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Title: Susumu Mukushina Interview
Narrator: Susumu Mukushina
Interviewer: Anna Takada
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<Begin Segment 1>

Anna Takada:	<u>00:00:00</u>	So if you could just start by stating your name and your hometown.
Susumu M.:	<u>00:00:06</u>	My name is Susumu Mukushina and I'm currently living in Chicago, Illinois.
AT:	<u>00:00:14</u>	And where, and when were you born?
SM:	<u>00:00:17</u>	I was born on October 8, 1942. I was born in Los Angeles County Hospital. Um, even though that was not an internment hospital, my mother was about to be bordered on a train to Heart Mountain, but she had me in her belly and that was a few days overdue. So the doctors a forbade, forbade the authorities to have my mother on the train. So I was born in Los Angeles officially.
AT:	<u>00:00:53</u>	So did she have to go to an assembly center or did or was she just in LA?
SM:	<u>00:01:00</u>	Well, all Japanese had to go to a pre-detention center. Um, my, my parents went to the Santa Anita Race Track and they occupied one of the stalls, it was not very pleasant, but they made the best out of it.
AT:	<u>00:01:18</u>	And so did she leave Santa Anita to go to LA? To have you in the hospital?
SM:	<u>00:01:26</u>	I don't know the exact circumstances, but the trains are about to leave. And um, um, my father and mother were taken to the Los Angeles County Hospital and on October 8th I was born.
AT:	<u>00:01:44</u>	And what did your, what did your parents do?

SM: 00:01:47 Well, um, my father was a Buddhist minister and uh, he came to this country in 1936 originally to Hawai'i as a missionary, but not in a missionary in the Christian sense, not to evangelize people, but to uh, bring comfort to the Japanese who were working in Hawai'i. At that time, he was a young man, he was born in 1911. So he, um, just a lot of energy to see the world. So his first trip to Japan was a 19, from Japan, was in 1936. He went back in 1938. He came back with a wife, my mother and a back to Hawai'i and I don't know the exact dates, but they migrated from Hawai'i to Los Angeles.

AT: 00:02:48 Where, where was he from in Japan?

SM: 00:02:50 My father had a temple in Tokyo. And um, my mother was a born near Tokyo. My father was born in Taipei when it was a Japanese occupied. So it was like a State. And um, I didn't know the circumstances, but he came back to Japan before he was a, the age of five and I'm, from what I gather, his mother had, had emotional problems, uh, so she couldn't help my father bring him up. So he was taken to a monastery and he was there until he went to college.

AT: 00:03:44 And do you have any siblings?

SM: 00:03:47 Yes, I have one. His name is Masao. His American name is Warren.

AT: 00:03:53 Warren?

SM: 00:03:56 Hmh

AT: 00:03:56 And is he older or younger?

SM: 00:03:57 Younger.

AT: 00:04:00 And so when was Masao born?

SM: 00:04:02 1947

AT: 00:04:05 So after the war?

SM: 00:04:06 After the war, mhm.

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<Begin Segment 2>

AT: 00:04:08 And so your, your parents went to Santa Anita? They had you. And then did they go back to Heart Mountain?

SM: 00:04:17 They had no choice. Okay. Yeah. So at the next available train, um, what they went, they were taken to Heart Mountain. Um on a side note, which I didn't know until a couple of years ago was that, um, I, I talked to Gene Yashima and Gene was surprised that my father was at the hospital where I was born and um, I thought it was normal for a husband to be with his wife, but Japan, but priests were separated from their families before, uh, the camp. And so, uh, he shouldn't have been there when I was born and um, uh, that, I think he slipped through the paperwork somehow, but that's another story, but we could go onto that later on. Okay.

AT: 00:05:14 Yeah, I mean, do you even have any, any details about how he was able to go to the hospital?

SM: 00:05:18 No, um, well my mother and father said that, uh, um, um, when they we're living in Japantown in Los Angeles. One Sunday, two FBI agents knocked on the door and my father answered. And, and the agent said are you Zaishin Mukushina, my father. He says, yes. So why, why are you hiding from us? And he says, well, I'm not hiding. He says my name is on the mailbox, you know, that's how you found me. And he did a lot of social work with the local Buddhist temple and, uh, he was very popular amongst the merchants, uh, in the, in the area. Um, so, um, um, I think the agents were convinced that he wasn't trying to hide from them. So naturally, they uh, they checked out a story of, yeah, he did a lot of social work at the local temple, you know. Uh, and um, uh, and for some reason he was not asked to be separated from my mother, which was a good thing because she will be by a, by herself. Because we had no job, no family here in America. And had she, had my father had been separated, she would've been alone.

AT: 00:06:39 So nothing came of that exchange with the FBI?

SM: 00:06:43 Um, later on we were sent to Heart Mountain, a deterrent determined camping in Wyoming. And we were there for 18 months. And my father, uh, uh, was the authorities found out that my father was a Buddhist priest and he said, you don't belong here. You belong to a maximum security internment camp called Tule Lake in California. So about 18 months later, after we lived at Heart Mountain, we were transferred from Heart Mountain to Tule Lake and we were in Tule Lake until the war ended.

