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Title: Hiroki Kimiko Keaveney Interview
Narrator: Hiroki Kimiko Keaveney
Interviewer: Anna Takada
Location:
Date: September 2, 2017
Densho ID: ddr-chi-1-3

<Begin Segment 1>

Anna Takada: 00:00:00 Thank you. Could start by you stating your name.

Hiroki Keaveney: 00:00:04 Yeah. My name is Hiroki Kimiko Keaveney. Um, yeah, my middle name is my grandma's name, and then Hiroki I recently changed my name to, um, yeah.

AT: 00:00:15 And, and where are you from?

HK: 00:00:18 Uh, I grew up in Ohio, but I was born out in California and I've been living on the west coast, um, in different cities for the past like eight years or so. And recently came back to the Midwest.

AT: 00:00:31 Okay, and just for context, can you help me out with where you were in Ohio and then California and when you came to Chicago?

HK: 00:00:40 Yeah, so I was born in LA area. Um, when I was four we moved out to Ohio. I lived there till I was 18. I went to school in Seattle. And then, um, I moved to LA to be near my grandparents actually cause I wanted to learn, um, my history, cause I grew up in the Midwest with my Irish family, but I didn't really know anything about my Japanese American family. I knew we were part of the internment, but I, I mean, you know how it is. So I honestly didn't really know the full story. And so really the choice of moving there was to record their stories, to learn it from them. And I'm really lucky because my family has recorded a lot in the Densho website, which is a gift that I know a lot of people don't have. Um, so anyway, um, so I lived in LA and then I moved to the Bay Area, like San Francisco/Oakland, and I went to school there and then I moved to Washington DC and Donald Trump became the president. So I'm really lucky with work that I was able to leave Virginia and moved to the Midwest, to Illinois, for my job. So yeah, I hope that helps with the -

AT: 00:01:48 Yeah, of course.

HK: 00:01:49 Okay.

AT: 00:01:49 And, so when, when exactly did you arrive to Chicago then? How long have you been here?

HK: 00:01:54 Uh, April. So, is that half a year now, or five months? Six months. April, May, June, July, August, five months. Yeah.

AT: 00:02:04 Okay. Um, awesome. Yeah. So then if you want to, I'd love to hear more about your family story and, and what you have learned about your family's history.

HK: 00:02:19 Yeah. Um, sometimes you wonder why you are the way you are and like why none of your family lives near each other, and why there were so many family secrets and why your family is dysfunctional to be honest. And learning my family story about internment and their deportation cause they were no-no boys and um, yeah, like it just, it gave me so much compassion for my family and for my mom and for myself. And that's why these are so important because it's like this is the historical context that like heals because, yeah, it sucks that our community kept it silent for so long. Um, yeah. So yeah. Cause it's crazy how I think a lot of people, non-Japanese people always want to learn this sensational like internment story of like you didn't have bathrooms or like the stalls didn't, you know, like salacious. Is that a word? Salacious details? Um, I dunno if it cause it makes people feel sad or connected or what, but it's not really that interesting. It's sad. But, um, I was actually talking to, I did an ethnic studies program at San Francisco State and I was talking to my coordinator who is super awesome. She like helped found ethnic studies and she and I were talking about how, um, what's more interesting about the internment is the after effects of the generations following. Um, because like, yeah, it's amazing how much it psychologically wounded us as a community. Um, amazing is the wrong word. It's, um, yeah. Um, I'm don't think I'm answering your question.

AT: 00:04:11 No, that's, that's all good.

HK: 00:04:13 What was your question?

AT: 00:04:15 It doesn't matter. I don't know.

HK: 00:04:17 It does matter. Wait your question.

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<Begin Segment 2>

HK:

Oh, my family story. Okay. So, it kind of like came out of, um, I did a lot of organizing when I lived in Seattle, like with Queer and Trans, um, like Asian-Americans, Asian and Pacific Islanders and specifically Japanese Americans. And I did like a lot of pilgrimage work when I was there. Like I went to Minidoka, the internment camp that Seattle lights were incarcerated in and Bainbridge people, near Seattle, they were incarcerated and Manzanar, and then many petitioned to be moved to Minidoka. So it was interesting like having that connection because my family was incarcerated in Manzanar. But um, so anyway, I always knew since I was like in fourth grade when we learned about World War II that I wanted to go to an internment camp with my family. Like I knew we were incarcerated, but growing up in Ohio really isolated, like it was hard. It was hard. I didn't really know any other Japanese students. There was one person named Kelsey Miyahara and her brother and then my sister and my school had like 3000 students, like my high school and we were like the four Japanese American students, um, to my knowledge anyway. And, yeah, it was just hard, like being so disconnected. And so by the time I got to California and like had done like a lot of organizing and being really politicized in Seattle, um, like as a queer person of color. Like I came down to LA and I tried recording my family story. Even had like fucking, oh sorry, language. I even had like cassette tapes and stuff. I was like trying to like record their stories. But my grandmother had dementia pretty bad by then. So, but what was interesting about her dementia was she could remember the past, she couldn't remember the present and so, or like she, she was always in the present. That's weird. What about Alzheimer's. They're always in the present, which is like in Buddhism the ideal. But anyway, it had its good and bad moments. But um, but yeah, she always told me stories about World War II. I learned that, so my grandma, she, how do I say this? I like want to tell you my story, but it's so complicated that I don't, yeah, I'm not sure chronologically what would make the most sense, but basically the short story is like what I learned is that my family has been through a lot and they're really amazing. The amount that they've survived and like how they were able to make meaning out of just being handed a really bad deal. Like, and how they tried to uphold their family values even though, yeah, it's just really complicated. Um, like my grandfather became a no-no boy because my great grandmother wanted him to. He would have fought in the 442nd, but he wanted to

be a good Japanese son. He was the oldest son and you know, um, each of the siblings chose different paths. One sibling Anna, she stayed, oh, Anna, she stayed here in the states. She got married in an internment camp, cause they would have been undocumented citizens if they had stayed, um, because they lost their citizenship with the, um, questionnaire.

HK: 00:07:32 And so she stayed here. She moved to Hawai'i with her husband who she married I think in Tule Lake. And my great aunt grace and my great uncle Benny. And then my great grandfather and great grandmother and my Grandpa, they all were deported to Japan after being in, um, Bismark, North Dakota and Fort Lincoln because they were a part of the Hoshidan in Tule Lake, so, um, so like even just like learning that, like learning that my family got deported. I was like, oh my God. I was like, cause like you know when you're a kid and you hear stories like Oh your grandpa met your grandma in Japan. I was like, what were they trying Japan or like or like, oh your uncle gene's born in Japan. Um, but your mom who's adopted from Japan cause they couldn't get pregnant. So that's why she's an American citizen.

HK: 00:08:16 And like when I hear these stories like now as an adult and like learning them and piecing the stories together, it all makes sense why my family didn't have Japanese American friends. It all makes sense why, like they love white. It all makes sense why... really why we don't have Japanese American family friends. Um, being not only no-no boys but like being in the Hoshidan and deported. I was like, oh my God, like, and like, and I think right now, especially now that DACA is about to be taken away, it's like separating families and deporting people. It's like, how do I say, like I am a living example of why it's not good to deport people. Like, cause sometimes I like think about how screwed up my family is cause they were messed up already. Like lots of abuse in the family, but it's like internment magnified the already existing interpersonal dynamic problems and it just exacerbated the trauma.

