressing. And if I got a 3 cents for allowance to go to school, I was lucky. Yeah. It was real bad in those days. So I never want to go back to

Seattle. That's a memory within, I don't wish to retain it, you know. I feel sorry, no, I, we feel real bad for my folks because they had to live that way and they couldn't afford to give their children too much of a good thing, like now children get everything they want. But now in my days, I was lucky if I had a Christmas tree or like my mother's friend come over and she, they want to talk. Woman talk was, she gave me a dime to say, you know, get lost, go, go to the candy store or something. But that's how life was. And I was as a child, I had epilepsy, so it wasn't on top of that depression and epilepsy and, I was a very sickly child. So my, my mother had an extra work taking care of me and the boys were okay. You know. And, so that's why that's my opinion on Seattle.

**<End Segment 1> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**

**<Begin Segment 2>**

- AT: 00:02:58 Mmm. Growing up there. So you, did you go to school?
- RK: 00:03:03 Yes, I went to the Western school and the Japanese language school. So right after the western schools open over, I have to take, oh, I have to walk about a mile to go to the Japanese language school. Now, think about one, one or two hours. Then I came home, but had the western book in one hand and the, my mother made a bag for the Japanese of school book. So it was, I had to carry a lot of learning, you know, but good.
- AT: 00:03:41 Was there a, a big Japanese American population of Seattle at that time?
- RK: 00:03:48 Yes. Yes. Good. The Japanese school was just filled with the children, you know, it varied. It was discipline. So when we had freedom in the western school, we go to Japanese school, we were like a stick man where you just walk in and teacher come by. We bow low, we have to show respect, we'll be going into the classroom, we have to sit and if the teacher call, you have to stand and bow to the teacher then, re before you read the book of what the teacher told to read, you have to bow and chat. I'm going to read so and so then after that's over, I bow again, then I sit down. So it was very disciplined and, so that's how I was raised, they're not come home and I speak Japanese. Because my father could speak English but my mother couldn't speak English too well. So it was all converse. Conversion was in Japanese.
- AT: 00:04:51 And where were your parents from originally?

RK: 00:04:53 My mother was from Tokyo and my father was from Ofuna, which is in Kamakura.

AT: 00:05:05 And, so you spoke Japanese at home?

RK: 00:05:09 Yes. My father could read and speak English, so it was kind of easy when I talk with my father. But when my mother is strictly Japanese And,

AT: 00:05:22 Did you have a preference of language?

RK: 00:05:26 For me?

AT: 00:05:27 Did you have a preference in which language you use?

RK: 00:05:30 No, because even with some of my friends, we kind of, the Japanese kind of slips then, you know, and, so, um, oh, it was a very, it's not like now where the kids have everything computer and things. We have to, we didn't even have a telephone, so we have to go to some person's house, knock on the door, and do your so and so. So it was very hard and, but, you were disciplined. So it didn't matter if my folks said do it, then we did it.

AT: 00:06:11 And besides school and Japanese school, were you involved in any other activities or did your family go to church?

RK: 00:06:20 Yes, I went to first Baptist church.

AT: 00:06:27 So is that every Sunday?

RK: 00:06:29 Oh, yes, every Sunday. And then someone, they have a children's program. Then my mother took, took me to the church and, so we could perform in whatever we have to do.

**<End Segment 2> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**

**<Begin Segment 3>**

AT: 00:06:48 And then, how old were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

RK: 00:06:55 15.

AT: 00:06:56 And can you tell me a little bit about that day, of your recollections of that?

RK:

00:07:02

Oh, yes, I was, it was a Sunday afternoon. And, I was sitting on the front porch trying to take a breather. You know, I was thinking, what should our shoe work for school tomorrow? And if I did my lessons. Okay, so you know what passes through. Then, I saw from the distance, my father's friend was coming in a fast pace and then he came and I bowed, and he is your father at home. I said, yes. He went up the steps and then I heard voices. Then he came running out and we didn't have a phone or those days, no television, computer and new thing to give a fast information. So he was our information, inform, you know, he said, then my father said, get in the house. And I said why? Get In the house now. So I went in the house and he said that, Pearl Harbor was bombed. Gosh, why did I have to come in the house? I said, where is Pear Harbor? So my older brother, he turned on the radio and he said it's in Hawai'i. So I said, oh my gosh, you know, in those days, poli, you know, politics would then go through my mind, you know, it's always what to wear or school kids, what the problems with. In a, so I said, oh my gosh, and then, listen to the radio. My father said, I'm going out to get the paper. So he brought about the paper and there was an abandoned headline through inch star, Jap bombed Pearl Harbor. I said, oh gosh, at least I could read English. And, so, that day was kind of silent. Yeah. We didn't talk too much, but I could look on my parents' face, what's going to happen and then, sure enough, these things start to happen. Sign on the telephone post came out and, um, my mother said that, we have to go to the church, Saint Mary's to sign and register. But my brother was 16 then, so he was able to do a lot of things for us and have, gather everything up and pack our suitcases. Then she took me to my younger brother and I to Sears and said, uh, um, you, you have to get a pants suit, a boots. And a, I say, why? We don't know where will be going. And we didn't know what sand on need look like. So then, I recall just lately, my friend, we were writing to each other about camp and she sued. Her mother told her we had to dress dignity, dignify, you know, but my mother was opposite. You will know where you're going so you're going to buy the pants suit, we're going to go with your boots. So I said okay. Then they bought suitcases and um, oh, anyway, we came home with it. Yeah, my father said that we'd better start doing, getting rid of things. So we had a little house sale and we sold a auto, you know, utilities, I mean, not on the tools and sofa, furniture. And the people came and, they bought a song and dance. And my father had, my parents had a fruit and vegetable market, so they have to get rid of that. Then, they had a truck. And it was just a whole mess of thing. And then my mother said, we have to start burning things. At that time I got straight, um, is a Japanese search Kojo no maru meaning A plus and the teacher said that you, you did very good

