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Title: Constance Yamashiro Interview
Narrator: Constance Yamashiro
Interviewer: Anna Takada
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<Begin Segment 1>

Anna Takada: 00:00:06 This is an interview with Connie Yamashiro as part of the Japanese American Service Committee and Chicago Japanese American historical society oral history project. The interview is being conducted on August 10th, 2018 at 10:13 AM at the Japanese American Service Committee in Chicago. Connie Yamashiro is being interviewed by Anna Takada of the Japanese American Service Committee. So to start, can you please just state your full name?

Constance Y: 00:00:39 My full name is Constance Chiyoko Yamashiro.

AT: 00:00:43 Okay. And then can you tell me a little bit about where and when you were born?

CY: 00:00:48 I was born in Los Angeles, 1938.

AT: 00:00:56 When is your birthday?

CY: 00:00:57 May 6.

AT: 00:01:00 Okay. And, can you tell me a little bit about your parents, maybe, what their names were, where they were from.

CY: 00:01:11 Okay. My parents actually were Nisei, I'm Sansei, I'm an older Sansei. My father, well, I don't know where actually he came from, but he didn't know being Japanese. He never talked about, his background as such, my mother, was I think from Hiroshima ken. But I'm not too sure. And they lived in California sort of scraping by, you know. Yeah. They had a, they only had one child and that was me.

AT: 00:01:52 Okay. And, do you know anything about how, their parents came to the U.S. or?

CY: 00:02:05 Wow, you know, they didn't relate a lot about that. I don't think. Okay, well they have stories. My mother's parents, her father, had caught, had come first of course, and had written a letter back to Japan and requesting his girlfriend to come and join him in the United States. However, the family didn't allow that girlfriend or his love to come and they sent instead her sister, from what I understand, according to the, you know, family law was that the sister was more homely. So they figured that she would have a harder time finding a husband and they kept the pretty one back in Japan thinking that they would have no problem getting her married. So the more homely sister who was my grandmother came, instead. And, I remember, she, she had a hard time, a life in America was not what she, you know, as, you know, I imagine that it would be, my father's background was such that, his mother was, a little bit more bitter about everything in life. And, she complained a lot about being in America, but at the same time, I think her family wanted her out of the, out of the country. So there was all kinds of turmoil going on, you know.

AT: 00:03:54 Do you have any sense of idea about what they were doing for a living?

CY: 00:03:59 Oh yeah. My grandfather was a, of a, what they call a chalk farmer. When you first came and he had a place in Fresno, California and worked over there. My, my grandmother who was a widow, by the way, on my father's side, lived with us because my father was the oldest child and he took care of his mother, you know, the type of thing. And do you want to know what he did for a living? He, he took the jobs wherever he could at a fishing on the fishing boats. He even worked as an extra on the MGM lots, you know, wherever he could. He tried to get a job.

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<Begin Segment 2>

AT: 00:05:00 And so you were being born in 1938 you were very young when the war broke out. Do you have any memories of LA or as a child before the evacuation?

CY: 00:05:17 Actually, before the evacuation, I have no memories, I don't remember anything, but I do remember, going out to the camp and I remember the trip out there and I sometimes get confused whether it was a bus or train. I wasn't too sure because we went to Manzanar from LA, you know.

AT: 00:05:42 And, I'm sorry, were your parents, were they both from LA then or did they?

CY: 00:05:54 Right, right, right

AT: 00:05:55 Okay. So they were born in LA?

CY: 00:05:58 They were, well, my father was born in a place called I believe Stockton and my mother was born in LA, but oh, excuse me, in Pasadena.

AT: 00:06:07 Okay.

CY: 00:06:08 Same thing.

AT: 00:06:10 Okay. And then, so you mentioned that you do, some of your first memories are actually of evacuation?

CY: 00:06:23 Well, I remember the first getting into camp, I remember it was hot and dusty. It was very, very, a relief to get, I think it was a bus. I think we got off the bus, released to get off the bus. I remember I had to go, the washroom there was some kind of toilet set up that a lot of the Japanese women were upset about because it wasn't completed. You know, the facilities were so bare and, there was no separation, of the individual stalls. And I do remember that because my, and everyone was in a horrible mood. My grandmother was just, I was with my grandmother. I don't know why my mother and father weren't with me in the same bus, but there was someplace else. And I remember my grandmother being very, very upset and angry and, we all crabby and she, and she was spanking me and you know, just because I was crying and try to figure out, you know, what was going on, that I remember.

AT: 00:07:38 And so you mentioned that it wasn't completed, so it sounds like you, you're probably a part of that first or one of the earlier, earliest arrivals.

CY: 00:07:49 Right. We didn't go into the, we didn't go to those horse stables and some people went into, I think the LA people in straight into Manzanar, you know, and they were putting up the barbed wire fences. I remember that very well. And a lot of constructions still going on.

AT: 00:08:13 And do you have, so you actually remember like visually the, that it was under construction and they were still putting it together?

CY: 00:08:22 I remember, is like scenes, you know, it's like a certain pictures in your mind. And I do remember, the barbed wire. I remember the bathroom, which was such a big, you know, important, event for a little girl. And because by that time I was four and I was, well I guess trained. So I was very upset, you know, that you had to walk for half a mile to get to the bathroom and, and, it was very difficult.

AT: 00:09:01 And as far as the actual like living situation and the barracks, were you, was it the same where you with your parents and your grandmother? Like at home?

CY: 00:09:13 At the beginning of, it was, I remember they were there, but they went to work in what they call the sugar beet fields. And, excuse me. And I don't remember seeing much of them anymore, but I was always with my grandmother. So that's why as I grew up, of course I only spoke Japanese because my grandmother was being, Issei, and, and she took care of me, you know, and camp. Yeah.

AT: 00:09:42 And, in that case, what was your first language?

CY: 00:09:46 Japanese.

AT: 00:09:47 It was Japanese?

CY: 00:09:52 Um-hum, um-hum,

AT: 00:09:55 To jump back a little bit, as far as family background, was your family religious at all?

CY: 00:10:02 No, unfortunately they were not at all religious. My mother was, not religious at all. I don't even know if she ever went into a church. Maybe she did to, visited once or something, but my father and mother were not religious.

AT: 00:10:19 How about your grandmother?