AT: 00:07:27 So that would have been, um,

New Speaker: 00:07:31 1945, something like that.

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<Begin Segment 3>

New Speaker: 00:07:34 But when you left Heart Mountain, that would have been '43?

New Speaker: 00:07:36 Yeah around there.

New Speaker: 00:07:39 Um, and then what, what about after the war? Where did your, where did you all go?

SM: 00:07:48 Well, um, that was interesting because as I stated earlier, we didn't have family in America and normally if you didn't have family in America after the war, you were shipped back to Japan because our visa expired, you see. And so, um, uh, the interesting story that my mother told me the last six months before she passed away was that, um, when the war ended, the commandant of Tule Lake called on my father and, I said, well, my father, so he was the only person there and the commandant, was saying that, um, I've been observing you from afar and you, you have very good way of with people to calm down the hotheads. Now, I don't know if you know this or not, but Tule Lake was maximum security, a lot of draft dodgers so-called draft dodgers, and people who are pro-Japanese were there. There was a lot of dissension, people don't like to be incarcerated and they want to go back to Japan or they didn't want to be drafted unless their parents are freed from internment camps and that kind of stuff. So my father was a peacemaker. That's what I was told. And so the commandant told my father or we need people like you. And so he offered them three tickets for him, my mother, and me on a ship back to Japan or a, or to go to Seabrook Farms in New Jersey? Uh, and so, um, at that time my mom said we didn't know anything about Japan. All we knew that was bombed out country. We didn't know if there were enough food for people to eat, yeah. So, um, my father says we're staying in America and since it will Seabrook Farms, he knew that at least that we'll eat something. So we, uh, so we took a train from Tule Lake to Seabrook Farms, New Jersey.

AT: 00:09:56 Did your parents, did they, were they in communication with family back in Japan?

SM: 00:10:02 It was very hard to know because of the mail system was almost nonexistent at that time. There was a war going on, so it put a stamp on an envelope and send something to Japan. You don't know if it got there and the other way around, you know, I don't think that people, my parents, his relatives knew where we were.

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<Begin Segment 4>

AT: 00:10:29 And so you were, you were very young. Of course, during the war where, where were your earliest memories?

AT: 00:10:40 Well, my earliest memories was when I was about four or five years old, you know, and uh, um, things were kind of foggy back then. But I was speaking, um speaking Japanese to friends. Now mind you, even though I was born in America, my first language was Japanese. My parents didn't speak any English. So in camp, when people came to talk to my parents, they spoke in Japanese. And of course we had no television, no radio, and the only English spoken was I, I'm just supposing imagining we're, um, Nisei's, second generation Japanese on the outside. But my parents spoke to me in Japanese and everything was in Japanese. So when I was in, in Seabrook Farms are first non-Japanese contacts where Estonians. They spoke German. So I think I knew more German than English at that time. It was kind of um, uh, I wasn't all that clear, but I didn't speak English until I was eight years old.

AT: 00:11:55 And so what are those early memories? That was in New Jersey?

SM: 00:12:00 Yeah, New Jersey, yeah uh, my father was a priest there. He established the Buddhist temple there and I remember giving him a lot of sermons and he will be quite creative. He'll have puppets, you know, actual puppets and um, he had people engaged and um, um, he gave pretty good sermons. Yeah. His, I remember, it was all in Japanese though.

AT: 00:12:21 Okay it wasn't. Uh, do you recall the name of that temple?

SM: 00:12:27 Yeah. It's called Seabrook Farms Buddhist Church, it's still there.

AT: 00:12:37 And, so it sounds like there is a, a bit of a Japanese American community in Seabrook Farms?

SM: 00:12:43 I don't know currently, but uh, but there was a Buddhist temple there

AT: 00:12:49 Well, and because I know there were a number of Japanese Americans who went there as well. And if he was doing the ceremonies in Japanese. How long was your family there in New Jersey?

SM: 00:13:06 Up to about to about 1951, '52. Now, my father wanted to do more than farming. I think, uh my father was very pragmatic and he knew that the family could be fed, you know, so even though the Japanese who were field hands, many of them-- most of them--had education and advanced degrees, you know, but it was a job, it was a way to feed your family. So my father, uh, heard through the grapevine that, uh, a place called Chicago was a place of opportunity where you can make more money and, and provide for better living standard. So, um, I can remember coming on a train from East Coast to Chicago and I remember I remember train rights, you know, I was a little kid so let's just, you know, happy seeing the mountains of Pennsylvania and the train, like I'm rumbling along. And so I had very pleasant thoughts. I'd never experienced anything negative and I think my parents sheltered me from that. So I never felt anger from them. I never felt anger from my parents' friends, you know, but it was a, it was a happy childhood even though I was in camp.

AT: 00:14:36 Were you, were you in school in camp or

SM: 00:14:39 No

AT: 00:14:39 Oh, and what about in Seabrook Farm?