on your writing in Japanese. So he read it in front of the high school and then, my mother got it be burned. I said, oh no, please let me keep it, said no, every, anything written, you never know. You know, they can't read what you wrote. So I, so everything I had, it was burned. And, pictures and photographs, she just burned them all, so that we wouldn't be hooked with all the, because you never know. Eyes are looking, you know, so it was a then all damn morning when we started, I was sitting on my suitcase and when my pants suit and boots. There was a broom that my mother put in the corner, and I was looking at the broom, I said, I talked to her, her room. I said, well, you have to go. And I said, thanks for sweeping the house. And then, I got up and my mother said half an hour more, we'll be leaving. I said, okay. So I grabbed my suitcase and I came to the front door. Then I heard a big something that room the broom fell down so I said oh gosh, saying goodbye to me, I guess, but all humor aside. But uh, when we went out, so, it started, it was so quiet, you could hear a pin drop. That's how quiet the morning was. And, I just, I said I want to say goodbye to the neighbor next door, because she did a lot of soaring for us, you know, and there were Black couples. So, I went and knocked on the door. I said, thank you very much. You've been a good neighbor and I really enjoy you, you know, your friendship. And, so we shook hand, then, that was it. She said she didn't know what to say, so she just was silent. But I could tell by her looking in her eyes to say goodbye, you know, and, and, we all carry a suitcase and, radio and whatever we could carry, went down to the Saint Mary's church. In there, it was whole line of a gray hound bus. And No, each bus at the doorway was a soldier with a fixed banner. So I said, what in the world? What's going on? You know, but, so I, I was close by, I was still close to my mother and then, then to say, okay, everybody's going to load up now. And, so we all went in the bus. No, not a lot of people dress dignify, you know, they had a sushi they were eating. I said, how can they do this? You know, I'm not hungry. I don't want to know. I want to know where I'm going, what's going to happen, I'll lose all my friends and this, they have to maybe, that was their way of showing how maybe they don't want to look or sad or anything. You know. I don't know what the feeling was. But emotion was different, but between them and us, then, we came to, uh, Santa Anita Gateway and then, all of a sudden I felt like, oh gosh, I feel like, uh, not 15 anymore. We were old, you know, like more older. Uh, somehow something came over me and then that we went through the gate and we have to get off the bus, the bus. And I remember we went through, to make our own mattress. They threw that mattress bag at us and I said there was one guy was filling it, so I just, can I have the filled one. So he said, sure! He threw one of them. And then, um, the,

the army and, the whole thing is he was in our neighborhood, his name was Jim Amonon, and we got to know each other. And I said, he was telling me he was one of the guys that filled the mattress. I say, well, how come you didn't fill mine? And that's, we are to cut, you know, we used to talk, sit and talk about incarceration. And he said, well, at least you know, we're free now, so, and uh, but, uh.

**<End Segment 3> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**

**<Begin Segment 4>**

AT: 00:15:50 I want to backtrack just a little bit because you see you were born in Seattle, but you weren't there for your entire childhood. At some point, you move.

RK: 00:16:02 Yeah. 1937, we moved to Santa Monica, California. And then 1939, we moved to Los Angeles Uptown and my folks are operated a fruit and vegetable market.

AT: 00:16:17 In, Uptown LA

RK: 00:16:21 Santa Monica and Uptown. Yes.

AT: 00:16:23 And, as far as, were there any immediate impacts of, of Pearl Harbor, did anything change in your life as a 15 year old?

RK: 00:16:37 Yeah, umm, I became very depressed, you know, because um, coming from Seattle and Santa Monica and so forth, and I finally got to know a lot of school kids, became friends and start to enjoy school and all of a sudden it just cut me off and I was just sad. Then when you went into camp, I just sat on the front steps in the camp. I just didn't want to, it's just, I was just depressed. And, um, my mother said, why don't you go out and meet people? I say, no, I don't want to meet anybody. I said that I lost, I lost something I cherished, you know, as. Then, I said that, uh, so I said, well I might as well work or something. So that's I became a waitress there. And then wake up four o'clock in the morning and then, um, was \$4 a month, I think it was \$4. Then, work, uh, carrying bowls. Why is like this. And serving coffee and then chatting with the kitchen helper. And then after six months they said that the barracks were built. So you'll have to go to Jerome mark. So we got an order, you know, so when on the train, took a bus three days just to get to Arkansas and they pulled the shade down so we could not see out. But you know, as kids, we, I saw, you know, Black people picking cotton, I said,