CY: 00:10:22 My grandmother was, always looking around for different religions and she focused, on the Christian religion because I remember she bought me a book on Bible Stories and, you know, and I became very Nambour knows all the different, stories in the, in the Old Testament. And yeah, she was, she was religious in her own way, but she wasn't one to make a big deal out of it, you know.

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<Begin Segment 3>

- AT: 00:11:03 And do you have any other memories from camp from such a young age? Any, anything that sticks out to you when you think about? What men's life was like?
- CY: 00:11:13 A lot of memories from camp. There was a riot in my camp, I remember that there was a big riot, there was a lot of anger about, was it the JACL? Or, yeah, I remember that. And so my father must've been around because I remember him always yelling about that. Mmm. I do remember all kinds of get togethers where there they played the, you know, the Glenn Miller music and I fell in love with all the big band sounds. There are also like events where we all went out and said, you know, we, we wanted to say something to the emperor of Japan, you know, there was this kind of, of um. Yeah. Oh, oh, rising of, of I think it was among the Isseis and certain Jab and Niseis are what they call Keybase that, uh, would say that Japan is going to win. And we'd all have little flags that we flied around. And I remember being a little girl being happy. He had his little flag and you know, but, there were, those kinds of things that I remember. Of course the mass hall. And unusually I, I don't know, in Manzanar, no, the adults ate in one section and the children ate in another, which I don't think was a good idea, but, and I didn't like the food. I remember that.
- AT: 00:12:55 Do you remember what was being served or what you didn't like?
- CY: 00:12:59 I remember a lot of spam. I think there was a lot of spam. I hate spam now. Uh, I do remember putting shoyu and everything. And you know, it was, oh, I always remember corn on the cob cause I would save the corn and take all the kernels off and put it in my pocket and eat it like a piece of candy later, you know, cause of course there was no butter on the quarter or anything like that. Mmm. Mmm.
- AT: 00:13:32 Being such a young child, did you have to go to school? Or.
- CY: 00:13:36 No, at that time I was only four and I think they wanted me to go to some kind of a preschoolish type of thing. But I think I must have raised the faster or something and I never did end up going because I was always, you know, probably protesting or something. Yeah. I don't remember.

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<Begin Segment 4>

AT: 00:13:58 And do you know how long your family stayed in camp in Manzanar?

CY: 00:14:02 Well, we stayed all the way through. My, when I say my family and my mother and father were in that, sugar beet farm thing, but I was close to my aunt and my uncle and my aunt was terribly frightened of leaving the camp. She had heard the horror stories about, you know, people throwing rocks at the journeys and there was a lot of uprisings and we knew we couldn't go back to California. That's what I had understood that California did not want us back there. Thus, we, we were there until '44. It was, it seemed like a long time. I was there, until '44, some people left early.

AT: 00:14:56 So.

CY: 00:14:59 In 1944 where did your family go? Right here in Chicago. Well, was my mother, my grandmother and I, my mother and father had come out earlier because they were working, I think if you had a work permit, you are allowed to come out and, get a job. And they came out and we all sort of lived on the South Side. A lot of people among the Japanese people lived on the South Side of Chicago because they allowed us to rent apartments. So there was a lot of prejudice, but, they all, they were able to get apartments at that time. Okay. And we lived in a boarding house situation, you know, so my grandmother, I joined my parents and, it was, it was really that I remember very distinctly, you know.

AT: 00:16:04 Rejoining your, your parents?

CY: 00:16:08 Yeah. Huh. I asked who is that woman? They said that your mother, I said, whoa. I had no idea. I mean, you know, among children, just a couple of years absence, sometimes you, you know, you forget. And it was, I, I don't know exactly how long it was, but I was very close to my grandmother at that time.

AT: 00:16:32 And, just so we have it down, can you give me the names of your, your parents and your grandmother?

CY: 00:16:38 My name and the names of my mother and father, you mean? Okay, my father's name was Stewart. S. T. E. W. A. R. T. And my

mother's name was Dorothy. Okay. And my grandmother was, her name was Ekuto I think with E. K. U. T. O.

- AT: 00:17:05 Do you, do you
- CY: 00:17:05 She would be at Uchiyama now. There was, See my, when I gave you my name, of course Yamashiro that's, my married when I was married, yeah, married name.
- AT: 00:17:14 But Uchiyama is?
- CY: 00:17:17 But Uchiyama is my maiden name.

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- AT: 00:17:21 Hmm. Mmm. One thing I wanted to ask is about, I mean, you being very young and, and going into the camps, you know, that's probably kind of what you knew. You weren't questioning much but, did your, do you remember having any kinds of conversations with either your grandmother or your, your parents about the camp situation or?
- CY: 00:18:03 Well, I remember conversations. I remember my father being extremely upset, you know, because he was, at the height of his adult, or let's say I was four years, who was in his late 20s. So I remember, I always remember a scene where he was crying and the, and the kit, in the barrack. And, he was very bitter about the whole war scene and very angry. So I always heard that every day when I was crying, I heard it and you know, from him in camp, and I would hear it later about how, you know, they felt very, very bitter about the whole situation. That was the kind of conversations I've heard a lot of. And, I was always told my father would say everyday, this is horrible to say too, but my father would say, never, ever trust the white person. They'll act friendly, but they'll always, always hate you. And they like, and I said, oh, okay, well, you know, something I learned from him because he felt so betrayed. You know, he felt his whole life had changed and altered and he wouldn't go back to California for a long time until he was a much older man. You know, my child or we.
- AT: 00:19:38 You mean even to visit or?

CY: 00:19:40 He wouldn't have anything to, he wouldn't have anything to do with Japan. He, he would, he had no desire to visit Japan. He had no desire to, in, in my case, it probably doesn't bode well for this video. There was hardly any cultural things going on at home. He said, one of the first things is you do not talk, you only speak English. You should not speak Japanese. I mean, as I got assimilated into Chicago, I went to a private school, so I was taught English right quickly because you know, children just, you just learn it. And so, he made it a point that. Yeah. You know, a, we, we Americanize, he used to always say we're not assimilated. That's why we got thrown into camp. He would, you know, lecture me about people all sort of clustered together in LA and lived like, again, ghetto style. And he says that was a mistake that we made. I don't know that's a mistake we made. But that, you know, as if putting all the blame on, on the Japanese people, rather than the government that put us into camp, he felt that we asked for this, this was what, something that because of our behavior, because of how he looked, because of how he acted, this is what happens.