HK: 00:09:23 And I think, um, yeah, I think, yeah, it's never good to deport people. I don't, I don't really, it's just, it's so heartbreaking, like, just everything happening with undocumented immigrants because immigration status is so, you know, and Asian-Americans have a long history of trying to get around the system and I think about undocumented Asian-Americans who are like so invisibilized like on triple levels and quadruple levels for being Asian and undocumented in a movement that's doesn't see them as, yeah, like the model minority and stuff. And um, and I think about how my family was undocumented and I think about how like, how do I say, like I think about

Chinese Americans too, and the paper sons and it's just like, yeah, immigration status is just so... anyway, but yeah, of course.

AT: 00:10:23 Thank you for, for sharing all of that.

HK: 00:10:25 Yeah.

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<Begin Segment 3>

AT: 00:10:27 I'm wondering if we could, uh, because I love getting into the zone -

HK: 00:10:35 Oh to focus on family.

AT: 00:10:36 Well just, um, just to go through

HK: 00:10:37 Chronologically?.

AT: 00:10:39 Yeah. Kind of like where they were at and like who.

HK: 00:10:42 Sure.

AT: 00:10:42 And who your family is? So we, so we can have that and then get into the -

HK: 00:10:48 the bigger questions. Okay.

AT: 00:10:49 Yes, yes.

HK: 00:10:49 Yeah. Oh yeah. Cause it's, that's the whole purpose of this is to connect. Okay.

AT: 00:10:53 Well just, and so I know too, because I, yeah, I would love to have just some more context.

HK: 00:11:00 Sure.

AT: 00:11:00 So -

HK: 00:11:02 What camp they were in?

AT: 00:11:04 Yeah. So, so your grandmother and your grandfather, um -

HK: 00:11:08 They met in Japan. My grandma's an immigrant.

HK: 00:11:12 Yeah. So I'll just talk about my American family and then I'll talk about them being in Japan and then I'll talk about them coming to America, again. Okay, cool. Cool. Yeah, I know, I told you it's super complicated. And then my mom was adopted from Japan, so I'm just like, God I'm working it out like every day. I go to therapy, I go to - I have my crystal, like here I'll just like have it out now. But, um, yeah, it's hard when it's a complicated story and then being biracial too. But I think being biracial isn't that complicated in the Japanese American community because most of us are. But, um, but it wasn't going to say, so my family immigrated to the United States from Japan and I think in 1910 if I looked at the census information correctly, um, there was Anna, Arthur, um, Grace and Ben and those were the four siblings. And my grandfather's name is Arthur. And so my grandparents, or my great grandparents, I'm pretty sure my great grandfather was a landscaper and he made a lot of the gardens in Manzanar that they're like uncovering now, especially by the hospital and the hospital's where my grandfather worked. Um, and that's also where he worked in Tokyo. Uh, US military base too, was like in as a quarterly. I think that's what they're called, the people who clean up stuff in hospitals. Um, so anyways, so they were living in LA area. Um, I think it was, oh my God. Where were they living in LA. It will come to me - Whittier high school? So maybe in Whittier? I, I've tried to remember the different areas of LA.

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<Begin Segment 4>

HK: 00:12:45 Um, so anyways, so they were living there and then, um, like everyone else they were put on buses and they were taken to, um, to Manzanar. And my grandfather described it as like, they were really scared. They just thought like they may shoot all of us. Like he, he like shared little details. I still remember from fourth grade about like how - he didn't tell me that part when I was in fourth grade, he told me that one as an adult about being scared that they were gonna get killed. But when I was in fourth grade, he told me that like, they like would stop on the side of the road and just give them toilet paper just to like, yeah, just like in public, just like so anyways, so -

AT: 00:13:25 And how old was he?

HK:

00:13:27

I think he was 23, if I remember. Like, and so it was really powerful, like, getting to know my grandparents at 20, I think I was 22 or 21. I actually think he was 22 or 21 cause I remember thinking, oh my God, like my grandpa was my age and I'm all the opportunities I've had because of my grandparents and financial support to get an education is because of them. Um, and he never had the opportunities to get an education, um, because he was incarcerated. And, um, so they were in Manzanar, um, and before they got sent to Tule Lake, um, the reason why I'm wearing this shirt is because my grandfather had a bunch of jobs and one of them was he would sell hot dogs at the baseball games, which I thought was pretty cool. And so I got this shirt at Manzanar when I went. Um, I forget, I think it was the Bainbridge pilgrimage. So what was interesting about his story was that I was so grateful I lived in Seattle, um, because I've been to Bainbridge and I've also met people on the internment like Minidoka pilgrimage committee who are from Bainbridge. And they were the first to be taken away. And so because it was so quick, they were sent to Manzanar and so because my grandparents were like landscapers, um like agricultural stuff like every Japanese American back then, or it's either hotels or agriculture. So they um, he farmed with them cause it was like a way to get out of the camps was you could go farming and like farming for the white people. And so they basically, like, he befriended people from Bainbridge island, which made sense because I remember when I was in undergrad, it's so funny when you learn the story and then all the details kind of fall into place, like they always talked about Bainbridge, when I lived in Seattle for undergrad, they were like, go to Bainbridge island, go to Bainbridge island. And I was like, okay, like I had no interest. And so now it makes sense. So the story, cause he was friends with people from Bainbridge, which is why they bought like a house there, um, as a property.

HK:

00:15:29

Um, yeah. So they were in the camps just doing their best to like, like what everyone else did, just doing their best to seem like a human being. And then, um, then the no-no, the, um, questionnaire came out. And so my grandfather would've fought, he wasn't gonna forswear his allegiance, but cause he always said, he's like, I didn't really understand the question and I would have said no to it. Um, cause I think for him it would've meant he wasn't Japanese, but he was willing to fight for the military. Like he was like, yeah, I would've fought for my country. I'm an American. Um, but my great grandfather, oh, I'm sorry, my great grandmother was really disillusioned. And she was like, no, like you need to be like a good son. I assume. Like it's funny, I read that John Okada's "No-No Boy" and I have a feeling - I don't know if my family was exactly like that, but it, it

just, a lot of it was mental health and I'm feeling disillusioned as a Japanese immigrant at that time, Like as an Issei, I can't, I can't even imagine what my great-grandmother was going through. And, um, and maybe I would've done the same thing too. Um, and so she was like, she was like, no, like I need to go back to Japan. We can't live here. They don't want us. And so I mean, like my family, they sold their car. I remember when they told me this, I think I was in fourth grade when they told me, they sold their car for \$10. And I just like when you're in fourth grade, you hear that and you're just like, what? But like as an adult, like \$10, I can't even get lunch for \$10. Like, and I know it's like different, you know, obviously it's not 1940s, but it's just so humiliating. I can't even imagine how she felt. Um, yeah, I can't even imagine how she felt. So she um, yeah, so they were no-nos, um, which was a sexist term! Cause there are no, no girls, I think, but whatever, um, cause Yuri, oh no, Yuri Kochiyama was part of the war. Nevermind, I was like was Yuri a no-no? Um, so basically my family, um, were sent to Tule Lake, and because they were a part of the no-nos, they were sent to like the, probably the shittier part of the camp, honestly. And from there they joined the Hoshidan, because I think they wanted to learn Japanese because they were going gonna get deported. So they were like better learn the language cause, assimilation, no one taught us. So basically, um, they're part of the Hoshidan and I think it was in Tule Lake where my great-aunt Anna got married, and so she and her husband after the war moved to Hawai'i. But um, yeah and there was like more with another cousin. Like my family story is very complicated. Like, and I'm still piecing it together, honestly. So from Tule Lake they went to Fort Lincoln in North Dakota and I was so excited to see that the exhibit actually has Fort Lincoln. I was like, what? Like no one ever talks about those camps where they put Germans and Italians and Japanese people. So it's like, damn, you know, my family's messed up. It's like they're with the white people. So anyways, so they were there and from there they were sent to Japan.