oh my goodness, where are we going? You know, and then, um, oh, it was lucky my mother got me to pant suit and the boots and the, it was muddy. When we got off to get, you know, then she roam. Yeah, it was just a terrible experience. But, uh, after awhile I got to know a few, you know, girlfriends because we'd go to school and I didn't care for school and it was just a terrible experience for me. But later on have to move to Roller. Uh, it became easier for me and the people were at Roller. I got different group of friends and we all went to school together and this and that. And uh, so, 1945, oh, we, I graduated high school in Roller and um, let's see, we went, uh, we went to Little Rock, we got permission to go Little Rock. So we ran on the army truck to go to Little Rock and we bought our dresses and shoes for the graduation and we came back on the bus on the truck again. And uh, so we better hurry, you got, you girls better hurry, because they are gonna close the gate on us. So we have to hurry and look for dresses and shoes, and. But uh, and, let's see, after graduation, do you know, we've got a notice then, there was a big meeting that the war has ended. So we went there for a prayer meeting and then, and also another meeting was the, when Hiroshima was bombed, we went to that one too. We pray for the people and uh, in Hiroshima. But, um, then my father said, well I could go out now, so I'm going to go out to Chicago. There was a people that will support him for one give him apartment and so forth, rooming placed anyway. And uh, he called us, um, and he said that, uh, I guess he wrote to my mother and he said, we are coming out now because, uh, I got a place, I got an apartment and I have a job. So the family could come out now. So, um, the address was 4115 South Drexel. And uh, it was a second floor. I remember. And I just sat by the window and just look out and I said, oh gosh, what's going to happen to me now? Because I'm, I can look out, and then, I'm so used to seeing Japanese faces. Now it's different. And then, uh, my mother said, take a month off, get yourself adjusted and then, start looking for a job. So I just sat at the window and, uh, I said, gee, what's going to happen? And um, uh, fun, yeah, find a job and lots of jobs. So I just, I came out with no money in my pocket, so at least. Its about \$26 was my first pay check. And then I worked on the line, you say, hey, you! Meaning, you know, as, you better do better than this. I said, oh gosh. And then the day after day, you know, they say, hey you! You know, these were tough women. I finally got sick, my nerves all shot. For 10 days I was in bed, my mother had to feed me. I said, Oh God, you know, it was just the one thing after another. And then, so I just went to the, mmm hmm. Manager and I said, I'm sorry about quitting. I spent 10 days at home. I can't take this job anymore, so I said, just send me my check. And I walked out.

AT: 00:22:43 And where, what was the company or where was the,  
RK: 00:22:46 It was on 26th street. Uh, it was a, um, they made a metal picture frame. And what I have to do was a spot weld on one corner, so it becomes a frame. But if you don't do it right, they send it off. Then it became a, I just think, well, I couldn't take it anymore. And I got awfully sick and I was in the washroom and a girl came and said, we got to make a quarter. What are you doing down here? I said, I'm too sick. I can't move. And they called the superintendent. So he came, he said, yeah, you look sick. So he sent me home. And but the,

**<End Segment 4> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**

**<Begin Segment 5>**

AT: 00:23:30 And you're so your father left before your family?  
RK: 00:23:35 Yeah.  
AT: 00:23:35 And found the, the job and the apartment. Um, what job did he find?  
RK: 00:23:42 He was working for a school supply. I can't remember the name, but uh, in all the school or tablets and books, I think whatever school supply the furnished. And uh, my mother was at home yet, but then she got a job working for auto lamp I think was the name. They all with the Issei women, they form a little group. And my older brother was in the army that time and my younger brother going to, uh, school yet. And, uh  
AT: 00:24:26 Which school did he go to?  
RK: 00:24:29 Let's see, what was it? I can't remember the name now. High School. Um, he would go then he got a scholarship. And he went to art institute, but I can't remember the name of the high school.  
AT: 00:24:46 And your older brother, um, so was he drafted or?  
RK: 00:24:55 Yes, uh huh, he was, uh, going to go to Europe and uh, the war was still going on. It wouldn't, they shipped him to go to uh, ready to go on board to go Europe. The war ended. So he was then he said, then we're going to ship you to Japan. So when he was going to go to Japan, same thing happened. The war ended. So they sent him, how to say, they sent him to MIS School to be



a translator and to learn more Japanese and talk to right and speak. And then that's how he went to Japan as a translator. And, I don't know how long he was there. Maybe two years or so.

AT: 00:25:44 And, do you remember your, your feelings or reactions to him joining?

RK: 00:25:54 Him joining? No, because, uh, I feel he's drafted so he can't do anything, but I felt kind of proud that he had an American uniform on. And, uh, he met, he met all our relatives, and he was able to help them with food and cigarettes and whatever they need. So, um, I, I said that you know, somebody is there from us, our family, it is good because they could help out and uh, whatever comes up, he could go to the army headquarters somewhere, help, help the people out. And um, both my cousin, the first cousin, second cousin, they, they kind of went for him because he was, he was kind of good looking, you know, how it is with uniform. So when I went to Japan, she said, gee, your brother was good looking, I said, but uh.