AT: 00:21:15 Do you think that, his, like generation had anything to do with that? Like what do you think he would think differently if he were, say Issei or Sansei? Or I'm just, I'm.

CY: 00:21:34 No, I know I, I'm a little unclear about how do you mean?

AT: 00:21:40 I guess, do you think that he would still think that way if he were of a different generation as far as like the Japanese American community? So if you were Issei, I guess.

CY: 00:21:57 Well, I don't know. I have no idea ... speculating how he would feel that he was over a different track. If I was a Issei, as such at his age at that time, I would experience the whole wartime thing very differently. I think one of the interesting things about this internment camp and about our adjustment in Chicago, everything, had all dependent upon your age group. A lot of it was, it was like a, when I talked to all my girlfriends, we all play hana, you know, the Japanese, oh, they loved it in camp and then so I say, you loved it in camp! And it was the most fun I've ever had. And these girls are maybe a little older than myself. The teenage dances, the baseball games they played all the freedom from everything. And uh, in a way you can understand that it was like a big summer camp. I mean, and I think it was very hard for the Isseis. They were terrified. They had no idea if they're ever going to go back to their homes in California, which many didn't. And I think, for the Niseis my father's age group and you're talking about which generation, I think it was devastating all their plans for like a college or a future jobs or

you know, that all got scorched. And I feel that, it depended as you say, upon the generation you were in. And, my generation of course being so young, I sorta had, it was all enjoyable in a sense, speaking.

AT: 00:23:52 You had your grandmother kind of taking care of you. And.

CY: 00:23:56 I had my grandmother taking care of me and I had a, there was a strong community once you came to Chicago, you know, there was, which I was very, very quick and taking advantage of all the different, available resources we had, a while I'm not a religious person. I did go to church because going to the church, the community center, I got to make a lot of good friends and, you know, enjoy all the activities, campfire girls, et cetera, et cetera. And one thing about the South Side of Chicago became my little Japanese village. You know, you walked down the street or 43rd where I lived on 43rd and Drexel, you know, there's a Japanese grocery store, a Japanese coffee shop, you know, Japanese mochi store and you know, you just go and that whole area. And then I would go and visit all my girlfriends and, you know, who lived on various different blocks. And it was quite an interesting time. And they know that there was a community that got developed clubs. There were all of these basketball teams, baseball teams such, you know, as that, you know.

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<Begin Segment 6>

AT: 00:25:28 So getting into this, this experience of coming to Chicago, do you have memories of actually traveling to Chicago?

CY: 00:25:38 Yes, yes, yes, yes.

AT: 00:25:39 And so did you take a train or?

CY: 00:25:41 Yeah, we did take a train. I remember coming with my grandmother and my uncle and we were on this train and, I do remember we had oranges in a bag and we ate those. And I just was so fascinated by the city. I was so fascinated. I always remember that, I don't know when I took the L ride or the, you know, but I thought, oh my gosh, you know, I was like, we're on top of the world. And it was just fantastic because in camp you always saw him, you know, in close. You always, every day I would walk along the fence and the soldiers, occasion would give me a piece of chocolate. So I love to be able to get a piece

of chocolate because they were very, you know, worrying. I don't know what they were worried about. I think that, you know, we're the song might jump a fence or something, but, um, you're always feeling like you're in closed. Whereas when you come to a place where suddenly there was no fences, it's a very big experience. It's a, even for, at that time I was seven or eight. It's a very interesting experience, you know, freedom.

- AT: 00:27:01 As far as the, the city itself, do you remember some of your first impressions?
- CY: 00:27:09 I was very, well, we went to the South Side of Chicago and, I remember, of course I was overwhelmed by everything and, but one of the problems was I was on 43rd street and the, there was a problem with the stock yards. You know, in the old days, Chicago had stock yards. And I remember once a while I get the whiff of the smell and the stock yards and we'd say, oh my gosh, what's that? I always remember that. But we also had the lake and we would, all the kids would get together and we'd all walk together and go and jump off the rocks. Nowadays, this would be considered very dangerous, but we all take our towels and then go jump off the rocks off 43rd and on Lake Michigan. And this is the days before the of the show. I was even built, you know, it was a long time ago and, we really had a good time. I mean.
- AT: 00:28:10 Do you remember your address? The exact address?
- CY: 00:28:13 Well I remember many, many places we lived in, but the last address was at 935 East 43rd street. It was above a tamper and yeah.
- AT: 00:28:25 You said that was the last?
- CY: 00:28:27 South Side place. Yeah. Then we moved out of the South Side and we went to the West Side of Chicago.
- AT: 00:28:36 Just to have a sense, a better sense of where your family stayed in Chicago. Can you walk me through maybe like.
- CY: 00:28:50 Like where we lived?
- AT: 00:28:51 Yeah, kind of chronologically if possible.
- CY: 00:28:52 It was very hard to explain this because I came, when I came to Chicago, of course we're in a boarding house on Drexel Boulevard. Then we went to this sort of like tenement building. I

always remember this apartment because it was on the top floor of a big apartment building and it had one bathroom that service the whole floor type of thing. And we went there on Drexel, then we moved a few blocks and we moved down to a 43rd street and I said 935 East 43rd. But I remember right after that we moved again for a short period to, 43rd in Berkeley. Yeah. Which was a few blocks more east. So we did jump around a lot, you know, it was a.

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<Begin Segment 7>

AT: 00:29:56 And by this time you mentioned that you were enrolled in a private school? Was that.

CY: 00:30:01 But that was only at the very beginning when I started, when I came out to Chicago because my parents didn't know what to do. They want to work all day. And my grandmother found the job at a factory and they didn't know where to put me. And so no one to watch me. They put me into this St. George Private School on Drexel, and, so I was there until the fifth grade. And then she, my mother says they just couldn't afford it anymore, but it was really nice, you know? Yeah. I was very grateful. It was a very nice school. They gave me piano lessons and you know, sometimes, I was the only of two or three kids in a class, you know, so I, it was very, very progressive. It was good.

AT: 00:30:52 So very, very small class sizes?