HK:

00:18:34

And I remember reading an article about my family because like that's how it is with my family. It's like they only share certain details, but I've been really lucky that I've had a family who likes to talk about themselves so much. It's like narcissism is a great quality to have, but it's also like, I hope part of their healing process too. Um, and I think it is. I really do think it is. And, but, um, anyway, so my great-uncle Benny, he had done an article with someone and he had essentially described what I'm about to tell you, like about going to Japan and what that was like. And so it was the three siblings and the two great-grandparents,

AT: 00:19:10 Just to clarify, can you help me out with, like, how old everyone was.

HK: 00:19:17 By that time?

AT: 00:19:17 In the order of your grandfather's family?

HK: 00:19:19 Oh, so he, oh, so my great aunt Anna was the oldest siblings, so she was probably mid-twenties. He was early twenties and then Grace and Benny were probably teenagers, like probably like 19/18 cause they were all pretty close in age. Yeah.

AT: 00:19:35 Okay thank you. I didn't realize that

HK: 00:19:36 Oh yeah, sure. Of course.

AT: 00:19:38 But so, so

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<Begin Segment 5>

HK: 00:19:39 By that time he was probably in his mid, late twenties. They're probably in their early-twenties or mid-twenties. Um, cause it's been like four years or five years. No, three years. Wait four years. I think there were deported in 1945. Yeah, so it would have been and Pearl Harbor happened in 41. Okay. Um, yeah, no, that's a good question. It's good to like track. So I was like, was he entering his Saturn Return? Like when he was deported? Oh my God. Okay. Anyway, so they were deported and because they were Japanese American, they didn't speak Japanese. Um, and so they ended up working at a U.S. Military base. Just the ironies upon ironies. I know from my family, but before they worked in Tokyo, like at a hospital, um, which is where they worked in Manzanar in hospitals too, um, like cleaning up people's like waste basically. Um, yeah, it was a really sad story. It was like, even my grandfather I think talked about it a little in Densho about like being on the train and seeing just the devastation, the atomic bombs, like just like, I can't even imagine like, like being treated like shit in your country and then like going back to the country that you're supposed to be and then like seeing it in total ruins because of the country you came from. And then, um, basically the story was they were on the train and they got to the stop and then my great-grandma, I assume it was her, cause they were rice farmers, they were looking for their rice farms and they couldn't find them and they

walked for like miles, like along the train tracks and just by the time they got to the village, I guess, um, yeah, the way that the article that I read about my family was like my great-aunt Grace she just like sat down and just started crying just by the time they got there and it's just really hard to hear it cause my great-aunt Grace was my favorite aunt. She actually is my favorite aunt, hands-down. Um, and she's like one of the funniest people I had ever known. And so it's usually funny people are funny cause they've been through a lot of bad things and um, yeah, I think about my aunt Grace a lot, um, when I think about them going back to Japan, um, and how that impacted her.

AT: 00:22:03 And so were they returning to where your great-grandparents were from?

HK: 00:22:09 I assume it was my great-grandmother. Yeah. That was the sense I was getting, cause she was the one who really wanted to go back. So they had been rice farmers, so I assume, um, and yeah, I just assumed they were looking for their farm. But um, it was probably destroyed during the war, so because it was destroyed or they couldn't find it, they ended up going to Tokyo and working in like the hospital or the military bases, finding different jobs, befriending white people to, really, as a way to come back to America. Um, if it wasn't for this, like white soldier person my family wouldn't have come back to the United States. So it was my grandfather's way of befriending white people to come back to America. And then my great-aunt Grace, she came back to America by marrying someone she didn't love. She married like a soldier who she didn't really love because she wanted to come back to America. And my great uncle Benny, he has a lot of problems. He just came back to the United States when, um, they did the pardon, which I think was in the 50s where the government apologized and said, you are under distress, clearly, and you can come back to America if you want. Um, so, and then my, I think I'm confused about my great-grandfather. Like what, I know he was in America for a bit, but I think they sent him back to Japan cause he wasn't a good person. Um, but my great-grandmother, she ended up living in LA, like coming back, I think during the pardon, and just her story it was just, I feel like a lot of people in my family, honestly, had really tragic endings, but it's just, I actually learned my great grandmother's story through my second cousin, my great-uncle Benny's son. He's so nice. His name is Kenneth. He lives in Seattle. He's like, he's just so nice. And so when I lived in Seattle, I got to know him better. Um, and yeah, he shared with me about my great-grandmother and how she basically like, yeah, she lived I think by train tracks like somewhere in LA and that, like, she, she just like, her story was, she was just so

disillusioned about everything that happened. And, um, I think my great aunt Grace would always visit her, but it's crazy how disconnected I feel from them that I don't know their names, you know, that I don't know if my grandmother died alone, my great grandmother, you know. Um, and that's what internment did, it just, it just separated us as a family. Um like, yeah, I have family scattered everywhere. Um, yeah. And so in Japan though, my great-aunt Grace, she was a typist and that's where she met my grandmother, Kimiko, um, oh actually I don't know, my grandmother's maiden last name. That's a problem. Patriarchy, you know. Um, so Kimiko worked in the U.S. base too, cause she really wanted to come to America. So her mom, so my other great-grandma wanted her to be a geisha and she was like, no thanks I want to go to America. And she would always talk about how like all the Japanese girls would like date, like GIs, like white soldiers. But she wasn't looking for a GI. She was looking for someone she actually wanted to love. And so she met my grandfather through my aunt because they were in the same class together. She's like, oh, I want you to meet my brother. And then they ended up getting married. She liked how tall he was cause like he's very tall. Um, and my aunt and uncle are very tall too. My mom's really short. She's adopted. Um, so we look nothing like our family. Um, so anyway, so they met my grandmother was from Fukuoka and um, yeah, and they met in Tokyo and then they immigrated to America I think in the fifties. Um, they were able to come back and they weren't able to get pregnant when they were in Japan. They had my uncle Gene. Um, and they tried and tried but couldn't. And so they adopted my mom from the same city as my grandmother's son, which was Fukuoka and, um, and they ended up getting pregnant that year with my aunt, I think.