AT: 00:26:56 And did he come back to Chicago?

RK: 00:26:58 Yes, he came, came back to Chicago. For a while he worked, I don't know where he worked but uh, he got married. So he and his wife with one child, the first child they went to California and now I think Los Angeles. And then they moved to Orange County, then they went to Oceanside. And, mmm, that's where they both passed away. And so, uh, both my brothers gone. I'm the only, and my parents are gone. So I'm the only one left of the Kobayashi family. And I see 91 years old and oh gosh. My father was 99 and a half. He was waiting to be a hundred, but he didn't make it. But uh.

**<End Segment 5> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**

**<Begin Segment 6>**

AT: 00:27:46 And um, do you remember your, your first impressions of Chicago when you moved here?

RK: 00:27:53 When I first came from the camp out, I say, gees, this is dirty city. You know, was thinking. When I said, you know, my father came to pick us up and he came home and not care, but I think it was, if I remember correctly and then, um, we went up second floor. And I said, oh gosh, there were a lot of

cockroaches and my mother's oh my Gosh, you know, and then, uh, but that's the best he could do it at that time. And uh, but there was a Hyde Park neighborhood in the, a lot of Jewish people were there, and then there was a convenience store uh, on a, 41 or 3 or something like that. And I went into it one day, and they took me under their wings. They taught me about classical music. They taught me about the, they told me to get this workbook, the music, they told me what place to go to get dresses, and they said that. So they made me feel welcome. And then when I went to the Hyde Park Delicatessen, oh, I loved the cadeshas, it was big, and then hot when they made it. So they, therefore they see me come in, they give me the hot ones and I learned to like the Jewish food. And then I began to like the Jewish people, they were so kind to me. And then, uh, then later on I found out that about the Holocaust. So I said maybe that, maybe that's the attraction they got because they found out that I was incarcerated. So I have many good friends now of Jewish people and, um, they've been very good to me. And there was one that's working at the zoo, Lincoln Park Zoo, as a volunteer. Every Tuesday I see her, we exchanged bag. I give her books and magazines and, uh, medical, um, medical things, uh, written datas. And she gives me this, um, her magazine and we exchange. So, um, but I really enjoyed them. The Jewish people.

- AT: 00:30:11 And um, what were the demographics of Hyde Park at that time when you first moved there?
- RK: 00:30:18 Pardon me?
- AT: 00:30:19 What were the demographics of the neighborhood at the time? Um, in Hyde Park when you first moved. Who were living there?
- RK: 00:30:28 Oh, it was uh, before the Blacks came in, it was a Jewish, and uh, I don't know, Caucasian, anyway, I don't know who they were, but, uh, and then they, um, then I don't, um, across the street. Uh, Hyde Park, a center opened up and the people who go in there and they could join the club and so forth. And uh, there was um, oh remember. There was a Japanese gift store. And I helped the lady out. And, uh, and my friend, she's Italian, she came and, uh, helped the lady out, she took photographs and the lady liked to shift. I'm going to give you a Japanese name. I'm going to Daniel Terumi meaning shining from with them. You know, Oh, and she liked that. She said, I'm Terumi. So even to now she calls me Terumi. Okay.
- AT: 00:31:33 Where, where was that shop?
- RK: 00:31:34 Huh?

AT: 00:31:35 Where was the shop?

RK: 00:31:37 Oh gosh, I was on 50. I can't remember. No, it was about a block away. So 4115, so it would be, well, anyways, blocks south of 4115.

AT: 00:32:04 Uh, and what, what kinds of things were sold there?

RK: 00:32:08 Oh, Japanese products plus uh, ladies scarves. Neon Uh, dishes and, um, I can't remember. Cause I didn't stay too long, you know, I just help as a temporary help because she needed somebody to, when she was in the back doing something. And, I guess like what a gift store would be, you know, narrow coin purses and things like that.

AT: 00:32:41 And uh, in Hyde Park at that time, were there other Japanese American families?

RK: 00:32:47 Yes. Yes. There was quite a few. Those uh, oh, let's see. Japanese food stall, And, uh, but I can't remember where they were at because my parents went to the shop. And, um, let's see what else we, I guess there was a restaurant too. But uh, we didn't have money so we couldn't go eat at a restaurant. But, uh, I don't know too much around the surroundings too much. And uh, because I had to start going work and I know 51st street was a, a little rumble there. You know, all kinds of stores there, you know, was a bookstore I remember, it's still there yet. And uh, they had a tree trunk and the people put signs up. I think they still do that. I haven't been down to for ages. So.

**<End Segment 6> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**

**<Begin Segment 7>**

AT: 00:33:47 How long did your family live over there?

RK: 00:33:50 Well, I moved out, uh, when I was 27. I said, I have to get out of here because my job is on the north side.

AT: 00:33:59 Which job was that?

RK: 00:34:00 Oh, let's see, I worked for a AC Mc club. It was a wholesale place. There's quite a few Japanese working there. And uh, let's see, I was living on Linen Avenue, on 909, I think it was. Wesleyan, and uh, I was on the second floor and there was one, but it was owned by a Japanese. And all was under third floor.