CY: 00:30:56 Yeah, it was very small class sizes. Just the first year was difficult because I was, when I was first put into, I guess first grade they said I was too old to be in Kindergarten. They up knee up to was a secondary or something and I couldn't speak English. Cause I was. And I remember being very, very upset because I asked to go to the washroom, but I kept saying, you know, very slangy term of I have to go Benjo you know, and then the teacher said, just ignored me. And finally I just had an accident and she got furious with me and, I was very embarrassed and I always remembered that, she was a very, very angry teacher. She was angry that she had to deal with me. I think there was a lot, the war was still going on and, and the yard, you know, the recess yard kids would come up and say that, you know, their father was in the Pacific War and, this and that and this and that. So did, he had some problems, but it's all the guy just being kids, you know.

AT: 00:32:18 So even at a very young age, you were kind of experiencing this discrimination directly?

CY: 00:32:27 What I would do is, because I was called a day boarder, it was a school that really was for people who boarded over there. I got to go home everyday. Someone picked me up around six O'clock. There's, after working and I told my mother I wanted to bring a bag of candy the next stage of school. And she said, oh, okay. So she gave me a bag of candy and I would pass it out. I said, if you don't hit me, if you play with me, I'll give you some of my candy. And it worked, you know, and being kids, no one really is into, you know, any, theoretical problems with the war or anything. They just wanted to have fun. So I would bring my stash of candy and give it away. So it's funny, I always remember that.

AT: 00:33:16 Smart kid!

CY: 00:33:16 I mean, you know, it's a clever way of saying, okay, you get to play with me, but I, you know, you play with me, you can't go around, you know, this and that, you can't beat me up or anything, you know. Mmm. Mmm.

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<Begin Segment 8>

AT: 00:33:32 You mentioned your grandmother found a job at a factory.

CY: 00:33:36 Some factory I, they used to jump around. Those jobs were, yeah. Yeah.

AT: 00:33:42 And how about your parents? What were they doing?

CY: 00:33:45 Oh, gosh, my mother found a job in a factory. My father was always a, well, it's, it's sort of embarrassing to say my father was more of a gambler and he liked to go to the pool hall and he liked to go to the tracks. And so I, you know, he had occasional jobs here and there, but he really didn't, I can't remember anything that he really did, you know, as a profession or as a, as a career really. He had all these little jobs. He was a line cook at a restaurant once and you know, whatever.

AT: 00:34:32 So, in that case, do you think that it was probably your mother and your grandmother who had the steady income?

CY: 00:34:42 It was my mother who basically had the steady income, from the, from this factory. Umh.

AT: 00:34:50 And do you remember what these, what kind of factories they were? What?

CY: 00:34:55 Fishnet factory I remember she had and she was very upset. I forgot the year when they moved out of Chicago. Yeah. And, she had to find another job. Um, where did she go after that? I think she went to UPS and found a job at UPS. Oh Wow. And then after that she found a job with an insurance company that, I think continental, yeah, downtown. And she was there until she retired. Yeah. So she always had a steady job. This is a woman who always worked, you know.

AT: 00:35:42 Had she worked in LA as well, do you know?

CY: 00:35:46 Well, my mother was very young when she had me and I imagine that a, she used to, Oh yes, she did. She worked in the, on first street in the, she said them, Ma Manju or mochi place that, yeah, yeah, she worked there, but you know, there's like a high school type of salary.

AT: 00:36:10 It back in LA.

CY: 00:36:12 Yeah.

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<Begin Segment 9>

AT: 00:36:14 So you, you shared a little bit about those earlier days and the South Side and you had mentioned that there is a bit of a Japanese American community there, that there were restaurants and.

CY: 00:36:36 It was a huge community. Yeah.

AT: 00:36:38 Grocery stores? Can you maybe go into a little bit more detail about, I guess to start maybe some of those businesses that you were recalling the grocery store, if you remember their names are, or where they were located?

CY: 00:36:57 Well, the name of one's Fujimoto's grocery store. He owned the building. Actually, on 43rd street here. A lot of the real estate in the area. Fujimoto's. Well, I forgot the teapot in. I think my

mother worked there for awhile as a waitress. Mmm. I'm trying to remember the, then you're asking for the names of these places. I don't remember the names, but I remember. You know, Oh, there was this, a store that sold a mochi, you know, flavored mochi down the street. And we would go in there and buy one just to munch on and that was run by an old, I thought at that time old, probably younger than me now, old, Issei man who did, who ran the business by himself.

AT: 00:37:58 And, if you were to kind of map out the area where some of these businesses, and I imagine there were a lot of Japanese American families living there too, like residents. So in thinking about the South Side at that time, like where do you think those, I mean not to put it in borders in terms of borders, but that area, where would that have spanned to and from?

CY: 00:38:30 Well, you're asking what the geography of that was? It was a huge area. You know, there were Japanese friends of mine that lived on 39th Street, way down, much more south and, or maybe that would be north, I guess, excuse me. And there were a large, and these people that live more further up north, closer to the school. I went to Hyde Park High School. So going up and that area, you're going into a 51st or 52nd now called the Hyde Park area, you know? Yeah. So there were, it was quite a big area in a sense of speaking it dependent on financial too, if you like. My, my mother's family and we were all sort of like eking out a whatever living we could. We had a more of a rough time, but the Japanese who had came out or camp with more of a financial, let's say, cash co stash, so to speak. They were able to afford buying buildings. They bought a, some buildings and they lived more, north more south, more south, more, more in the Hyde Park area. It depended upon your financial situation.

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<Begin Segment 10>

AT: 00:39:59 And, so you mentioned you went to St. George until fifth grade. Where did you go?

CY: 00:40:08 After that? I went to a school called Shakespeare Grammar school. Yeah, yeah. It was on the South Side.

AT: 00:40:17 And from there you said you went to Hyde Park High School?

CY: 00:40:21 Yeah.

AT: 00:40:24 Um and can you, uh, tell me a little bit more about the, the demographics of that neighborhood and those schools? At that time.

CY: 00:40:37 It was, at that time it was.

AT: 00:40:41 Okay.

CY: 00:40:42 It was a lot of Jewish kids. There were, Japanese and Jewish and I used to play with some of the African American kids that, there was more or less, color line, I would call it between 43rd and Drexel then. And there was a street called cottage grove. And on the other side there was influx of, African Americans, you know, who made the great migration, as you probably know, you know, and they were coming into the city too. At the same time, a lot of the Jewish people were abandoning the area because the Japanese came in and whatever, and lot of them moved into the suburbs and north, you know, Chicago, et cetera. So, although, you know, I have friends who, strangely enough when they came to Chicago like Jean Machine Ma, you know, we were talking about she, lived on the West Side of Chicago and, she grew up among, mostly Caucasian people was I grew up mostly it was all Japanese, you know, Japanese Americans, so to speak.