SM: 00:14:44 Yeah, um, I started, um, back then the semester started in September, uh, and there was the midterm, so I started a year late because I didn't know any English. So, um, so there's, well maybe you ought to start next year. So in a sense I failed kindergarten, you know, so that was the beginning of academia.

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<Begin Segment 5>

AT: 00:15:12 So, you took the train ride to Chicago in '51?

SM: 00:15:15 '51.

AT: 00:15:16 '51. And then where did your family settle in the city?

SM: 00:15:20 Well, we lived in--I know the address--it's at 4450 South Oakenwald Avenue in Chicago. That place no longer exists, you know, something else is there, but it was a roach infested ghetto building. Our neighbors are mostly cockroaches, you know...But there were some Japanese living there, but back back in '51, '52, people could reject your application to rent based on race. So they'll say we don't rent to people, your type, that kind of thing. And there was no legal recourse.

AT: 00:16:06 And which neighborhood?

SM: 00:16:11 It was on South Side. There was a little Japanese community from the lakefront. Oakenwald Avenue was on the eastern part of Chicago, probably about a block block and a half or two blocks away from Lake Shore Drive. And there was a Japanese store on 43rd street called Star Market and Star Market, it looked big to me as a child, but it's probably maybe one half or two thirds the size of a 711 today. But that's the only place in Chicago, that I knew of, that a person could buy Japanese food, you know, like, uh, like sukiyaki meat and fish and rice, you know. I don't think Jewel food store was around back then, but there were some other food stores and, and one thing that always stuck in my head was we were um, we were not rich, you know, my mother was very good in saving money and, and I knew that she could go to a American food store and get milk and products at a cheaper price. And my mother always said that, well, we have to support each other because if Japanese don't support each other, who will? Long before food stamps, long before welfare, no medicaid. So we had to support ourselves. And so a Japanese community in 19 in the early 1950s supported each other. And um, is there, I remember even as a kid growing up age seven, eight, nine, I had pretty happy memories.

AT: 00:17:54 Where were you going to school?

SM: 00:17:56 We went to a school called Shakespeare Grammar School. Shakespeare, is no lon, the building is still there, but the school has, it's not a school anymore, it's something else. And I was, I was there in a very overcrowded rooms, were, um, I think there was like 45 or 50 in a room.

AT: 00:18:19 And what did your father end up doing in Chicago?

SM: 00:18:23 He worked in a factory first it was called a Paul Paul revere. They made pots and pans and then, um, uh, uh, they made cameras, Revere now, Revere camera, and then it became Woolen Stock. Woolen Stock was a German company that, that made tape recorders. And so, so he was on the assembly line. Uh, uh, that's how he supported the family. Interesting, was uh, maybe, well, it's interesting, that has a bonus he got a turkey for Thanksgiving and he didn't know what a turkey was. He brought home a turkey and my mother thought it was a big chicken, you know, so, um, so, um, uh, she had to ask our neighbors, how do you cook this bird? You know. And um, so we had our first Thanksgiving dinner. Um, my mother was really worried about that. It wasn't not overcooked or undercooked. And those are some fond memories I have of my or dinners with my family.

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<Begin Segment 6>

AT: 00:19:40 What else do you remember about those early days in Chicago, were there a lot of other Japanese Americans

SM: 00:19:50 Yeah

AT: 00:19:51 At your school?

SM: 00:19:51 No, there are some in our school, but I'm, uh, I belonged to the Cub Scouts. It was all Japanese American Cub Scouts. Then, um, I was in the Boy Scouts that Boy Scouts. It was troop 515, I think still around and that's where all my friends were Japanese, you know, uh, um, uh, or the rest were African Americans and it was kind of hard to it. It was just hard to know each other culturally. So, um, um, when I was in the Boy Scouts, um, um, um, interesting thing was that every one of the Boy Scouts I knew went to college. We were talking about college, even in grade school. Where are you going to, people were talking about various schools and um, some of the, uh, the thoughts that came out of that was when I moved to another, when we moved to another neighborhood on the North Side, um, I had my first non-Japanese, Caucasian friends. They were Irish Catholic, must of them. And, and, um, so I remember asking some of my friends, which college are you going to? None of them had college plans and I remember being totally shocked because every one of my Japanese friends went to college as though it was, you went to grammar school, high school, college. Of course, we all go to college and, and I am, and that was my, my introduction to a, uh, a non-Japanese culture. And I

remember one instance, um, his name was Ken and it bothered me so much that I still remembered it, you know. And I said, uh, he went to St. Gregory's Catholic Grammar School, St. George. And I said uh you're smart, why don't you go to college? And I remember him saying this, my old man will kill me. I says, I thought he was kidding. He said, college is for pencil pushers, you make, you're a man, by doing things with your hands. And I said, your father would punish you for going to college? And that was my first surprise coming from an all Japanese background. And, and I found out that was a fairly common, you know, so I quit talking about college to my non-Japanese friends and um, and they thought it was weird because I was going to, I was thinking of going to college, you know, so, uh, that was my cultural shock, you know, uh, as a, as a kid because we are playing baseball, football things that kids play, you know, and getting into trouble playing tags, that kind of stuff. So we all knew each other. But, uh, um, uh, another thing was that this one boy had a birthday and he came to me, he says, I can't invite you to my birthday party, I said because why not? Because my mom says no, Japanese. Now, if right now it doesn't bother me, but if you're 12, 13, 14 it bothers you. And that's when I first became kind of aware of my Japanese identity.