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<Begin Segment 6>

HK:

00:26:12

So that's, yeah. Anyway. And so my grandmother who had dementia, she would always tell me stories about Japan, um, cause she could remember it. Um, and she told me about, I think I like, I was like that non-Asian person who wanted to know the sensational details. I was like, did any of your friends die? I was just such an idiot when I was like trying to record my family stories. But one of her friends did die actually. Like there was like, but it wasn't from like an explosion. It was from residue from the explosion, like a piece hot like concrete or something fell on her thigh and it just became infected. And, and my grandmother almost starved to death during the war

too. Like she used to like make, um, she used to like when her mom wasn't home, cause like they had have to ration food, she like would like just wet rice and like add flour to it and like eat that paste. And I um, God like even sharing that out loud, um, cause these are stories she just told me, um, in her house when I was like 21, 22. It's amazing. Like I think about all the opportunities she's given me, um, that I don't have to starve and that I could go to college, that I could, not only could I go to college, but I could study sociology and ethnic studies. You know what I mean? Like that's wow. Like I didn't have to be a doctor. I didn't have to do a practical degree. I could, yeah. I could do degrees that the society doesn't value. Um, yeah. And so it's interesting like having a Japanese immigrant parent who experienced the war, having a Japanese grandparent who experienced internment, and then having a mom who was adopted. Um, so it's always felt like a very complicated story. And the last piece is the story, or there's never a last piece, but one dream I do have is trying to find my birth grandmother. Um, I always wanted to know what happened. Like why would someone give up their child? Um, there wasn't really any records, but we recently found out that my mom, her name, her birth name is Eiko Okuda that her mom's name is Eiko Okuda, that my great-grandmother named, oh no, not my great, but my grandmother named my mom after her and my mom was like, oh it's cause she didn't love me. Like she even bothered give me a name and I was like, what if she wanted to - like we could find her. Maybe that's why she gave you her name, and my mom was like, hm. I don't know. But I think it's really amazing, like having so many grandparents and like really feeling loved by them. And like, I think adoption is really complicated. I think about like Korean adoptees and I was like, oh my heart goes out. And Chinese adoptees too, you know? And yeah, I think we normally don't associate adoption with Japanese and, um -

AT: 00:29:07 And I don't, I would say even less so of that time -

HK: 00:29:11 - Generation. And what's interesting about the generation is that there was a push for inter, not interracial, but transracial adoption like by white Americans of like Asian, like of, well I was talking to someone about this cause that really surprised me cause there was so much racism, so I was like, are you sure? Like, is this correct? But if that is true, it had to do with that sense of multiculturalism that we have now that was like burgeoning in after the civil rights movement. Um, which was like around the time my mom was adopted, but um, or not after, but like around when everything was reaching the boiling point in the 60s, which was when she was adopted.

HK: 00:29:57 But, um, now I'm getting off track and I need to Google and research it. But I hope that makes sense. The family trajectory of being in America, getting deported, meeting in Japan, coming back to America, and then adopting my mother. Yeah. And the last story I do want to share about, um, Fukuoka is that my grandmother, she would always repeat herself cause she had Alzheimer's. So it's like I really learned the stories and she told me, she was like, she was like, the weather saved my life. And I was like, what are you talking about? And she was like, yeah, you know, she was like, we were supposed to be bombed by - but it was cloudy that day. So that's why Nagasaki was bombed. And like the thought of like, like I wouldn't have been alive, like my mom's family, like blood family wouldn't have been alive either. And it's amazing how a cloudy day can save your life. And it just shows how just arbitrary, and not arbitrary, but just like one wrong move, and it's, it just shows how little control we have. And I think, is it okay if I talk about the president? I think like during this era, like I think a lot of liberals are, just like white liberals really are just feeling out of control. And the truth is we're not in control ever. And I think like, I feel so lucky with like a meditation practice that I had when I lived in the bay area. It was trans meditation and um, basically like learning that we really aren't in control and doing the best we can with what we can control. And I think, you know, I used to always like roll my eyes at "shigataganai" and "gaman" and I was like, what the fuck is wrong with people? But it like, it's true, like shigataganai, like some things literally can't be helped and some things can, but it's, I think that's, I think I have finally understand shigataganai and gaman in a way that I had never because Donald Trump's our president and feeling so helpless, and like he didn't even win the popular vote. Like, it's just some things are literally out of your control, whether it's a Russian hacking or the popular vote not being taken seriously. It's like, um, it's like, how do you shigataganai basically the stuff you can't change and then how do you fight back with the stuff you can change if you have enough privilege to do that. Yeah.

AT: 00:32:35 Thank you.

HK: 00:32:36 You're welcome.

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<Begin Segment 7>

AT: 00:32:42 So I would love to hear a little bit more about, um, your own journey and experience and, and learning your family's history

and also, um, this history in general because I feel like, and I know you've touched on it at times, but everyone kind of has their own like, oh, well we didn't talk about it. I learned about it. So I want to hear more about like your experience about learning about your presentation and then also kind of like connecting those dots and piecing together your family story.

HK:

00:33:19

Absolutely. And I'm like trying to cross my legs. Um, yeah, it's - healing is really painful experience. Um, it's like when you get to the other side, you're like, whew, okay, I made it. But while you're in it - I think when I was 19 that was my first pilgrimage. I think I was just so like radical and QTPOC and it's just like a mess honestly. But like being at the internment camp, being at Minidoka in Idaho, it was such an important moment. I think even when I was 9 years old or 10 years old, whatever or however old I was in fourth grade, I always knew I needed to go. It's kind of like how I've always known I need to go to Japan to find my birth grandmother. It's just something you know, intuitively, and I like, I knew I need to go to a camp. I was like, I have to like, how am I - like I live in fricking Ohio, like no Asian people. Like I was like, I need, I just have to. And so the first time I went on a pilgrimage, I just cried so much and it was the first time I ever felt Japanese American. And it was because everyone looked like my family. There were mixed people. There were people who looked like my aunt and uncle. There were people looked like my grandparents. There were people who weren't Japanese, but were just there to support, like whether it's interracial or there's just really like Japanese culture and they're there. And it felt like home though. It felt like what I knew. And um, it was the first time I ever really heard about the suicides in our community. And it was the first time I ever really saw older Japanese Americans cry. And that like, that fucked me up. And, and then when I went on Manzanar pilgrimage, seeing my grandfather cry was really hard. Um, he even just starts crying when he's just talking about the internment. He even doesn't even need to be at the camp. He just starts crying. And, um, so for me it wasn't like - it's just hard seeing old people cry and it's hard seeing your community cry. It's hard seeing your family cry. And it's crazy. Cause I think a lot of people when they're older, they want to protect the youth. They don't want them to see them cry, especially if they're your family. But I think that's how traumatizing internment was, was that like my grandfather literally can't control himself. Like he just starts crying. Um, yeah. I think as a community - they - we just try to control it and hold it in for so many years that - I mean that's the bad part of shigataganai is like, it, it just like - it's why our community has so many like mental health issues, honestly. We may be financially okay, but spiritually are we?

Emotionally and like mentally are we okay? And um, yeah, I don't, I don't know the answer to that. And I think our community like learning about the history as a whole, like you're asking, it's really interesting. It's like we are from a people who colonized other Asian people. We are from people who colonized our own people. Like, what was it, the Ainu and the Okinawans. I'm like, what the fuck's wrong with people? And I just coming from that legacy and understanding how like Chinese and Filipino and Korean and like South Asian, whether Pakistani or Indian didn't have the opportunities we had in America because they weren't part of an empire. Um, and well, an empire at that time period. I'm considering China being an empire at certain points in history, but, um, I think with Japan it's like, it's such a bizarre state - situation to be in. It's like it was such a culture shock I think for Japanese Americans because they were treated not great. There's still experienced racism, but they were treated better than other Asian people, Asian and Pacific Islanders I should say. And so I think when internment happened, it sent a shock-wave through our community. This like sense of superiority that I think they had because they were from an empire, you know, that it just, it really, you know, when you meet someone who's Japanese American, you know, when you meet someone who is from Japan, you know, when you meet someone who was in Hawai'i during the internment, you know - or at least I know when I meet someone who's from the mainland and incarcerated because I think people who were incarcerated carry this like shame and like sadness with them. Even if, if it's us, like the fourth generation, there's this like sense of shame that we carry about being Japanese and this like disconnection that when I meet people I'm like, oh that person, they immigrated or their parents immigrated cause they don't hate themselves or like that's why our friend Anne is - am I allowed to talking about it? That's why she's so fascinating to me because she's Yonsei and Shin-Nisei and I can see both in her, and Shin-Nisei are just like so empowered. I was like what the hell? And the Yonsei are just like werb-werb-werb you know, it's like, Oh God, I hate us all. And it's like, I think with like, um, with our community, it's just, we're just so complicated. And like my mentor, she told me, her partner called it like shades of JA. Like there are just so many JAs and we're not even talking - I wasn't even talking about Okinawans. I wasn't even talking about the Ainu I wasn't even talking about like what does it mean to be from Hawai'i because they did experience different types of incarceration but just not seen as incarceration on the mainland and same with Canadians. And then also same with people in Latin America who were brought up, you know, so yeah, so I wanted to say that. And I also wanted to say that I think I was really lucky. I know a lot of