AT: 00:42:08 Okay. And, as you were growing up in Chicago, did you, besides school, did you have any other activities?

CY: 00:42:17 A lot. Yeah, the activities were centered around, the, the church actually because they provide a lot of Bible study things and I would go to summer camps and, I made a lot of friends. I used to go up and down the street going into and taking my doll buggy and, and, looking for people to play house with. And, yeah, it was nice time.

AT: 00:42:53 And, what was the name of this church?

CY: 00:42:56 You know, I knew you're going to ask that. Oh, now I remember Ellis Community Center. It was actually a church, too. Ellis Community Center.

AT: 00:43:09 Okay.

AT: 00:43:10 And.

CY: 00:43:11 There was a reverend. I remember the reverend Nishimoto. Yeah, he was very good.

AT: 00:43:23 And so there you said that there were a lot of activities through the church?

CY: 00:43:27 Yeah, well it's through that community center, we would go, we could go every day and we'll go on to the, what they call a play area. There was a pool table. Um, they participated in, you know, years are gone and they're still doing it at the Museum of Science and Industry. There's something about Christmas around the world every year Christmas we participated in that. The group from the Ellis Community Center, we got to put on a, I guess a skip. I was not really a skip so much as it was the story of the birth of Jesus, you know? And it was really very exciting that we were at the museum and we were so proud of ourselves or you know, just I guess a fourth, fifth grade kids and I to this day, I remember my teacher there named Mary Matsumoto and she, she makes watch and impression on me, you know, such a wonderful impression.

AT: 00:44:28 What did she teach?

CY: 00:44:30 Well, I don't really know. She was our Sunday school teacher, our counselor, you know, she sort of just hovered over us. She took care of everything, you know, she was actually a very young woman, but I, you know, I, of course when I'm young like that, I think, I think she's an older lady. She must've been all of 19 or 20 and, and, going to college or something, you know, but I always remember her. She was very warm and, sort of like a mentor later. You know, I remember.

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<Begin Segment 11>

AT: 00:45:09 One thing I'm curious about is you mentions. The, how strongly your, your father and your grandmother, specifically, how they had kind of, what their response was to the war and the evacuation.

CY: 00:45:29 Very embarrassing to talk about that, they were very bitter. I mean, that's all I can remember is that I think two of my father's dying day, he was, you know, he might've been suffering from depression and I have no idea such, but I know that, oh, my father had a lot of trouble, with, you know, different races. He had issues, you know, when, I would play with my, different friends, you know, and, he was very, very bitter man. So I, I try and, you know, remember that try to overcome that kind of thinking.

AT: 00:46:21 Well, and my question was, did he, and maybe your grandmother, if you remember, when you made the move to Chicago. Did they still have or, share some of those feelings with you? Are, maybe about the move or about Chicago itself or did anything change?

CY: 00:46:53 Well, you asking if they were still bitter about everything?

AT: 00:47:01 Or, if there was bitterness about being in Chicago, you know, kind of uprooting and starting a new in this.

CY: 00:47:08 Well, yeah, they did. Yeah. Because it's interesting that when you came to Chicago, I had my aunt around, I had an uncle, I had a lot of relatives. Every single one of them left within a period of year or maybe two years after we got here, they all went back to California. They hated it. They hated Chicago. I think probably the biggest excuse was the weather. But I think they were not used to it. They, you know, they grew up in California and it was entirely different kind of country and, they want to go back there and they regarded as home. So, so I think, a lot of them eventually went back and my father never would, as I said, you know, until, until he was an old man, you know.

AT: 00:48:07 And did you have any feelings about it?

CY: 00:48:11 About going back to, oh, well I did in the sense that when I was a teenager, I lost a lot of my friends. They were all going back. There was a strong migration of Japanese American families going back, you know, to California. And, I sorta wish, oh, I wish I could go back to, but it was something that when you're a child, you don't really conceive of what it would be like. All you know is that you're here in Chicago, this is your home and you've grown up here all your life. So, it was something that, it never occurred to me, you know.

AT: 00:48:52 And, being a kid in Chicago or you know, of course growing up here. And having those types of experiences where it's, you know, a pretty strong reminder of what happened during the war and kind of how you had ended up in Chicago as a kid growing up here, were you pretty self aware of, you know, like how you had gotten to Chicago, or this kind of. This particular experience, you know, was camp something that people, young people were aware of or thinking about or talking about?

CY: 00:49:37 Actually, they referred to it back and forth, but it was not something that was discussed at any length. You know, it was, you know, how kids are teenagers more interested in the next

dance or the next get together. And, I think we all sort of huddled together. You know, we all felt more protected by being very, very close. We are in the organizations where in the interclub council, I remember, you know, it was very interesting because, I think the people that ran, you know, people like the Resettlers Committee, which I think preceded of course the JASC now that I think they worked very hard at trying to establish a cohesive community. And I very grateful for that because I feel rather proud of the way we, integrated into the city and how, I, I believe Chicago welcomed us of for the most part, you know, for the most part. And Japanese were very good at keeping a very low profile. So it's not to rock the boat, so to speak. You know, we were good workers and, a lot of my friends became very, good scholars. They went to colleges, et cetera, and they had a very good life, you know, and that was a, that was part of the nature of the, I think, the personality of the Japanese people.

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<Begin Segment 12>

AT: 00:51:45 I want to touch on a specific thing that you had mentioned. So you mentioned the interclub council. Yeah. Can you tell me more about your involvement and that or other clubs?

CY: 00:52:02 Do you remember? I mean, you don't remember of course, because.

AT: 00:52:05 Not personally, but.

CY: 00:52:06 But you've heard of it. I, I have a friend named Miyoko Awakawa, I dunno, she know her, but anyway, she was one of the, excuse me, officers of interclub council and we were all involved in that because of our organization, in sports, especially at where we would all play at a place called Olivet, community center, I guess Olivet community center.

AT: 00:52:43 Olivet Institute?

CY: 00:52:45 Exactly, exactly. And they would have meetings. I remember going to the meetings and I actually don't remember what we talked about, but, it was good because it was a, as a way of joining up and having an agenda and making sure that, people all felt included, you know, and, sports was a good vehicle, I feel for getting young people together. You know, it was, besides all

the dances and all that, but a sports is a way that people among the Japanese groups felt comfortable. Excuse me.