That's right. Third floor. So the water system, too much water.  
And uh,

AT: 00:34:40 Were you living alone?

RK: 00:34:42 Yes, I was alone. Then, my friend, um, uh, the, Terumi, she were learning how to play cello and she said, uh, I have to study, but I have no, no, I have to go all the way downtown. I go out every afternoon, so why don't you use the apartment? Nobody's going to bother you. So that's how we became friends too, you know. And uh, she, she became a beautiful cellos, but they said that if you don't, if you're not a guy, you can't get ahead in those days. You know. So I guess, what the, the teacher, uh, she had a top notch teacher that she played for lyric opera and uh, another guy he played for Milwaukee Symphony. And they want her too, but she said, I can't because I got to join the union and then, uh, if you're going to join the union, you got to or she said it was just too messy. So she, anyway, uh, I was living alone anyway.

AT: 00:35:52 And, um, in those first few years that you were in Chicago.

RK: 00:35:57 Um, what were some of the challenges of, of moving to a new place? Oh.

AT: 00:36:07 And, and, to moving to Chicago. Did you experience any challenges?

RK: 00:36:12 Well, I expense uh, Oh, I taking subway and it was close contact with people in those days. And then the guys, you know, they see a woman standing there now all of a sudden like your leg around my, his leg around my leg and things like that, I said, what's going on. And then, uh, I was was going to go upstairs to catch the L? Yeah. Oh, going upstairs to catch the L and, uh, the guy stopped me and I couldn't get through. And um, the lady and the, um, the one that takes the money, cashiers, she knocked and said, you'd let her go through, I'll call the cops. I mean number, things like that. And um, in that each job I had, if I didn't like the job, I'd just roll up my apron, throw it up, and I said, I quit. And then I go to the office, send me my check, because not improving me. And I get on just slur remarks when the people, hey you, that's, that's the, that was a thing then, hey, you, not my name, but hey you, so, uh, if I didn't have a college degree or anything, it was putting tough. Then after awhile, they said, you have a college degree, BS anyway? I say, no, I don't have any, just a high school diploma while we can't hire you. So, you know, it was, it was just, I just, uh, I just felt like a piece of just the Hong Kong beat, huh, but my mother

said, you know, just just be calm and just be yourself. And I was daddy girl. So he used to say, you know, there are many nice people here, regardless of their age or the color of the skin. Be nice and you know, learn to like people. So that's how I, he told me what to do and that was the best thing he told me because I meet so many nice people here in Chicago more than New York or California. And even if a, I'm sitting on the bus and then I happened to look like this. I see somebody smiling. I say, I smile back. It made my day, you know, so I still love Chicago in the, like the other day I was eating at uh, McDonald's and a lady, the Black lady sat next to me and then I gave her one of my hand wipe. So you know, it's kind of, you don't know what she touch. Oh, thank you very much. She said, would you like, uh, fries? I said, well, I'll take a couple of them. So she gave me a couple of fish fries. We start talking. She said, I'm a teacher. And I say, what do you teach? She said, I teach everything. You know that place up there by, uh, she was telling me, uh, used to be a restaurant bomb down below an upstairs, a char, I think a charter school. Was she. What was there to teach. I said, oh wow. And I found out she very educated person, you know. So I came home and I told Terumi about it. She said, oh wow, that's nice. Because you know, and I said, I didn't see any color in her. I just, you know, we both sat there like we knew each other for a long time and we talked and talked all through the meal. She said, I have to go now, huh, but, you know.

- AT: 00:40:09 Do you think that's something that's particular to Chicago?
- RK: 00:40:12 Pardon me?
- AT: 00:40:13 Do you think that's something that's particular to Chicago?
- RK: 00:40:16 What I can't ...
- AT: 00:40:17 You said that you felt like people were nicer in Chicago than say New York or California?
- RK: 00:40:23 Yes. The New York is so fast, you know, and uh, you have Garmin just looking this and that. I like the calmness, you know, I mean, uh, they'll come up and it's, so comical. One day I was waiting for the bus and a guy came rushing up and he said, I want to ask you, are you Filipino? I said, no, that's number one. What's next? Are you Chinese? No, I'm not Chinese. Are you ah, this, are you that? I think five of them, he was saying, and he said, well, I give up. What are you? I said, I'm American, and I'm Japanese. And he said, oh, okay. Then, he disappeared. It's so funny, you know, but.

<End Segment 7> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 8>

AT: 00:41:05 And to go back to, um, uh, those earlier days when you first moved here, um, what were, so you, you went from a move from the south side to the north side. Can you tell me a little bit about, um, what was different in your experiences, either part of town?