people don't have exposure to their family history, and my family, because they're narcissists, they love talking about themselves. And so it was easy for me to learn their story because they would just so openly shared it. And then also they openly shared it on the internet too. And like when I was in fourth grade, they even were willing to share like little stories that you would tell a child. Um, so I never felt like - excuse me - I think that's part of the reason why I moved from Seattle to LA. I knew I could learn my family story. I think if I had never really heard any of it, like in fourth grade or through over the years, I wouldn't have felt like, oh, let me move here. Because a lot of Japanese American families just don't talk about it. So, so I feel really like blessed in that sense that like, yeah, my family stories really - I don't know if tragic's the right word, they're tragic elements. But yeah, my family's story is really complicated and really sad. Um, but I knew I could learn it. Um, and I didn't realize how complicated and sad it was or I probably wouldn't have tried to learn it cause it was, it's depressing when you learn your family story, you're like, oh man, you went through that. Oh my God. And that happened. And, but at the same time, like I'm so grateful that I learned it because if I hadn't learned it, I think I would still carry that sadness with me. And now that I don't, now that I know it, I know I'm not sad anymore. I mean, I get sad and I cry, I cry, I like fricking internment trailers, but it's like I don't carry the sadness of not knowing anymore, which is a certain type of sadness and trauma. Um, I just carry like, man, my family's messed up. Like, and I can joke about it. And I think when you can joke about something, not always, but I think for me now that I'm able to joke about it, it means that I have done some healing because I remember the first internment camp I went to, I like could not joke at all, but like as time has gone on, I can make jokes when I'm at an internment camp, but like maybe that's horrible. I don't know. But it's like, it's, um, I think when you're able to joke about something, yeah, it's either you haven't processed your feelings or you have and like you're able to find humor even in the worst situation.

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<Begin Segment 8>

AT: 00:41:36 And why do you think that? Um, um, like what is it about knowing that handles that, that's healing or, or, or what was the difference exactly between the sadness of not knowing versus the sadness of just everything that happens?

HK:

00:41:56

I think for me, I was just a very defensive, like QTPOC, whenever I say that I mean like Queer and Trans people of color. And I was like very defensive. I was just like, don't mess with me white America, like, don't mess with me. And I think I had a lot of stuff going on cause I'm half white so I was like God mixed race people, it's like half white people anyway cause not every mix is half white. But anyway, um, I think for me I was coming from a place of defensiveness and like I also, it was like when I was younger it was this sadness that people would say things to me. Like white people in particular that I knew wasn't true. Like, I like, people would say things to me about Japanese culture or just anything I just like knew - I was like that's not true. But I don't know why. And I remember like I was in, I was 13, it was in eighth grade. This one popular boy, white boy, everyone was white basically, not everyone but most, he like - he and I got into this argument we were talking about should the bomb have been dropped, and like he and I like I don't remember cause he was some, one of the most popular boys in the class and I just sort of stood up and started yelling and I was like, no it was wrong. I like, it was like my ancestors were talking through me cause like I had no idea. I was very introverted, I was a closeted gay b trans b whatever you want to call me. Like I definitely wasn't outgoing like in that sense, but like something in me knew that what he was saying was wrong, morally wrong, spiritually wrong and that people, my people died because of imperialism and like, yeah. So I think like that, like the not knowing was the sadness of like people telling me things, but in my heart knowing, mm I think something you're saying is wrong, like, but I don't know what. And it's that - and that's why you internalized racism cause it's like constantly people are projecting like microaggressions every day or like macroaggressions and then you just, you just, you hate yourself and you think, oh yeah, I'm Japanese. Like, man, like, like I'm nobody. Like, you know, I don't have a history. We're not really American. Like, yeah. Yeah. I think that's the difference. And I think knowing it now, I feel more American now than I did before. And it's complicated because we're not native American. I'm not native American, so I'm not American in that sense. And so, um, so it was partly that. And it was also partly I wanted to learn my story because of Uncle Fred and Auntie Dorothy Cordova who created this group called Filipino American National Historical Society, which has like - I'm like promoting it right now - that has like chapters throughout the country. And really, I think it was in the '80s they created it and it was a way, or the '70s Oh, I need to remember. But it was a way to record Filipino American stories, specifically Filipino American. And they mentored me so graciously and I really - they - Uncle Fred always told me, learn your Asian American

history, learn your Asian American history. And they always accepted me as a mixed person, which was really special. And it was because of Uncle and Auntie Dorothy really that it, that I even wanted to learn my Asian American history and learn my family history. Cause I knew just from their legacy in their work that it was - I remember Auntie Dorothy told me, she was like, she learned Filipina American history because it gave her a sense of self worth. She was like, I just, I feel like I have a sense of worth now. Now that I know my story now that I know my history, um, you feel like she was like, I feel like I'm part of America now. And I think that's what's hard about Asian American history because even within academia, even with an ethnic studies, honestly it feels like Asian American history is not taken as seriously. Um, and we're not really seen as people of color who experienced racism and, let alone, if you're half white, then you can forget it you're definitely not a person of color. And so I think it's like, it's like no, it's like no, we are people of color, we do experience racism. We just experience it in a very specific way and, you know, like erasing our histories is part of white supremacy and we actually can learn a lot from each other if we just like took the time, took down our walls of being really defensive, which are our coping mechanisms and really shared our stories, like sharing that my grandparents had to sell their car for \$10. Like that's horrible. Like you know, like little, I think people think of Japanese America as this really rich community, and we are now, I would say we're upper-middle class and I also want to say like that's because of our, the history of pitting people of color against each other and elevating certain people and Japan's history of being an empire. Like, that's why our community's so wealthy. And I think like, like I think people just kind of ignore the fact that of what happened and how it's psychologically wounded our community and why we are the way we are. And how do you hold that complexity of both having privilege and then also being oppressed. And I think most people have both but are unwilling to talk about it. Um, yeah. I hope I answered your question.

AT: 00:47:01 That was very well said.

HK: 00:47:02 Okay, cool. Cool, good, good.

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<Begin Segment 9>

AT: 00:47:38 Yeah. So, um, cause you mentioned that you were pretty isolated in Ohio. So if you could just like, yeah, you know give the lay of the land.