- AT: 00:53:36 And, so was this something that kind of took place? Because of course they're the Japanese American community in Chicago, sort of in these earlier days of late forties, early fifties, and on, people were kind of spread out?
- CY: 00:54:01 Oh, yes, yes.
- AT: 00:54:04 So I'm curious about first something like interclub council. Was this something that was like focused on any particular neighborhood or area or group or like who, who was.
- CY: 00:54:16 Reason it was good is it focused on the fact of combining the South Side and North Side teams together so that we didn't feel like, for a long time though the South Side teams, the same would feel the North Siders were like, you know, complete strangers to us and they were our enemies and we were very competitive, you know, but the interclub council was, I think it was a way to have us all get to know each other, which I thought was very smart, you know, now that I look back on it and we all made friends and I think, you know, everything was like North Side, South Side, the North Side had a Clark and Division area as you must have known. And, they had all the clubs as et cetera, so that when we had basketball games, we had the North Side teams versus the South Side teams and, and you know, there are things like we would have a beauty contest. I remember, a Nisei queen and all that kind of stuff going on those days. It was, it was always attempts to try and enjoy all the different, Japanese groups, you know, not to keep them so separated.
- AT: 00:55:49 And what, if there were like a greater reason, or intention behind this kind of.
- CY: 00:55:55 You know, I really don't know. I wasn't part of the organization as such, I just participated in it. But I do know that, people were all, you know, you have to be at the time, you have to be joining things because that's the only way, you know, your life is filled with some kind of, you know, enjoyment. You know. It was a time when I, I, when I remember going to high school and at time that I went to change later, I will, they said, you know, a girl want to get into a try high wide club. They had these high wide club and try our clubs. And, they told her because she was Japanese, she was not allowed to get in. And, I mean those, complete discrimination at that time. And, I heard that changed later of course. But, when we were younger, we were told we

can't do this. We can't do that because, you know, that's for the white people, and this is for the, you know, this is the Japanese, you know, because they don't want you there and they don't like you. So why do you push the button, you know, so to speak. And, I think we're always trying to, it was a, it was a hard time in the sense that it was postwar. It was postwar but, a lot of people still had strong memories of the war time. And, because of that, it's very hard to figure out, you know, how you can tread on this kind of a problem. You know, people, you know, some people just said, oh, I don't care. You know, it's fine with me. You know, I don't care if the, I get discriminated against or what. But I think the Japanese people were very frightened, especially the ones that were in camp. The ones that were a little bit older than me that already been tossed around, locked up behind barbed wire. They were very, very careful about not rocking the boat. Now, you know, my daughter came along and, you know, my, the younger generation, I don't think they quite understand how, how, how, we are so bogged down by the environment that we were in because I think a lot of people say, well, you could have just, you know, fought back. You could have done this or you could've done that. But, you know, it wasn't, it wasn't like that. It was very, it's very hard to explain and I'm sure people wiser than I am, can figure that out some day. But it's one of those, it's one of those things. It's like how the Jews walked into the concentration camps or, you know, how you just follow orders, you know, you figure, well, everyone's going to be good to us if we just, you know, behave. And I think that, that was a big point among Japanese people who were there. They knew how to behave. Then you how to take orders. They knew how to not rock the boat, but that's no longer the way it is. That's why when I read about the march, that's something that would never have happened in our days. See, it's, it's almost, you never want to put the spotlight on you. You always avoid that since those days are gone. Thank goodness.

CY: 00:59:57 Hmm.

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<Begin Segment 13>

AT: 00:59:59 Let's see. So this is, this is great because, you know, you were, like I mentioned where we're interested in this period of resettlement and you're kind of right at that age where you're, you know, going through, these clubs and sports programs and, and things like that. I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit

about, I mean, I, so the kind of establishment or organized organization of a community isn't something that you might necessarily realize is happening at the time.

- CY: 01:00:49 That's right!
- AT: 01:00:50 But I'm wondering in retrospect if you'd be able to tell me about, kind of some of the, the institutions or organizations or people that you remember kind of making that happen in Chicago. So whether it's folks that, all of it, I mean, granted you were of a certain age, so you're going through a particular experience of, of this development of community development. But what are some other, groups, or places maybe that was a part of this kind of founding of a community here?
- CY: 01:01:43 Are you talking about organizations like.
- AT: 01:01:46 Or churches or, anything?
- CY: 01:01:48 Well, I remember I didn't attend the church, but I remember the Buddhist church was a very strong influence. A man called Reverend Kubose was the reverend. And this was on the South Side of Chicago. And, that was quite a meeting place for a lot of teenagers, older teenagers. Got to meet them, future boyfriends, girlfriends, etc. That was good, organization as such. I think a lot, another thing that was good is that there were some big businesses such as, well, I, I was very fortunate. I always got a job. As I got older, I was working and I worked over at a place called Del farms as a, as a grocery checker. And, I got that job through Mr. Sunohara. I worked for him. Years later I worked for Henry Ushijima, who was a filmmaker for documentaries for Mayor Daley and I worked for him as a girl Friday. I always seem to be working with Japanese people. I worked for a man named Omar Kaihatsu, who was, I think he died now, but I worked for him as a secretary for awhile. So I was very fortunate. I had all these, you know, Japanese people helping me out.
- AT: 01:03:33 And was this post high school or in high school?
- CY: 01:03:37 Well, this is post of course. Yeah. During high school, I had, I worked at that Del Farms as a teenage cashier, you know.
- AT: 01:03:51 So maybe as a weekends or after school kind of job?

CY: 01:03:55 It was after school. I would go there after school and on weekends. Yeah. And I was a. I was very happy. I liked the job. It was fun because I got to meet a lot of people.

AT: 01:04:08 And where was that located?

CY: 01:04:09 The first, the one I worked at was on North Avenue and Armitage. It was called Del Farms. Okay.

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<Begin Segment 14>

AT: 01:04:19 And what year did you graduate high school?

CY: 01:04:21 I graduated in 1955.

AT: 01:04:26 Okay. And, can you tell me a little bit about what you did after high school? You mentioned a few of the jobs, but.

CY: 01:04:39 Huh, the problem was, right after I graduated I had this boyfriend, the Yamashiro of home. Okay. He wanted to get married. So foolishly I got married when, several months after I graduated, which was much too young and I was still working part time here and there. But that was. That was what I did. I got married and I'm with it all the problems of being a housewife, which.