AT: 00:23:17 From other kids?

SM: 00:23:20 Yeah. Peers, who'd love to have me at their party. You know. Because he came to me and says, I can't invite you to my party. He says, I want you to come. You know, that kind of stuff. And I remember this one lady, uh, our neighbor, um, when my mom and I will walk to the store, she'll just turn it back, you know, and my mother was a, I will say, why is she doing that? That's just, in Japanese, it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter. We went away. And these, I think that was the awakening on my Japanese identity. And um, another moment was um, when my mom and I were at the corner of Clark Street and Balmoral on North Side. There was a cigar store. Now it's, uh, uh, uh, I think it's a hamburgers there now, you know, but we were there and my mother speak, spoke Japanese and, and the, we were just talking about, I don't remember, we're talking about this one day he came to us and says, speak English. I don't understand you. That was a shock. So I think when you're like a preteen or teen, you become very sensitive to your, uh, you know, I caught that, like your awakening, you know. So, um, so that was my first, uh, um, uh, um, you, you could call my first baptism into a non-Japanese culture.

<Begin Segment 7>

- AT: 00:24:50 And when your family was in Chicago. Um, you had mentioned that you were in the boy scouts. Were there other, um, activities that you would, um, that you were involved in that work within the Japanese American community. Like any church or temple?
- SM: 00:25:10 I went to Japanese school on Saturday. We all, we all with the Japanese school, you know, with them whether or not, you know, parents just took us there. And that was at a, a, um, a Protestant church about two blocks from where I lived. And, um, and my father, even though he was a Buddhist priest, he was, he was very good friends with the minister there. His name was Nakamura. I remember that. And, uh, uh, he loaned us for free the rooms of the church so that, uh, uh, the Japanese language could be taught to the other children at least to keep some identity of who we were. And we hated that because we wanted to play baseball and football this. But we were forced to learn Kanji and Katakana and Hiragana, that kind of stuff. But uh, in retrospect, I'm glad that I went there. But if you're a kid, no one, no one wants to go to school on Saturday.
- AT: 00:26:03 Can you still speak and read and write pretty well?
- SM: 00:26:07 No, I think speaking is uh language skill, that has to be kept up. My, my mother passed away in 2004 and so when she was in a nursing home and so whenever I saw her, we spoke in Japanese, I encouraged her to speak Japanese, you know, so we also probably hear Japanese language for a three, four, or five hours a week and then she'd just speak to me and tell me what's going on in her life. And she was making crochets and things like that. I didn't mind what she was talking about, but I'm, I'm in earlier, my father passed away in 1990 when I visited my parents. They all spoke Japanese. So, uh, it came into my mind, my brain. But since 2004, um, none of my close friends speak Japanese. And so, uh, I lost the ability to speak even though that was my first language. What was interesting was when I first visited Japan, uh, my Japanese was getting very, very rusty even at that point. When we were
- AT: 00:27:18 When was it?
- SM: 00:27:18 A back in, the first time was 1978, you know. And um, I remember being in Tokyo and people are speaking so fast. I, I had a headache, but on third day everything fell in place. I understood language, I understood the characters I learned in Japanese school. So I didn't get lost, you know, in, in subways.

But that's what I meant. I meant, uh, I, I was so glad that I learned that uh a Japanese language, at the Japanese school because somehow I think all of that, all of that education is buried in your brain someplace it's gray matter someplace. Maybe in, in, uh, uh, our version of a hard drive, brain drive.

- AT: 00:28:00 At what age did you stop going to Japanese school?
- SM: 00:28:04 About 14 time high school started at that time. We moved and we moved from South Side to the North Side.
- New Speaker: 00:28:13 Where on the North Side?
- New Speaker: 00:28:15 We lived on Rascher Avenue in Rogers, now called Rogers Park and um, uh, we live about, we lived about a quarter of mile from Foster and Ashland Avenue Northwe, Northwest. And what was interesting was that we were, we moved there because the landlord was the first Japanese person to buy property there. The last name was Boji. And um, I guess my father has some prominence so they invited my family to a better neighborhood, better education and so forth. And so we moved there and there was only one other Japanese family probably within jeez, a mile, half a mile and they were called Watanabe. And they were on Balmoral Avenue, just near Balmoral and Ashland Avenue. And, um, uh, they had a little girl about my age, her name was Lynne and that was my association with the Japanese community at that time, you know.