RK: 00:41:34 What a, when I move up closer to the north side, it was close to that, uh, Wilson Avenue L, I heard it was dangerous. In that, there's a lot of American Indians living along the, and uh, so it was a different atmosphere. And then, uh, I was walking, you said that uh, I heard two girls talking and then, they were talking about their lives. And I said, you know, they had been abused too, you know, the Indians, so I guess their life was, uh, well, I don't know, just, just as worse as mine. Well, the atmosphere was so different because when I was on the south side, I will end a day, they give you all the warmth, you know, and I come up there, it's cold. And in the, in the, even though building that I'm living in on the third floor, it was cold because, not, not that the water don't come up, but the, the people there, you know, they just walk on by you, you know, and I said, gee. And um, they had terrible fights in that building, you know. Then all of a sudden I see cockroaches and I said, oh my gosh, I told, I said, Terumi, actually, her name is Dorothy. I said we got the, I got to get outta here. I can't take it anymore. So, in fact, my place was robbed too, somebody then, uh, uh, I have bet then, uh the private detective came, he said as an inside job now, who would take my movie camera? Just my movie camera and that's it. I've got to get outta here. So we, um, I said, I tell you what, Dorothy, let's you and I, we share rent. We could find a place, we'll go have, you know, two, three bedroom or something. And then, um, you could practice all you want and then, so I was looking at the paper, and then I found a coach house, so we went down there and he said, yeah, he'll rent to us. So I said good.

AT: 00:43:57 Where was that?

RK: 00:43:57 Huh?

AT: 00:44:00 Where was that?

RK: 00:44:01 Uh, let's see, 642 Schubert avenue, right next to Clark Street, almost.

AT: 00:44:10 And um, on the north side, around that time, do you remember any, uh, Japanese American owned businesses or a markets or anything like that?

RK: 00:44:23 Yes, I remember on division street, uh, the jewelry store was owned by Japanese and uh, there was a Toguri gift store. They moved to Belmont after awhile and a, the gift store, I mean, the jewelry store moved to, um hm. I think it was Clark Street. Yeah. Narrow above uh, Diversity. And then, I remembered going to the Japanese restaurant and they had a horse shoe shape, uh, you know, tables and, her name was Kio, she came from Japan as a war bride. I think, and uh, so we got to know each other, well bless you.

AT: 00:45:17 Thank you.

RK: 00:45:18 We got to know each other and then she stopped going to open a restaurant so it was, um, she opened it, I think it was near Division, oh, near Diversity and Clark called Kio restaurant and it was beautiful restaurant and they had a sliding doors where you could have a boot, a little room, they have a hole in the floor, so you could put your leg down and they had a table and then, the waitress come with a Japanese Kimono and then, you know, bow traditional Japanese style. So we order our food and a, a cup of, a few, see it. Four of us from the place where I work, uh, we went there. One was Polish, one was Jewish and no, two were Jewish and one was Dorothy and myself. So we all went in that room and we really had a nice time. We order Sake and thing we pretended like we were drunken, but the, that was a nice place. Then one day she said, I lost my shop. And I said, what happened? She said, uh, the kids took over. They did just put me in, then the chef. Chef ended up in a nursing home and I said, oh my gosh, what happened? You know, a lively woman then, down in a nursing home. So I went to see her and she was just, oh, very depressed. Next time, maybe she'll go back to Japan where she came from. I didn't say anything, but that's how she ended up and I felt so bad. But um, the other restaurants there, I don't know. Oh well I'm living now, there was a Ito Sushi and that's gone. She's, he said after 35 years, I don't want to do anymore. So that was my favorite restaurant Ito Sushi because like almost like home cooking to me, but the other restaurant. Um.

AT: 00:47:37 And um, how long were you on Schubert?

RK: 00:47:41 Oh, which, uh, 642? Oh, let's see, 19, 1977. Uh, we went through 1138 Schubert. She bought the home there? Yes.

AT: 00:47:58 And um, so that's farther west?

RK: 00:48:01 Yes. It's between Lincoln and Racine, and between Schubert and Diversity, it's, it's in the right hood, um, neighborhood

**<End Segment 8> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**

**<Begin Segment 9>**

AT: 00:48:13 And um, throughout this time, uh, when you were working, um, did you do any other activities outside of work? Were you involved in any churches or,

RK: 00:48:27 No, I was, uh, involved with my hobby be, both our hobby became uh, photography, Dorothy and I, and then, um, uh, that time I was living at the south side yet. And uh, my friend called me and she said, her friend was going to go to the YWCA. She wants to learn photography. So would you go with her please? And I said, so I took my little box, I went, and the next time I was, oh, I thought she will be there. She dropped out. She didn't care for it, but I stayed. I stayed in, uh, in the, one day. Then Dorothy came in and I was sitting at the piano and she said, uh, do you play piano? I said, no, I'm just sitting here waiting for, um, meaning to start. So we started talking and she said, do you like classical music? I said, oh, I love classical music. Opera, you name it. And so she's, I do too. So window was a Madam Butterfly came. We both went in, uh, um, had our Rutgers signed by Tibaldi. She was a singer then, you know, in the gut. The comical thing was we both had a blue raincoat on and we had, we were taking a shortcut to the opera house and there was two women. One was on the ground and one was on her knees, you know, and she thought we were cops cause we had a Black person sit, please don't take my sister to the hospital, to the jail, you know, she said, she didn't do anything wrong. I said, pick up your sister and take her home now. Then, we were pour laughing at. So she said, oh guy we were both, we were, uh, just the other day we were talking about that. I said, gee, we must look tough.