AT: 01:05:21 Did you two move in together or move?

CY: 01:05:25 Yeah, I yeah, he actually, he moved in with me into my, into my house where I lived with my mother and father and grandmother.

AT: 01:05:33 And was, where was that at that time?

CY: 01:05:36 That was on the West Side of Chicago. Yeah.

AT: 01:05:43 Would you remember the streets of the address of that apartment or was it a house?

CY: 01:05:49 It was a house. It was a, it was a, it was on a street called Bloomingdale, near, was now I think called Bucktown area. But at that time it was pretty bad.

AT: 01:06:07 And, did you move anywhere after that path?

CY: 01:06:13 Yes, all over the city. So my husband and I then moved to a place honoree Racine my girlfriend's father on the building near a Wrigley Field, it was Racine and Addison and, moved over there for a little while. And then from there we moved to an apartment on Orchard Street near Diversity and Orchard, which, you know, is so I know all these neighborhoods. And, then, then, we moved up north to the fringe of uptown area, is a Clark and Foster area. And shortly after that my kids were growing up, I had two children. Actually I had three. One died. So I had, with two children and, I eventually got a divorce. Okay. So we lived up on Clark and Foster then. Yeah. I sold the place and moved to Ravenswood Manner, which I told you about that one. And I'd been there for over 40 years. Okay. This is all sort of personal stuff, you know.

AT: 01:07:48 And

CY: 01:07:49 I, and you're editing it, I hope. You know.

AT: 01:07:52 Yes. no, and to be clear, it's just, one of the reasons we're curious about where people stayed and lived is.

CY: 01:08:03 You have to remember too, Chicago has changed a lot.

AT: 01:08:05 Sure.

CY: 01:08:06 Chicago's one of those cities that, when you say now, I lived on Orchard Street near Diversey, oh, you know, such a great neighborhood. At that time it was all tenements, you know, it was really, really a bad neighborhood. Everything changes in Chicago. It depends on, you know, you could live across from Cabrini Green. My son had a place a business establishment across from Cabrini Green and then the city went and changed it all around and now became all yuppie area. And Yeah. So the taxes went up and, everything is, changed. It's interesting this city is a van or location, location, location.

AT: 01:08:51 Right, right. And, so as you mentioned before and kind of what's you know, pretty generally understood by, I would say, Japanese American community members here in Chicago is, in when people were first coming from camp, there were a lot of challenges in finding housing. There's a lot of housing discrimination and, you know, some issues with some of the neighborhoods where people were actually able to find housing. And you mentioned that, you know, some of these areas where you'd stayed. Of course, it's not the same that it was You know, even 10 years ago for some of these spots, were there, did you

have any, Were there any challenges in the, in some of these past homes or apartments or,

CY: 01:09:52 Well, it's interesting that you say that, but it has nothing to do with, I think it being Japanese American, I had a hard time. I own the, you know, I sold the place on Clark and Foster and I wanted to get a mortgage for my place on the Ravenswood. And I had a hard time because I was a single woman and a lot of at that time a single woman was very, very risky for banks to give them a loan to and no husband. I said I could pay it by myself. I had a job at a hospital and they said, well, you know, it's, you know, you, you're not married. And so I went jumping from place to place and I finally found, Tom and at that time, Tom, and so they would give me a mortgage, but that was due to other people had that problem too, being, being a woman without a husband created all kinds of, you know, cultural issues, which is not the same as now of course, you know.

AT: 01:11:00 Sure. And it's not the same as 1945.

CY: 01:11:06 Oh yeah. Well 1945. Yeah. That was a nightmare year. Yeah.

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<Begin Segment 15>

AT: 01:11:12 So we have a, just a little bit of time left, let's see. I guess, but before I get into kind of a random question, is there anything else, you know, as far as, so since, you know, we are curious and interested in learning more about resettlement in Chicago and kind of those, this start of, you know, a pretty strong Japanese American community, or at least Japanese American presence in Chicago. Are there any other things that come to mind or that you'd want to share and, helping us have a better sense of what that was like?

CY: 01:12:05 It was interesting. It was a time of transition. I don't really know if I can, you know, really help you out with that because, it depends on, as I say, the times, the times are changing very quickly, very fast. It was unheard of at the time that, you know, when I was young, but to be mixed marriages, for instance, as such, my daughter is married to a German fellow. You know, I mean, it's so different now, you know, but at the time, you know, it was, it was a very narrow way to see the world. And I think we maintained that I have in this Japanese community and having boyfriends in that group and having the clubs all know each other. We tried to sustain and maintain it, but a lot of

them, as we got older, we have what we call reunions. We're old now and, there are certain was like, I like to go to the unions. Say, have it in Las Vegas or something, but there are some of the people that just want nothing to do with it one. Nothing, as a reminder, it depends on, I guess what you got out of it for yourself. You know, I feel like, it created a lot of good memories for me. There was some sad memories too, and, self-worth. But I feel that, I feel that it was very, very unique. You know, it's like I get together with Japanese people now, my church. I do go to church now. And, and you know, you get, you meet people in the first thing you said, one of the first things you say, where were you in camp? You know what, someone who was around my age in the 80s and what camp are you in? So it's a form of, you know, it's a touchstone that, because say, you know, and I've had friends who were not in camp who are almost jealous of the fact that, well, I don't have the community sense that you do because I don't know these people are that people are there. Because, I was, I stayed in Chicago. I said, well, I just stay in Chicago because if you're in Chicago and the war broke out, you were not sent into a camp. It's interesting that, I feel, I was more privileged to be able to be in this, history. I don't think my children will ever understand us, you know, because they see it as a sort of anomaly, you know, that, you know, the world's, so you're Japanese American and, so what? You know, their attitude, well, it was a big thing at the time. It was a community that could never be reestablished and it was unique and, we thought it would go on forever, you know, at the time and it doesn't like everything else, you know, it, it dissolved and, that's what's so sad about it. You know, it is what it is, you know what I'm saying?