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<Begin Segment 8>

- AT: 00:29:26 You said that your, your father had some prominence. Do you know why or how he would have
- SM: 00:29:39 Well, in Japanese culture they don't like to talk about their accomplishments. They just don't, you know. Um, uh, I remember growing up as a, as a child, as a kid, I knew a lot of people who serve on in 442nd, Go for Broke Regiment. And they were pretty, they were pretty humble guy, Hawaiian non-Hawaiian, you know. And, and I would say things like, well, did you have to shoot someone, you know, how kids talk, they will never talk about it. Naw, I was war and things were kind of messy. And they'll change topics, right away--hey how are the Cubs doing? Something like that, you know. Um, the plaque that I donated to the society there, um, it was given. Oh, um, the

back of the uh, the, uh, the plaque, is the name of the person who donated it, you know,

AT: 00:30:34 Can you, before we go on, just, can you describe the plaque you're talking about?

SM: 00:30:37 Yeah, it's, it's a one plaque, I'll say it's about two, two and a half feet like this, and maybe about eight, 10 inches solid wood software, balsa wood and some personal skills have made a picture of a the camp and Heart Mountain in the background. And he gave it to my father as a gift. He said thank you very much for what you did. And my father would never tell me. I said, what, what did you do? You know how kids are, you know. And my father would say, it was really nothing. It was nothing. Nothing. But it was nothing. If you've seen the plaque it's more than a nothing, more than a nothing. And so, um, uh, so on, back of the, uh, of the plaque, you see the exact date on there and the person who, uh, who donated that, and one days I's like to photograph the back of that plaque when this exhibit is over. But uh in camp. There was no, I don't think, I don't think money was allowed. So everything was kind of bartered and he was, my father was given that the plaque in Heart Mountain and it hung on our home for years. So we just took for granted, you know, until later in life I saw the problem and solve that and I saw the wood, began to see cracks in the wood and I was not ah, I wanted the wood to be preserved so that it wouldn't fall apart. Then I, that's when I called Jean, Jean Yashima and um, uh, with great sorrow, I gave it to her, but I knew that she would take care of it.

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AT: 00:32:34 When your family moved to the North Side, that was probably, that was the mid fifties?

SM: 00:32:44 Mhm.

AT: 00:32:44 Which high school did you attend?

SM: 00:32:45 I went to grammar school first, in fifth grade, it was Trumbull Grammar School. Trumbull is no longer in existence, but the building is still at Ash, uh, Ashland and Foster. I went to Amundsen High School at Damen and Foster.

AT: 00:33:02 And how did the, how did living on the North Side compared to living on the South Side?

SM: 00:33:08 World of difference. Um, I, I knew that when I transferred to the, we transferred, um, in March and I was in fifth grade and for a while my mother told me, you know, have the Trumbull School was about two years ahead of the, uh, of the ghetto school, Shakespeare I was at. So my mother was very good to mathematics and geography, so, uh, so she kept me up, you know, even though she couldn't read a word of English, she was a very encouraging person too, well, I'm glad she was there.

AT: 00:33:53 She would help you?

SM: 00:33:54 Help you, with my homework and um not sure what she was saying, I'm speaking, the other school was really slow, you know. So, um, so I was way behind academically when I went to my Mount Trumbull School and I was academically behind for the next four or five years, I think I had to catch up.

AT: 00:34:23 How did that work exactly? Were do you, did you have to do any repeat a grade or anything or.

SM: 00:34:30 No, well, back in 1957 I graduated, we all had to take IQ tests .and I can, we don't do that now, but that was the latest thing in psychology. We're, uh, we're, uh, we're all the children in the world in the country could be measured, by IQ, you know, not knowing that there's not a bias in IQ. But if you're 12, 13 years old, what do you know, you know? And, and, um, this is again, stuck in my head. Earlier I stated that we, all, all the kids were thinking about going to college, you know, going to college and when, um, when I was talking with Mrs. Mann, my eighth grade counselor, she said, I don't think you're going to make it through high school. I said, what? You know, so well, because here's the rational, here's, here's why, you're reading grade is 5.2, you know, fifth grade average when I was in eighth grade. So I was three years behind. My IQ was 92, average is 100, you need 120 to go to college. She said, she said, forget about college, you know, and um, I, I, those words stuck, not personally, but I was very ashamed because I'd be the only Japanese kid not going to college, you know, that was my thought. You know, my best friend, you know, he was going to Lane Tech and, and um, uh, we're talking about going to Northwestern or you know, all these good schools, all these good schools because at the University of Illinois and that kind of stuff. And um, I didn't tell my parents that, you know, Oh yeah, my parents also said, listen to your teachers. They're always right. You know, so uh, so whenever I complained about

my teacher being mean to me, my mother would say, no she's a teacher, you outta know better. So here I am, an authority, authority figure telling me I was not smart enough to go to high school, you know.