HK: 00:47:49 So, um, yeah, it was funny when I was in Ohio, I just, I wanted to learn anything about Japanese culture, but like I didn't cause I internalized racism. And I remember being Japanese in high school was like, like - don't worry, this connects to your question. But um, I remember once someone came up to me - they were a person of color, thank God, but it was still really awkward - they asked me what kind of Asian I was and I knew she really liked like manga - and at the time I didn't even know what manga was I thought it was called anime. That's how disconnected I was from anything. And all I knew is I didn't, wasn't gonna read manga or like watch anime because that's weird people do that. And I remember this one white girl came up to me and was like, she like confessed to me what she was like, like I like, I watch anime. And I was just like, I don't care. I don't even know what that is. Like my internalized racist ass. I was like, I don't care white girl. She's like, I'm really ashamed. I was like, I don't, okay me too, like lot, plenty of shame to go around. But I remember I didn't say me too, cause obviously I didn't know. I was like, Oh okay, I don't care. Um, cause that's how deeply rooted was it was like even the white people who did it, they knew that only weird people watch that stuff. Only weirdos. Right. And so I think I always associated being Japanese with being really weird. And um, and so this person, she came up to me and she was like, what kind of Asian are you? And I was like, don't say Japanese. I was like, oh my gosh, shouldn't say Japanese she's going to love me if I say Japanese. But I grew up Irish Catholic. So I was like Japanese because like I couldn't lie, like it was a sin. And so in my - you know - I was taught that it was sinful to lie. So I was like Japanese, she's like, oh my God, Japanese. I was like, yeah, like it was just so much. So that was my exposure to I guess a Japanese community. Like, and I was like, me and my sister, Kelsey and her brother were like the only four Japanese Americans I knew growing up in Ohio. Um, I remember there was one person named Natsuko Abe, who they called Natsuko, Abe, but like looking back I was like, that's how you pronounce her name. But anyway, that was when I was in, I think like, elementary school, second grade, fifth grade, I don't know. But I remember I was so excited to meet like someone from Japan, but she was only there for half a semester cause she was - or for one semester - cause she was an exchange student. So that was really cool meeting her. But as you can tell it's very isolated. So, um, so by the time I, you know, was a senior - or no, I was a junior - they offered Chinese at my school, and I thought this is it. This is like the closest I'm

going to get to Japanese so I'm going to take Chinese. Same language, right? Not at all.

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<Begin Segment 10>

HK:

But like that professor or that teacher, she was my favorite teacher in high school. Like very much like that-teacher-who-changes-you. Like she was that for me, she was one of the most loving and compassionate and warm people, and basically it was because of her and her warmth and like loving taking that class with her that I decided I was going to do Asian Studies, which brought me out to the west coast because I was like, I've got to go where Asian people are. I had no intention of learning Japanese American history. I was like, I'm here to like learn about Asia, not Asian American. So I went out there and I, yeah. And everything changed when I went out there because I started seeing myself being reflected everywhere, whether it was interracial couples, um, children who looked like me when I was a kid. Um, yeah. And I took an Asian studies class, um, it was called "The Asian American Experience." We learned about Filipino, Chinese, and Japanese Americans and that's actually how I met the Cordovas was through that class. I did an internship at the Filipino society and everything changed. And I think like I was a sophomore in college when I changed my major and yeah, everything changed. Um, I actually changed it to, they didn't have Asian American studies, but they had - I could do African American studies. And I think for me, I just wanted to learn about people of color, period. And that was part of the reason why I did ethnic studies. I just wanted to learn about people of color in America. Like, cause I didn't have that growing up. And I think like what was so powerful about African American Studies, specifically African American history, the classes I took, was like know your history, know who you are, know your community. And like that's how you can heal, that idea of Sankofa of like we understand the past in order to like understand the present and have a future very much like circular time. And, um, and then the also that the saying of everything we do is for the next 7 generations or everything we do is for 14 generations because the past and present for like, um, I hate saying "Native American sayings" cause I don't know what tribe that saying is from but - Native American saying. But um, yeah just that idea of knowing your past and so all of these courses and all of these things helped get me out into the community. Cause I think for me, I was just intellectualizing everything. I was just in school, but like these courses really

politicized me. And there was this group on campus, the multicultural affairs office, and they had a students of color retreat that said mixed people are welcome. Cause I was like, well I'm not a person of color but I'm mixed so I guess I can go. I hope they like me. And so I went and that's where I became politicized too was my sophomore year of college. And then through that retreat and all these classes I was taking sophomore year, that's what got me out into the community. So don't worry, it all connects.

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<Begin Segment 11>

HK:

So when I was doing community work, I was mainly doing racial justice work for immigration stuff for at first there was also this community garden, um, called the Danny Wu Garden in the international district in Chinatown. And just being around Asian American elders, it was just really powerful. Um, and so all these things like the classes, the Filipino American society led me to wanting to work with the Minidoka pilgrimage. I was like a scholarship recipient, um, that summer. And then because of this immigration, like it was mainly like, I think it was mainly Latino run, they were organizing mayday march and at the mayday march when I was helping out, like I was one of those people wearing the little yellow vests or whatever or orange vests, I forget. I saw this banner that said "Tadaima - radical Japanese organizing" and they all looked hapa. And I was like, what is - I like literally went up to them and I was like, hey, like - like God, so awkward - I was like, hey, like I'm radical. I'm Japanese. Like, what are, what is this? And they were like, you're the first not-white person and come up to us. I was like, oh yeah, they like our anime. And like we, we just had this moment and they were all queer and this is before identified as queer. So it was really special that like all of these racial and economic justice groups or so many queer and trans people. And that's what helped me come out to myself, um, to see myself reflected in another person. And so I organized with Tadaima for like two years, I think, especially that one summer. Um, there's just a really beautiful, like sweet group of people based out of Seattle, mainly queer and trans, um, mixed Asian Americans - or mixed Japanese Americans. And they work with like Sundeoksu like Korean group if it's still around. Um, they work with Pinay south Seattle, um - Filipino group - Um, I'm trying to think. I'm trying to think who else. Basically they do a lot of like queer, Asian American organizing, but also like trying to mobilize, especially with like black lives matter. I could, I

don't know how active the group is anymore, Tadaima but that group gave me so many opportunities to like connect with the whole community as a whole. Like we did this API freedom school and like teaching kids Asian American history. It's just like that group of people, they were so special. Like we used to do like educational things like every other week or once a month. Like learn a topic about like Japanese spirituality or like, you know, just like anything to just sort of come together and feel empowered as Japanese Americans. And um, yeah, looking back I was like, wow, what a gift. Cause I really was able to accept myself as a queer person because of that group. And um, that summer, the first summer I was part of Tadaima we went to this Hiroshima event together and they had like all these lanterns and it was just such a powerful experience. Like, thinking back to that argument when I was 13 and knowing something was off and then getting to - from 13 to 19, like what a difference, well I was 20 I think, seven years later like being with Japanese Americans at this like Hiroshima remembrance event. Yeah. So that was Seattle. It's a really positive experience.