- AT: 01:15:52 Do you, are you saying that the community dissolved, that sense of community?
- CY: 01:15:57 Yes, yes, yes. Which is good because it was too enclosed.
- AT: 01:16:03 Yeah. Do you have any, any thoughts of why that might have happened or what happened?
- CY: 01:16:09 Well, I believe one of the things is that we were all together because we were desperate for trying to survive. You know, at postwar. But as people became more prosperous, as people became more aware that they could establish themselves in the city, they felt that they wanted to go into like the suburbs or they felt they didn't want to be tagged along with, you know, provincial ideas of being a Japanese community as such. And I can understand that, you know, it's, you got one foot in that, one foot in this other, what you want to do is you want to be

just as the same as the whole population here. There's a sense of, we, you know, we all felt we weren't less than but we were not Caucasian people, you know, so it's interesting. It's a very, very half and half type of thing. Yeah. I don't know how to put it.

- AT: 01:17:26 It is interesting and I keep thinking about what you were sharing about, some of your father's perspectives because on the one hand he, you mentioned he was pushing for, you know, we need to assimilate that, you know, it's almost like, you know, quote unquote our faults or, you know, we're taking on the burden.
- CY: 01:17:50 Right, right, right
- AT: 01:17:51 But on the other hand, when you were bringing home friends who are not Japanese, you said.
- CY: 01:17:58 Oh, it's terrible.
- AT: 01:17:58 He had issues with it. So it's, it's kind of, that's what I'm, to what you're saying, that's just what I'm thinking about is kind of this double edge sword.
- CY: 01:18:08 Yes. Yes. Especially I had real close Korean girlfriend. Oh yeah. It's just the whole, I had to see her on the sly, so to speak. And yeah, he had all kinds of, very, racial or racist ideas about people. I don't know, it was just his ideas that would be a projection of his own anger. I remember he, he worried about, when I was growing up about my being dark, he said, don't let yourself get dark. And if they would rub lemon all over me thinking that, and they were worried about, you know, looking, to, Asian, that was a big thing. You know, he felt that was a detriment. And, he, he himself, put a great emphasis on appearance of, you know, Japanese people, you know, he felt it was very exhausting to be around. Yeah. In that sense of speaking, you know,

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<Begin Segment 16>

- AT: 01:19:33 So again, we just have a little bit of time left. I'm curious in, in your opinion and. With the perspective of a lot of time and distance from, you know, the war and all of that. What are

some of the ways, if any, that the wartime experience and resettlement impacted your life or maybe you as a person or?

CY:

01:20:15

It's a big question. You mean the whole experience and how it impacted my, I don't really know how to put it. It's very hard to explain. I, all I know is that as I've gotten older, I wasn't like that when I was young, but as now I'm in my eighties. I often feel like. Okay, let me put it this way. There's a, there's a magazine I just read about the article and the Crazy Asians, you know, about the Chinese American community that's all excited about finally getting through and having a film about them as a contemporary. And I was thinking, you know, it took a long time for that to happen. It wasn't the issue of them being in a, you know, dragon lady type of thing or anything like that. But, I thought, that's how I felt about the Japanese Americans that we were always seen as a, you know, the Geisha girl or something like that. And I always felt a little resentful about that, but I figured that's the way it is. And, you know, you can't change it, but sometimes I, I, I really do get upset about, you know, how people come up to me and, and I saw ignorance, you know, saying, well you speak English very well, or you know, or this and that. And I think, and then I'm always surprised at, I have a girlfriend who was next door and was a lawyer who had no knowledge, hardly any knowledge of the camp. I mean, this is a woman who's been through, you know, university and everything. But she had, she said, well, how was it like, and what was it like and why and this and then I thought to myself, you're the one that's an attorney. You should probably know all these answers. But you know, it could see that some people are just so not aware of these things. And it's sort of gets me a little angry that that kind of knowledge hasn't been a shared. It isn't that no one cares. It's just that no one bothered, you know, it's like, it's like when I read all the history of the American Indians, I mean, I'm sitting there shocked by what happened is because no one actually teaches you these things and this is what's going on with me now. It took me a long time to realize. I think it's wrong, you know. But it's one of those things, is it human nature? And because, maybe right now, I'm reacting against the current president. And uh, I feel that, you know, these times are very, very scary. There's nothing I can say that uh, you know. And when you're older like this, you no longer have your youth, your vitality. You know, your health. Everything. It's on the waning end, you know, and you just have start realizing the regrets you had. What you could have done. But on the other hand, you have to be able to forgive yourself you know. Mhm. So.

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<Begin Segment 17>

- AT: 01:24:07 One question I like to finish up these conversations with is, if you could leave any type of legacy or, or message for maybe your children or grandchildren. What's something you would want them to know or understand? Or leave with them?
- CY: 01:24:33 Yeah, it's, it's very hard. If I could leave one thing it's try not to apologize for yourself, because were always going to do things we're going to regret. And it's, it's part of human nature. And uh, and one of the things I'm very grateful for are my friends and the community. Whenever I could do, I was never very good about doing things about, what I should have done. But on the other hand, I'm not going to beat myself up over it, you know. And I thought maybe talking to you about this would help, a little bit. I don't know, you might edit the whole thing out. But it's very, very hard to regather old memories, you know? So um, I hope it worked out.
- AT: 01:25:30 Well, and is there anything, any final things you might like to add? Or that I might have missed in this conversation?
- CY: 01:25:36 Well, you know, I can't think of anything right now. There might have been. There are so many things. A person who's been here for a long time and so many things have happened. Uh, but I think the most important, significant event was the camp. I didn't realize that before, I thought so what. It was like something I shrugged off. But now that I've gotten older, I realize the significance of what happened. And uh, the barbed wire and the whole thing of being separated from my parents. And uh, being in, in a school where I only spoke Japanese for a long time and how frustrated and angry it made my teacher and. But you know, it's, it's interesting. You don't think it of that way, until you get older and realize that was quite an experience. You know, you think, you just sort of shrug it off. But it really is something.
- AT: 01:26:50 Well, thank you so much for, for coming in and sharing with me.
- CY: 01:26:55 It's almost like a therapy session. I mean you know going over all those memories has a profound affect, you know. I'm sure you talk to a lot of people and I'm sure they have the same reaction. Yeah, because everyone had a different experience but it's still the same experience in some ways.

AT: 01:27:26 Mhm.

CY: 01:20:15 You know, yeah, and um I, I suppose for some it was a good experience. And for others like my father, if you had my father here, it be a very different thing, you know. And uh, it's interesting.

AT: 01:27:47 Well, thank you again for coming in.

CY: 01:20:15 Oh, you're welcome. I hope I see you again someday.

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