- AT: 00:36:40 Was it, you weren't smart enough to go to high school?
- SM: 00:36:40 No, no, I could go to college. Excuse me. So um, and um, and when I went to Amundsen, my first year I was in a remedial class, they called that the slowpoke class, you know. So everyone there had low reading scores. And, and again, again you know, this is my fate, you know, and my counselors there, they're telling me to take something you can do with your hands be a mechanic or, or do something with your hands because you don't have the brains, the smarts, the intelligence to finish high school. So they were actually kind of encouraging me to not to do something else in high school. But what happened was that my, um, uh, I started school September, first year was in June, my Marines were coming in was 5.2. So they wanted to have at least one year advantage I have a 5.0, 6.2 and some people 4.8, you know, it was that range. And um, um, I remember that a teacher, her name was Mrs. Baxter was saying when test results came in on the second tour, she was saying, Oh, you said Mary, you went for 4.8 to a 6.4. Great. And she'll come back and forth. Oh, Steve you didn't do very well you remain about the same. Then she says Susumu, you know, you went from 5.2 to 10.8. They thought I cheated and I said how could I cheat on a test, you know, especially if it was written out. So I was supposed to be in honors English, but they didn't want to do that. No one went from, from the remedial class to honors. So I just stayed in the same level throughout the level. So that was my, my exposure to high school.
- AT: 00:39:10 So you said most of your classmates were Irish Catholic?
- SM: 00:39:16 It was interesting. Yeah. I lived on ah Rascher Avenue. Families north of Balmoral were Irish Catholic, there was a divide. And south of Balmoral were Protestants, you know. So, um, uh, so when I played, um, the Catholics back then didn't play much with the Protestants, you know, I didn't understand why, you know, but uh, uh, but I got on well with everybody. So, uh, um, so, um, I found that out as I lived there, you know, because I noticed that everybody on my street block, all my friends went to St. George's or St. Gregory's and everyone, uh, uh, living south of Balmoral went to Trumbull, Trumbull Grammar School. So that's when I got curious about, about why people do that, you know, religion and that kind of thing.

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<Begin Segment 10>

AT: 00:40:19 And I'm sorry if you mentioned this.

SM: 00:40:19 Go ahead.

AT: 00:40:19 Did you say that your family was in involved in any temples or churches?

SM: 00:40:24 Yeah, my father had a Buddhist temple in the apartment. Um, we call it the Chicago, Chicago Buddhist Church. And most of the parishioners were people from camp, you know, and so it was more like a social gathering. My dad would preach and so forth. But what was fun was after the service, we never went home, you know, people brought, maybe it's Japanese tradition, but they brought their food along. We had fabulous Japanese food, you know, and they'll stay to watch baseball and football and whatever. And it was not unusual for services to start at 1:00 PM when the Cubs are playing, w:e started at 1230, you know, watched the game. It was not unusual for people to stay until 7:00, 8:00 in the evening. Just to socialize because that's the only time to, uh, to let off steam, I suppose, if they had bad time at work, you know. So, um, so my father, uh, uh, um, so I found that the temple and perhaps even some Christian churches today are a, it's more than just to hear a sermon go home. It was the effort to be like a big family affair. And I was talking to some of my friends who like Japanese food, I took Japanese food back then for granted because it was so great, you know, and, and Japanese ladies would come to my home, you know, early in the morning and my mother and these will be talking about but don't make some sushi and some all kinds of Japanese food, you know. It was a feast, you know. And uh, of course, uh, as a kid, I didn't appreciate that, you know, I just ate and ate the food and the, um, uh, I, I had a very good memories, you know, it was a very warm, warm gathering. And um, um, I think my father wants said, uh, the service, we had service once a month. It wasn't every month. Service was just for gathering people together. So, but sermons, it just an excuse for people to come together. So that's how my father thought about things. He never thought of himself as a, as a great orator or, or, or a great leader, you know, he just, um, he was just a very humble person, naturally humble. And so he said, oh, I'd like to provide a service. We're all friends can meet together. And oen informal setting, casual setting would talk about politics, talk about baseball. Could talk about lots of things,

work, you know, a kid's education. It was a, I really cherished those days.

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<Begin Segment 11>

AT: 00:43:07 What was, so you were, I mean, of course you were very young in camp. How did you, was that experience something that your family talked about? How, like where did you, how would you describe your own um like, development of those family memories?

SM: 00:43:33 Well, the Japanese families community never talked about the camp. Oh, they'll say, but the only mention of camp was: Where were you at? I was at this camp. Or I was at Heart Mountain. That was about the extent of it. I never heard a bad thing about America, you know, even though that we were forced into the camps and I never heard about that FDR was a rotten guy or anything, nothing like that. And people, people who fought in the 442nd regiment, you know, they talk about, they talk about their loss of their friends. They, a lot of people died in 442. But it was never out of bitterness, it was out of sadness, but it was out of duty and obligation. They were great Americans. They, I try to imagine a soldier being drafted out, internment camp and, and, um, the mother and her father and her siblings are behind camp, they said, what are we fighting for? You know, and yet they fought for the country. And, and the 442nd was the most decorated unit in history, uh, uh, of warfare. More people died. And, and, uh, I think that's the tribute to the Japanese, uh, thinking I think, you know, um. Going back to Japanese history, you know, um, people in Japan were not angry at the 442 because in feudal Japan, you fought for daimyo. For various warlords, you know, and you were loyal to that uh, lord. If you're not loyal, you were considered a spy, you were considered a lower, a lower person. So they, so the Japanese mentality is that you're, you're Japanese face, speak Japanese, if you're in America, if that's your home, you fight for your home. So there was never a backlash from the Japanese people I knew who lived in Japan about a Japanese serving in the US army in America. And these are some of the things that, uh, that seeped into my, uh, my soul, you know, as the years go by, you know. People I never heard of, I talked to relatives, never said, how could you fight for America when you in camp and all, you know, we can do this kind of stuff, I never heard that. And I'm being very sincere about that. It was just the, uh, the Japanese culture. Uh, my father says, war is crazy. Crazy things happen.