AT: 00:50:37 Mmm, and then, uh, did your parents and your family, did they stay in that building on the, near Hyde Park?

RK: 00:50:53 Oh, my folks did for awhile. Then, uh, they decided to move north, so they move, do you remember on Racine there was a goldlets, or I guess not, we are anyway, was uh, near the Buddhist church. Up the, um, it was, there was a lot of, big apartment building. So they moved there. I can't think of the



address, but, uh, near the Buddhist church that I could know it was on Racine. That's all I know. They moved there and they liked it there. It was lived, and you know, close to goal bloods. My mother's favorite scar goal. Uh, and the friends. It was easier for her friends, their friends to come over. And, um, so more than the south side, you know, a lot of driving to do so. The, uh, they decided to come move north, so the friends could come, visit them

**<End Segment 9> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**

**<Begin Segment 10>**

AT: 00:52:00 And, throughout your time in Chicago. Um, did you have any kind of involvement in the Japanese American community here?

RK: 00:52:11 Oh, let's see. No, not too much, no.

AT: 00:52:18 Did you ever go to any picnics or festivals or anything like that?

RK: 00:52:21 Well, they have this, I like the, they used to have a, um, they call it a Kodomo fair, but uh,

AT: 00:52:35 Kodomo matsuri?

RK: 00:52:35 Yeah, I don't know when that is now. I thought it was in November.

AT: 00:52:40 It just, it was last weekend.

RK: 00:52:41 Yeah. I see, I didn't get any notice, so I missed it. But then they used to have another different, uh, gathering there. But, uh, other than that, I didn't do too much because mostly I was going on my photography trip and not a, not a good photographer, but became a hobby, you know, and, uh, when, um, then, I used to work on the south side 800 Wabash and um, it was run by a Jewish man. And it was a funny interview. I thought I have to write uh, upper, register and all that. He said, what does your father do? I said he, oh, he retired. What does your mother do? She retired too. And uh, so how about your brothers? Do you have two brothers? I said one is a art editor, and the other one is a cost accountant you hired. That's how I got hired for that job.

AT: 00:53:44 What was the job?

RK: 00:53:47 It was a picking orders, you know, as a musical warehouse place. So they had anything connected with music, um, guitars and cello, different accordions and things, you know, and it was 95% Caucasian and then within a few months turn all Black. So I had a hard time trying to get adjusted, but I am not, I don't want to say this thing because you know, that's their way of approaching me and doing things. So one day I had a pencil in my pocket, I threw it across the room. I said, I quit. You know, I took my locker key, went downstairs and I told uh, I said, uh, I forgot his name, I put the key on the table. He said, why, what's wrong? I said, I don't want to say anything, I just quit, just send me my check. So I just walked out like that, cause all were afraid, they're going to hurt me. They were tough woman. And, uh, well I'll tell you one incident, she pushed me against the wall. Ripped my blouse open, she said you are a hunky. I said, I'm not a hunky. I said you get, you, you might have a black pants, but you know, I have a yellow pants and they are very fierce. There is no thing as yellow pants. But, uh, I mean I had to say something to protect myself, but,

**<End Segment 10> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**

**<Begin Segment 11>**

AT: 00:55:33 And um, before we wrap up, um, uh, in what ways, if any, would you say that, um, the incarceration during World War Two and resettling in Chicago, in what ways did that, uh, impact you and your life?

RK: 00:55:59 Oh, I see, incarceration. Um, I was glad to get out and was free. And uh, coming to Chicago, um, I was very lucky because I didn't care for the East Coast or the West Coast and uh, cause I couldn't get a job either place, not only tha, you have to drive certain places. That, uh, I love Chicago and I, like I say, I love the people and I love, uh, I like the parks and everything is close by and then, the neighbors are good and, they take me as I am and, uh, they always say good morning and say what's up, what today? I say I'm going shopping as usual they say yeah. But people are so friendly. And of course there's one or two of them actually they, they throw the rhubarb in. But, uh, other than that, I thought, I love living here in Chicago and, um, was 75 years of different experience. I think, uh, I'm very fortunate that I have my religion, which I say my prayer every night. I thank God that people here they take me as I am even to drop me a smile. It makes my day. And I said that uh, what else, they shake my hand and I feel the warmth. I said, where else can you get that? What else can, you know, now seeing there is a baby

mother. I say, oh, how cute in the baby sleeping. I say, I wish I could sleep like that. And the mother will say so do I. But you know, it's a, it's a real, comical and it's real nice feeling.

