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Title: Sharon Seeder Interview
Narrator: Sharon Seeder
Interviewer: Anna Takada
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<Begin Segment 1>

Anna Takada: 00:00:01 Okay, so this is an interview with Sharon Seeder as part of Alphawood Gallery Chicago Nikkei Oral History Project. The oral history project is being conducted in line with the current exhibition, Then They Came From Me: Incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII and the Demise of Civil Liberties. Today is September 29 and, uh, we're recording at about 11:15 AM, uh, at the Alphawood Gallery Oral History Studio. Sharon is being interviewed by Anna Takada of Alphawood Gallery. Um, so if we could just start, um, would you mind just stating your, your name?

Sharon Seeder: 00:00:45 Yeah, my name is Sharon Seeder, but my name was Sharon Shingu and I was born and raised in Chicago right after the war as one of the postwar babies. And my parents were born in California and after the war they migrated to this area because of jobs and a lot of family also migrated with them.

AT: 00:01:14 Where were they from in California?

SS: 00:01:15 Los Angeles area. Although, my family owned a little diner in Wilmington, California, which was like a seaport. And I know currently cruise ships often dock at that place, so they cooked um, for, you know, dockworkers and any kind of, um, laborers, sometimes sailors. I know that some of my aunts dated sailors that came in. And it was all, uh, American food, no Japanese food. And matter of fact, Kelly and I were just talking because, uh, my mom did not know how to cook Japanese food. And one of my land lady who's also Japanese American, her mom didn't know how to cook Japanese food. And it's because, you know, they were just taught you need to be American, so you needed to cook American food. They literally had to learn how to cook Japanese food, food through cookbooks and from friends who worked in restaurants and, but they did not know how to, and, and I had to learn from my mom, which was interesting, because she did everything by taste. So that was, that was challenging.

AT: 00:02:31 And um, so what do you know about, or how much do you know about your grandparents, when they came to the States?

SS: 00:02:40 Well, my grandmother was born in California, so she was pretty Americanized. She rarely spoke any kind of Japanese. And my mom doesn't really know how to speak Japanese, so there might be some words here and there that were scattered. But basically my grandmother was totally American. My great grandparents came from Japan and I don't really know too much about them. I know that they lived with my grandmother in Chicago and my grandfather, um, he liked to raise parakeets and he, we actually had a little koi pond in, in the middle of the city. We had this concrete koi pond, so he kept a lot of, um, uh, things that were familiar and he enjoyed, but really there weren't a lot of, um, things that were very Japanese, I guess. I don't know too much about my great grandmother because, um, she, she was a little on the mean side, so we didn't talk to her too much. So we mostly hung around. My, my, a great grandfather and my grandmother. They, um, my grandmother really didn't cook Japanese food either except on New Year's Day. Then that still is a tradition where we have, uh, a feast of, you know, sushi and, um, different kinds of dishes. But my grandmother was far more elaborate than my mother. I mean, we, she'd cook octopus and other to me, very exotic foods and, and we would, uh, feast on that for New Year's Day. And of course, ozoni soup and I taught my children how to make ozoni soup. So that's, uh, the good luck soup with mochi and spinach and so on.

AT: 00:04:43 As long as you're careful not to choke on.

SS: 00:04:43 As long as you don't choke on. Uh, yes, as long as you take small bites.

AT: 00:04:51 And what about your, your grandfather's parents, did they?

SS: 00:04:54 You know, um, my, my grandparents on my dad's side, they, my grandmother stayed in California and the Pasadena Alhambra area with my, uh, with my dad's sisters and his one brother. Uh, my grandfather actually was a Japanese soldier and he stayed in Japan. So he never, I never met him. I've only seen pictures of him in a uniform. So I, I knew nothing of him. So my dad's side, we'd see my Oba chan a couple times a year. Sometimes we'd make trips, car trips out to California, and to spend time with, um, my dad's side of the family. And again, they're, they're outside of like having maybe Japanese dishes and a couple of things here and there. It was just very American. Um, the one thing that was interesting, I remember from very early on is that they were not allowed to, even after the war to own property. And so there was some point in time in California when they

actually allowed Japanese Americans to own property. And so that was a big deal. Uh, they bought a house and my, um, families bought a house, houses in Alhambra and Pasadena, but I always thought that was kind of, you know, something I remembered and I'm like, why can't you buy a house? Um

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