Let's go, just move on. Crazy things happened on both sides. So I learned a lot from my father. To this day, I don't like to look back, you know, I like to look forward. Life is not perfect, you know, so I just like to move forward and I'd like, I don't like to dwell on the past too much even though they may be very hurtful.

AT: 00:46:49 How would you, how would you describe your experience in learning about what happened to your family? You know, piecing together these stories of, hearing about the FBI coming to your house, for example, or you know, your mother getting to leave to go to LA to have you. Um, how, how would you describe the journey of, of piecing those stories together?

SM: 00:47:26 I was a little surprised because it didn't come at once. It came over the years, you know? And um, if you, as my mother and father, they weren't just give you a direct answer. They'll say, oh, that's ah, I don't think about it. But as I grew older, like my mother, uh, telling me six months before her death, how we stayed in America. She just said she just stated out of nowhere, we were just having coffee and just talking: Oh, by the way, we're lucky to be in America. I said oh? You know. And then she started speaking and that was news to that, that was news to me. She'd never stated that before. And I was in my sixties at the time, you know, fifties I think, I was pretty old guy. A lot older than you are, you know. And so, uh, it came out in bits and pieces. But, uh, my mother and father never said that in bitterness. I can seriously say that. And even my father's parents' friends, you know, they were uh, they were frustrated. But then are they never, um, uh, they were extremely kind people, you know.

AT: 00:48:41 When did you learn about the camps?

SM: 00:48:45 Well, I was brought up in one, so I still had memories of it, you know. Uh, so, uh, so it is, like it was revealed to me, but my father always pressed forward. And so he never talked about the camp, he'd talk about good things in camp, you know? Um, okay. Here are some things that, I don't remember this, but he said that, uh, I think that public best, at Heart Mountain, you know, were people just, it'd be Japanese style. And he said that when I was about one year old, he'd put me on his shoulders and I would be squealing like a pig. He says, you know, so there were some of the friendly, um fond memories. Again, the memories of my stay in camp were very positive, very positive. And it came to the surface years afterwards when it was becoming and became an adult.

AT: 00:49:49 What was coming to the surface?

SM: 00:49:51 Our experiences, experience, uh, of, of camp. I think you speak to a lot of Japanese people who were from the gener, they would not, I, it'd be very rare for someone to just speak about the camp, you know, you have to kind of draw them out of it.

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<Begin Segment 12>

AT: 00:50:11 And how, how does it feel coming to an exhibition like this and seeing the narrative right now and seeing your family's piece in the show?

SM: 00:50:23 Well, um, I saw them, I saw some of those pictures before, some of the photographs before I saw new ones. It just brought back memories of where was. But not, it was, it was, um, it was peaceful, you know, um, I didn't like to see little children in trucks either with a face sticking up between bars, so that shouldn't have happened. But it did happen. And um, it's something for people to always remember, you know, that though you can't just ah round up a group of people because they look different, you know. And, and put them in a camp. It doesn't solve any problems, you know. Um, one thing I learned, I learned about the camp was some of my friends think what Japanese had to, uh, be interned for their safety or because of alleged terrorist. That's the corporate propaganda. But the story, but the comment I will throw out, we'll say if Japanese we're so endangered, dangers of causing terrorism. Why weren't Hawaiian Japanese interned? Remember Pearl Harbor happened in Japan, in Japanese, we're still working on the naval yard, you know, working as cooks or janitors or someone you know, and they say what it says Hawaiian Japanese were not interned? And I said no, you know, and uh, um, I think that the, uh, the internment, one was economics. Um, I saw an exhibit down there or down there, saying that about 40 percent of all the crops, crops, um, came out of Japanese hands before WWII. I did some research many, many years ago about that and I saw the titles, ah the land titles, and uh, um, a land titles of the 1930s in that area were all Japanese, were mostly Japanese. And um, I looked at titles in the, in the, in the forties, late forties. They're all American names. And, and if, if one group of people controlled 40 percent of an industry, that's a lot of money and I think that was a, that was not stated to Roosevelt, but I think that was the reason why Japanese were interned, they wanted the properties, not all of their properties, but