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<Begin Segment 12>

HK:

And I moved to LA. Um, I studied abroad, I came back from study abroad, I finished school and then I came, um, I came to LA to try and learn my family history. I wasn't really involved in the Japanese American community there cause I was doing this awful Americorps program that like I had no time to do anything cause it was like awful and they ended up quitting it and like doing other work. But LA is so spread out that I found it was really hard to really cultivate Japanese American community there. I definitely connected with the Queer Asian and Pacific islander community there, um, through this group called API Equality-LA. Um, so that was really cool. Like getting opportunities from that group of Queer Asian Americans who like connected me to like I got to work with GSA, gay straight alliances throughout the Los Angeles Unified School district cause of them, like it was like very much they take care of, they take care of their own, you know what I mean? And like people were really welcoming, like I'm mixed and they welcomed me. Like most people weren't mixed there, but they always welcomed mixed people. And Seattle was just super mixed. So they just like, you know, you're one of the dime a dozen or whatever. So it was really interesting and a culture shock when I moved to the bay area. Um, and it was like constantly being told both directly and indirectly, cause we are Asian American after

all, like that I was not welcome, that I was too white, that I wasn't really a person of color. And then I definitely really wasn't Asian American and I think like it was devastating. I like, I wanted so badly to be around my people because that's all I knew like with Seattle and LA. And so it was like, it sucked so much. Um, being told to go away and direct and indirect ways by queer and trans Asian Americans. I wouldn't even say trans though. Trans communities way more accepting than the queer cis community. Anyway, um, so I think like it was, it was devastating and that led me to do more mixed race studies, mixed race organizing. Um, cause there was like this festival in LA, there are these critical mixed race studies conferences. And I had like, my mixed identity was like evolving as time went on. And I like even in LA, like they were super welcoming but I knew something was different about me and that the stories weren't really sitting the same way. And it was actually in San Francisco when I was basically constantly told go away by the sister organization of API Equality-LA called API Equality-Northern California. Just the people in the group. Not all of them, but a lot of them just - it was so it, it was, it was really sad when it happened actually. Um, but you know, identity, politics, whatever.

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<Begin Segment 13>

HK:

But I think like I emailed Amy Sueyoshi, she was leading this oral history project called The Dragon Fruit Project. It was an intergenerational, um, like one queer elders and Queer youth who are all Asian and Pacific Islander, Queer and trans. Sorry. Um, and she like kind of swooped me up. Like she, I sent this email and be like, hey Amy, like, thanks so much for welcoming cause like she was, she knew the director of API Equality-LA, so API Equality-LA - see this is how they take care of people there, she was like, oh, let me introduce you to Amy Sueyoshi. She's someone you should know. And so I met Amy at API Equality in Northern California because of API Equality-LA. So like API Equality-LA actually like, yeah, they're so good about taking care of people and like welcoming people, you know? And so, um, so when I met Amy, I like told her, I was like, yeah, like I'm too white, I'm so sorry, like, this project sounds awesome, but I shouldn't be the one to be a part of it, like, thanks so much, you seem really cool but yeah, I can't. And she like responded with this like really long email and it was so nice and she said all these nice things and she was like come into my office - like she works at San Francisco State - and basically that conversation

led to me applying to grad school and like led to me - like she even shared something in the email. She said that a lot of JAs like fourth generation don't feel connected to or even third generation like Sansei don't feel connected to Asia America because we have such a different history with the internment and being like generationally in the United States compared to a lot of Asian Americans who are the first generation or second generation and like, you know, immigrant kid aches like language, filial piety, guilt, all the shit. Like that's just something we don't really have as much as other Asian Americans. Like a lot of us didn't speak our language growing up. A lot of us didn't eat the foods growing up. Like, we don't, we don't have that story of going to elementary school, bringing our food and having the kids make fun of us, you know, or stuff like that. Or like you, yeah. Anyway, I don't even to go out into every horrible thing, you know, every type of microaggression or racist thing that Asian Americans go through. But basically like Amy's email really, she really saw me and like she really accepted me as a mixed person, which was really, I was like, whoa, really? Like, cause she's - I thought she was monoracial but I found out she was Okinawa and mainland Japanese. And I think that's a mixed experience in and of itself. And so, um, anyways, so to answer your question in the bay, I didn't organize with Japanese Americans and I didn't organize with Asian Americans. Um, I was volunteering some time with the straight, they're not all straight, but like, I find that like straight Asian American groups are more welcoming of mixed people than queer and trans groups. And I think at, I keep saying queer and trans, but I'll tell you, the trans community is so welcoming. We would take everyone, take white people would take everyone, but um, anyway, but it's like for like Queer Asian American, like it's just identity politics or it's just so intense when you're half white. It's just like, should I even show up? Like, and but with like I found with like more hetero, like Asian American, there was less of crabs in a barrel. It was more like, oh, you're half white, okay, my husband's white. Or like, you know what I'm saying? It wasn't like as serious like, and so I did volunteer some times with um, the Asian Law Caucus, which is like Asians Advancing Justice - Asian Americans Advancing Justice. Um, the one in San Francisco and um, yeah. Um, God that was so cool. Like, cause I got to meet some of the Japanese American elders, um, like famous ones and like it was like, that was a very - that was a very important experience for me too because like I understood the ways in which fame really disconnects people. Um, like way we idealize like say the Kochiyamas or say the Korematsus but then actually meeting the Korematsu's and the Kochiyamas you see that they're just people and that they're normal and that that we can be great

too. And it's just that their families were in the spotlight with their excellence. And that was a gift to get to, to know the Kochiyamas and the Korematsus, um, stories better from their children, um, through Asian Law Caucus. And then now I'm here and um, I have to say, cause I, you know, I know I shit talk the Queer API community a lot on the west coast - or well in the bay, but I also want to name that being here with queer and trans Asian Americans, it's been really healing actually. Like they're so welcoming. Like I showed a picture of that group I 2 I to a friend on the west coast and I was like, oh my God, look at this photo. And it's like you have like South Asian, southeast, east, like transracially adopted people, mixed people who are double POC and like half white. Like you have like you have old people, you have young people, people bring their babies to events here. Like it's just like so cool. Like it's intergenerational, it's mixed ethnicity, it's mixed class. It's like I've never been in a space like that for queer and trans Asian Americans. And so it, it's been so powerful to be around such a welcoming community. So I don't want to say all community spaces are the same as you can hear just from the differences. Um, cause like Tadaima was so welcoming. But if you notice, I said we worked separately in our different little ethnic enclaves. We work together - here it's like they - I know people separate - but it seems more like, you know, and I'm like, oh, interesting. And I showed my friend that he grew up in the bay area and he saw the photo and he's, he's Korean and Japanese and he saw it and he was like, whoa, this looks like a Sense8 photo. And there's this TV show called Sense8 and it's all about like interconnectedness of humanity. And I was like, I know it looks like Sense8 because, um, yeah, it's like everyone's so different like, but they all are like a family. So, um, so yeah, that's - and in DC I was there for only like 6 months and there were like no Asian Americans. Like it was so like, it was so shitty being Asian American there. But like my friends who were there were API like a few of them, so I didn't feel isolated, but it definitely felt weird being Asian American in DC for sure. Um, and I'm sure there are groups there, but I just didn't really know of them.

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<Begin Segment 14>

AT: 01:06:13 And what about, um, Japanese American communities specifically? Like - or in Chicago have you gotten involved in any way or what have you learned about it since being here?

HK:

01:06:26

Wow. Yeah. Right. Um, I've learned that there is a community, first off. I was like, whoa, what? And it was, it was so humbling because I am half Irish and my grandparents immigrated from Ireland right after World War Two. Just the irony, one's deported and one's immigrating, but they came like, I think around the time my family got deported actually, but they met in a at an Irish Catholic dance here in Chicago. So I always knew that my Irish side was connected. I never imagined that a Japanese American side could be connected cause I never associated being Asian American in any way with the Midwest cause of my personal experiences in Ohio. So yeah, it's super humbling, like getting to see the community, getting to learn the history, like meeting other Japanese Americans whose families have been here for a while. And I'm like, what? Like it's just, it's so eye opening and it makes sense. It makes total sense. But like with most Asian American histories, it's just completely wiped out or invisibilized or not seen as real racism or whatever it is. Um, so it's been really humbling and cool. I don't, honestly, as a trans person, like I don't do a lot of organizing with cis people. Um, so I think part of my hesitation to go at a lot of like Japanese American things is like my own anxiety around being mis-gendered. And then it also is about like - it also is about activist communities, honestly. I took a break from organizing around the time they told me to go away in the bay area and I started doing more like, um, like different types of work, like academia work or like going to a festival for families or like doing, um, what was it like energy work, you know, like learning about different types of healing practices. That's actually something I'm more interested in than building JA community. Um, like I've always loved meeting JAs cause it always feels like you're meeting your cousin or whatever. But like I think like I think where I'm at right now as like a trans like gender queer person and then also as like, um, when I care about like with like how do we heal intergenerational trauma. Like for me right now, maybe 30 - or like maybe 10 years from now, I would love to like go to a JA meeting. Um, but you know, or whatever. And I think, um, how do I say, I think right now like doing different types of healing spaces, like especially with other queer and trans people of color, um, and other mixed race people too, like I think is really important for where I'm at right now. So, yeah.