- AT: 00:57:57 Um, you've mentioned that you've been to the gallery a few times.
- RK: 00:58:02 Yes.
- AT: 00:58:03 Um, why, why is this particular history or experience, um, why is it important to, to remember and to
- RK: 00:58:14 Oh, number one is the photographers, cause I know the photographers, I mean I read up, I don't know them personally and I know, and so Adam, that's a good camera and is sharp. And Dorothea Lange, she goes to any means to get a picture. And, uh, and then if I see somebody looks me at what something I donate, like today, a young girl is looking. I came by and I said, excuse me, but this is what I donate. This is my name. And she said, these two arm bands. I told him, story what happened to the arm band and she listened very carefully. And then I took her around and uh, with different pictures I explained to them and, uh, I said, uh, then her, then her grandparents came and then, the whole family is moving with me. And, uh, they even invited me to have lunch with him. I said, no, I have to go shopping. I appreciate your thoughtfulness. You know, when I said that a, we want you to come, I said, maybe, you know, it's just that, um, I would like to come, but it's just that I have other things to do and uh, please excuse me. You know, I appreciate your thoughts. So, and uh,
- AT: 00:59:38 What was the, the arm bands that you donated?
- RK: 00:59:42 It has, uh, two "K"s on the ... That "K" stands for kitchen. And uh, so I explained to the girl in the one little camouflage, uh, pin. Or whatever it's made out of camouflage it looks like a mammy or something right next to the arm band. So I explained to the girl that was made with the scrap of the camouflage. So when we came to the camouflage, she saw there them working. So she took a picture of that, and I said somebody's scraps of, the girl would just make it and took the little, uh, bandanna under. They painted the lips and eyes and then I said, so she's, gee, that's something special, isn't it? I said, yeah, this is why I wanted to give. I wanted to donate that, and I said, everything here, I had it in a box or something, but when they saved, they need donation, I was so happy that I have stuff to give them. I don't know the um, government, uh, issue paper for my parents, but, uh, like I say, Chicago is it with me. And no matter

what I had, uh, since 1945, I had a very nice life here in Chicago and I appreciate it. And, um, I take on another thing is a couple of time I went to the Japanese American service center, uh, the farming jobs and, uh, so I approved, I like Chicago. I can't say anything bad about it. Of course, there are a lot of bad things happening. But on the whole, you know, when my, my boundary and life and loves.

**<End Segment 11> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**

**<Begin Segment 12>**

- AT: 01:01:34 If you could pass down any kind of message or legacy for future generations, what's something that you would want to leave behind?
- RK: 01:01:45 Yes. I like to say that, um, young people, y'all very fortunate. You could go to college, you could get, you know, nice jobs, nice paying job. You can get, you can marry into a good family. And uh, you could uh. There are so many things you could do that we couldn't do. You could become a engineer. You could become a fire woman or firearm man, uh, scientists. And uh, a lot of things that you could become. Well, I couldn't get that chance. It was like secretary housewife or nurse or something of that sort. We'll look more or less, you know, have few choices, but you have all kinds of choices, you could wear what you want, you could really speak fine English or you could speak American language, you know, like go for it this and that. But you have a lot of freedom where other countries don't have that, so make use, make good use of what you have your life, make yourself, you know, present of all, don't, don't get out of the way, you know, Get yourself to somebody too, take care of the elderly and, you know, volunteer for something good purpose and oh, I don't know there's so many things you could, you have choice to do. And uh, if I was your age, I will be doing all, all the things I just spoke right now trying to be something, or another thing. When I was in camp, the biggest thing that helped me was the roar federated church. Going to Sunday school and going to church and then become a choir member. And there was one beautiful song that the choir have to sing and I could never forget it. I thought how beautiful. And that's a lady. Um, her name was, the last name was Griffin. What did I think she had a beautiful voice and she sang this. I just knelt down. It was so beautiful. I had this knelt-down and uh, when I came to Chicago, I looked down before that music that one founded in, uh, so the church helped me quite a bit and uh, I found beautiful people in the church because they were more

like, you know, even kio with me. But, um, I don't know. That's my life.

AT: 01:04:35 Well, thank you so much for coming in and sharing. Um, before we wrap up, is there any last thing that you'd like to add or that I might've missed?

RK: 01:04:44 Pardon me?

AT: 01:04:45 There are any last thing you'd like to add or that, anything on me have missed in this conversation?

RK: 01:04:50 Yes. I, I wanna say this is a beautiful, uh, exhibit. And I am surprised so many people have come. And I have invited so many people. I took a bunch of those cards and I took, wrote down the time and the date and the free parking. So people came and uh, uh one of the other girls. She said, uh, she went to, she belonged to a group and she said, tell the whole group to come and look, this is history. So, uh, I think it was, the set up is beautiful. Yeah. beautiful, large and uh, in large photos. Well it grabs the people. And I've, I'm glad that it is the history came alive and uh, the people finally got to know what the Japanese went through. And I want to thank the Alpha Wood in the Japanese American citizen lean or service, I guess, would their efforts to put up the beautiful set up like this. It's a beautiful exhibit and then, you can, can help but to become emotional inside. So, thank you. Alphawood. Thank you, Japanese American Service Center. I'm, I have more things to donate too, you know. To the American, and I found another box filled.

AT: 01:06:25 Yeah, whatever you do, don't throw anything away. We'll share to donate it. Well, thank you so much again for taking the time.

RK: 01:06:33 Thank you for this time. I know I kind of chit chat too much. So my friend said you should go and tell, tell how you felt. So I said, I don't know. I'm kind of skeptical. Well, I mean, you're not, but. I've got little brave. Do you know?

AT: 01:06:54 I appreciate it. I appreciate you being so open

RK: 01:06:58 As the Jewish people say, Hutzpah! That's what I got.

**<End Segment 12> - Copyright © 2017 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.**