those farmlands. And those farmlands today are extremely valuable and I think they're owned by Japanese people, but the Japanese people started those farms. And, uh, and then, uh, uh, my, uh, my understanding of history back then was I said to my father for the, why didn't Japanese go to a lawyer to fight all these kinds of things. And then I read later on, this my own saying that the assumption assumption, some American, Caucasian, uh, lawyers try to help them, but their clients will say, if you help those families, I'm withdrawing my business. So that's why I didn't have any legal representation. The only legal group that helped the Japanese were, the, uh, the um, uh, the, uh, American Civil Liberty, the American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU. And they're mostly Jewish and, and the Jews were rounded up in Europe, so they didn't care, if they saw injustice. So they're the ones who have argued a case of some of the case, uh, for the, uh, the Japanese. One thing was um, 1930, early 1930s to late 1930s, the California passed a law stating that if you're a Japanese ancestry, ancestry, ancestry, you cannot own land, you know, I think you know about that. And what happened was that, uh, they found a loophole and that the babies were American citizens. So the baby's own the land, but they need legal help for that. They came from the ACLU. But no one else will help them.

AT: 00:54:53 That's

SM: 00:54:53 That's my understanding. Maybe some people would dispute this. But, uh, that's what I learned on my own.

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<Begin Segment 13>

AT: 00:55:06 As a Japanese American who was in camp. What is your response to some of the rhetoric and the actions of the government today that are targeting specific groups of people?

SM: 00:55:24 Yeah, stupid, it's one word. It doesn't. I mean, it doesn't work. You know, in a Japanese camp, a camp, you'll say that if you were married to a non Japanese, you know, if you're married to a Caucasian, that person was considered to be dangerous. They were interned. How dumb is that? You know, and, and, uh, uh, it, it's assimilation because of the Japanese were a, um, um, I read some, the newspapers, you know, um, I will call them like the Fox News of 19 thirties, you know, and I, I actually would News Reports but saying that: Those, goddamn Japs, you know, they're not human. They can work 23 hours a day, not sleep, no

white man could keep up with them. And then there's, you know, that's, that's, that's a, I would call it Fox News hysteria kind of thing, you know. Uh, um, uh, yeah. Another thing I read was saying is that the, uh, they're unAmerican not one of them is American citizen. You know, not, not knowing that the Japanese people, when they apply for citizenship, couldn't get citizenship but didn't care. And so they demonized that, they says they're all pro Tojo, pro emperor. We got to kick these guys out. So when the camps came, it was a natural progression. We, we don't want these, these unpatriotic, you know, Japanese people, uh, around us, they'll kill us in our sleep, all that stuff. These are articles I actually read when I was doing my research, you know, uh so a, back then I did a lot of research.

AT: 00:57:08 And why is this history, why is it important to, to remember and?

SM: 00:57:20 Well, for me personally, I don't want the current situation to get out of hand. You know, it's very easy to demonize a person. Very easy to demonize a religion, you know, my father was supposed to be at all surprised was supposed to be separated from my mother and a mother before I was born because she was considered to be a terrorist. That's crazy, you know, so they make assumptions, assumptions, and they always have some, uh, some, uh, a message, person say that yeah, I heard him say something. Yeah, I read that he's doing these terrible things, you know. And so, um, uh, I think, um, uh, American, Americans, can assimilate a lot of people, you know, I think every ethnic group from, from Germans to the Polish, to the Irish to the Jews to the, you know, all of all the others, the first generation, they always had a bad, you know, I read reports saying in New York: Irish not wanted. Why? Because you know how they are--they'll say. All they do is beat their wives and get drunk all the time, you know. And that's very easy to demonize people. That's a lazy man's thinking, lazy man's thinking. And so, uh, uh, uh, you have to see each, each person as they are. There's always exception to the rule, you know, that it'd be, it'd be a thing in every group, but the people are demonized. We're always got the get the exception and make them try to make that the rule. And, and on a personal level, I try not to think that there's always exceptions.

AT: 00:59:09 If you could leave any kind of message or our legacy for the future generations, what kind of message would you want to leave?

SM: 00:59:21 Well, I think that America is the only nation in the world that can assimilate people from other cultures. You know, we had

Barack Obama as president, the only African American president. In Japan, I can't imagine having a prime minister from, who's Chinese or Korean. I can't, it won't happen there, you know, and I can't imagine a, a, not a country having a person from India having a person from Pakistan being a, being a prime minister or people towards, in America it happens. It did happen. And so this is, um, I like to keep that legacy, uh, this, uh, this dream about and even if we have an group, a lot of policies with Donald Trump, you know, but he's not permanent and he's going to be passed on in history, uh, as well we don't know yet, you know.

AT: 01:00:22 As we wrap up, is there anything that you'd like to add or anything I missed?

SM: 01:00:28 No, I think we covered everything. Um, I'm proud to be Japanese, I'm proud to be an American and I'm proud to have a fantastic friends.

AT: 01:00:38 Thank you so much for recording.

SM: 01:00:40 Oh sure. You're welcome.

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