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AT:

01:09:18

I want to start wrapping up.

HK: 01:09:19 Sure.

AT: 01:09:19 But I feel like I still have a million questions.

HK: 01:09:24 Yeah, that's okay.

AT: 01:09:25 Um. I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit to how you see, um, the incarceration story. I'm like, what are some of the, the key things - or whether it's, you know, the ways in which, um, certain civil liberties were violated and totally removed. I guess I would love to, to hear your thoughts on that, on how it connects to some of the, the current issues that we're experiencing today and certain, um, violations of civil liberties that are happening right now.

HK: 01:10:24 I mean, if people aren't able to make the Muslim Japanese connection, then they are not awake or aware at all. Even when I was like 11, when 9/11 happened, I remember being like, I hope they don't do to them what they did to my family. And like, I was 11. Like I barely knew my family's story. You know what I mean? It's like if 11 year old me could make - connect the dots, I'm like damn America, like connect the dots and um, whew. My God. And I also, so that's the most obvious connection. Like the AMEMSA community, the Arab, middle eastern, Muslim and South Asian community. Hello. You know, if you don't get that then you're stupid. Cause like that's so obvious. Um, but the other connection that I really get until really learning about my family's immigration - tenuous relationship to immigration and deportation is how much citizenship and the rhetoric we use around like who is a good citizen and like who is loyal. I mean, and ugh, like understanding how just with like the drop of a hat, you can not be a citizen. Like it - that's terrifying. And that's like, it just shows you the construction of citizenship. It's a construction. It's not real. And that - why do you treat undocumented people like shit? Like I don't - why do you scapegoat people? Like I don't - ugh God. So, um, I feel like this is the least like, um, articulate thing I've done so far. I'm just like, wow, fuck everyone. But it really is, um, that's how I feel. Like I feel like I have like guttural reactions to your question. Cause it's the, it's just so - yeah. I don't know why people don't understand why the past isn't connected to the present. I don't know why people don't understand that people of color are human beings. I don't know why people don't understand that whether you're not, you have papers makes you a human being or a person worthy of protection and healthcare and yeah, I don't, I don't, I don't get America. I don't understand why. Yeah, I just don't get it. Yeah. Anyway, I don't even know if I answered your question. I don't get why people

hate each other. And I did ethnic studies as a master level and I still don't understand. I can understand the history, but I don't get it.

AT: 01:13:03 And what do you see as - um, like what role do you have or, or responsibility, um, in any way that you identify. So whether that's as a young person, as a queer person of color, um, how like however that is, like, what do you see, what do you see as your role in kind of working on some of these systemic problems?

HK: 01:13:39 Yeah, I think we, all of us have different gifts and I know for me Reiki was such a powerful experience that that's why I got attuned and I hope to like learn more about Reiki and practice it with community folks and even people who aren't considered my community. Like I think like how much Reiki has healed me and thinking about the history of Reiki and how it was taken away during World War II and that because of the Japanese woman in Hawai'i that it was like preserved. Like, like she was trained before the war and then like had to like basically not train anyone else. Like for 30 or 40 years, she started training people in the '70s. Um, and how Reiki was outlawed in Japan during U.S. - I'm pretty sure I need to re-Google this - during the U.S. occupation. Um, because it was used on the military to heal wounds and to heal, um, to heal injuries for medical things and kind of how she brought it back to Japan, what was taken away. And so I think for me, part of healing intergenerational trauma is having a practice that was taken away during a time period where my family was extremely traumatized and like getting to help - I don't heal people - but getting to facilitate people's healing processes with a tradition that was outlawed because of the very thing that like caused the - probably all my issues or not all of them, I don't know. But like it, it's what it's, it's, that's what healing intergenerational - like that's what I can contribute. And not only give it to like other Japanese Americans, but to anyone who is seeking that kind of healing and to feeling empowered from having it be from the community and what was taken away. Yeah. That's what I can offer.

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AT: 01:15:30 And, and what kind of, um, what kind of advice would you give to other young people who are interested in, um, you know, getting involved or organizing like that? What, you know, what

would you leave with them? Especially given the current political moment?

HK:

01:15:56

Um, I don't like, it's funny, I used to love giving advice and I still love it, but the more I learn, the less I want to give advice because I think life is a process and that you'll learn as you go. And, uh, I, I guess the one piece of advice if I could give, would be to forgive yourself, to be kind to yourself and to, to know that the only constant is change. And I wouldn't give them advice. I would just say what comforts me is that even though things are really bad right now - as a historian, it's not as bad as it was. Like, that's why I love history because it grounds me and it helps me see how far people have changed because the only change is constant. Um, and, uh, yeah, I hope, I hope that people, this is, you know, I hope that people see all human beings as human beings and that includes racist white people. Like that is like, that's something I struggle with and it's not my advice, but it's, I, it's just something I want to share that one of the most powerful things I learned in ethnic studies was that white people are human beings. Um, I didn't think of white people as human beings before my master's program, um, in between being politicized in Seattle and San Francisco. I thought of white people as like monsters. And I think Donald Trump and his followers are in the embodiment of like that but to really like change society, you have to change your heart. And part of that change is seeing everyone, even the worst people to try to find their humanity, which is a lot, I know, and I don't ask anyone to do that, but that's just something I try to do that, um, grounds me and, um, tries, tries to help me have more compassion. And I, I say the part about forgiveness because a lot of people are like, oh, I I don't need to forgive myself. But for me, like I think what's remarkable about our community is the way, the way I hear my grandpa talk about forgiveness and forgiving America. And um, the way the Nisei talk about is like, whoa. Like I think forgiveness is so critical to do sustainable work because not only is like you're forgiving yourself for like having a bad breakup, you know, the interpersonal dynamics, but also forgiving - like if you can get to a place like the way the Nisei have, where they can forgive, like whoa, like, and forgiveness all it is it's not excusing what happened - cause I think a lot of people think that's what it means - it's about letting go. This a Lily Tomlin - if I'm saying her right quote - it's about letting go of the hope that the past could have been any different. And it's all about letting go of like what you've been carrying. Um, and once you let that go, you can move forward. So that's why forgiveness is really important and it's easier to forgive other people or your country if you can start by forgiving yourself first for wishing that things were different and that, yeah. Yeah. You're welcome.

AT: 01:19:48 Um, is there, is there anything else that I may have missed or that you'd want to add, before we wrap up?

HK: 01:20:01 Um, not for this interview. Yeah, I think I'm okay. Yeah. Like I said, everything I need to say for this set. Yeah.

AT: 01:20:08 Thank you so much for coming on. Y.

HK: 01:20:10 Yeah, thank you for doing this. This is really important work, so, yeah. Thank you.

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