

Densho Digital Repository
Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and
Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS)
Oral History Project Collection
Title: Tonko Doi Interview
Narrator: Tonko Doi
Interviewer: Anna Takada
Location: Chicago, Illinois
Date: September 3, 2019
Densho ID: ddr-chi-1-19-11

<Begin Segment 11>

- TD: 00:49:05 Lincoln and, yeah. Yes, yes. Very close. And we still live in that neighborhood, you know, so we haven't moved far.
- AT: 00:49:17 Um, can you, so you were 16 when you came to Chicago. Um, do you, would you happen to remember some of your first impressions of coming to the city?
- TD: 00:49:30 Yes. Well, was I 16 or I was still 15? I think I was still 15 and then be, I became 16. I became a junior. My impression, well, you know, we didn't live in such a beautiful neighborhood in Cincinnati, but in Cincinnati, it's not like Chicago, it's not so congested. And where we lived on Kenmore, the train ran and back the the Red Line was right in back of our kitchen. So it was very noisy in the beginning and now you become accustomed to it. And I remember that, uh, I, uh, was where I was got off the train, I was 15 and I was gonna go for a job some place. Oh, I know downtown applying for a job. So I was wearing heels, which I don't wear heels. Well anyway, I got off the train and it was so hot in August that my heel got stuck in the asphalt.
- TD: 00:50:29 You know how you at that time, I don't know if they still have it like that, but you know, the asphalt melted. So what's that? And we didn't have, um, air conditioning, so, and we didn't have any air conditioning in Cincinnati either, but my father was very creative, but so in Cincinnati when it was hot, which it is, it's like Louisiana, you know, it's humid, very humid. It's right on the river. He would take us the whole family and would sleep in the park. And it was nice and cool. There were other families there too. Not so many, but my father he knew it would be cooler in the park.
- AT: 00:51:11 But I'm guessing that wasn't something you'll try it in Chicago?

TD: 00:51:16 Aye. You know what, my father, no, we didn't sleep in the park in Chicago, although he would have I guess. Um, but he bought this, um, gadget. It was a scam really. It was like a cooler. You're supposed to put water in it and the fan blows. We didn't get cool.

AT: 00:51:37 All right. Um, so, uh, the last question we were on was, um, about first impressions of Chicago. Um, and you had mentioned some of the comparisons between Cincinnati. Um, so you said it was very hot. It's congested. You're living right off of the red lines. That's very noisy.

TD: 00:52:00 Another thing, um, Kenmore in those years, in the 50s, um, oh, okay. it was a mixed street actually, and I found out that there were a few JA families that live, but we never saw them. We just went toward Irving park to get to work or we didn't meet mingle with anybody on the street, as, uh socialize I should say. But there were, um, Appalachian families who were very loud and I think, uh, fighting and when we had our windows open, you could hear them, you know, there was uh, fighting on the street, which you didn't hear in Cincinnati, Cincinnati, even though you lived in a poor neighborhood, people were polite. My opinion.

AT: 00:52:51 Chicago was a little rougher?

TD: 00:52:53 Rougher, rougher. Yeah. I mean, in the building that we lived in, in Cincinnati, as I said, there were many, like 90% JA because of the Quakers placing them there. But whenever we would come to Chicago, not often, but when we did and while we lived here, my parents are, were just astounded at how many Japanese Americans there were. And when they would see with it, it'd be like a sighting. My mother says, "Oh, Nihon-jin". Now how do they know they were Japanese? I don't know. Not, oh, Chinese, no. Nihon-jin, Japanese. That's what she said. Um, they were so excited.

<End Segment 11> - Copyright © 2019 Japanese American Service Committee (JASC) and Chicago Japanese American Historical Society (CJAHS). All Rights Reserved.