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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 Japanesey, 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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<Begin Segment 2>

AT: 00:06:30 Do you know where, how your parents met and when they got married?

SS: 00:06:37 They met in Chicago. They, uh, uh, my mom, you know, I guess there was, you know, Japanese communities that hung out in the, in, in Chicago and they met, uh, I'm not quite sure how, all you know is I associate bowling with them. I remember that they used to have bowling leagues and I think that's how they met, but I'm not quite sure. And then, um, oh, while we were growing up, there was a big Club Wai, Club Waikiki that was off of the Lake Shore Drive and Wilson and Lawrence area. It sorta stood out by, by itself around the Weiss Memorial area right now. And although it's, it was supposed to be like catering to a Hawaiians, a lot of Japanese Americans of course hung out there and my dad was a bartender there. When my, after my mom had me then she used to make paper leis and a different things at, at the bar. But it was very exotic. We used to go there once in awhile, I'll watch my dad work and then there was a radio show that was hosted out of, um, of Club Waikiki. So that, those are some of my memories, but I don't know how they actually met and

AT: 00:08:01 Do you know what the radio show was called?

SS: 00:08:03 No, it was a local radio show. Uh, I probably could dig up some things on it. I know that, uh, on the web, somebody had collected pictures of napkins and then there were hula dancers and there was, um, there was, uh, an exotic male dancer who used to throw spears and stuff in the air and, and, uh, we get pictures taken when we were kids, pictures taken with them. So I, I did find some, not pictures with us, pictures of them on, on the web. Uh, so that's, you know, then my dad opened up his own bar. It was called Ken's Lounge and it was on Broadway, kind of in the, uh, Uptown area now. And there was a little Japanese diner that was next door. So he decorated the place, there were booths set, had large pillows where you could sit down at as well as a regular bar. And so he used to bring in Japanese food from the, the place next door. And that was, I thought, I always thought that was kind of, you know, cool and

different. Uh, so he, he had that bar for a while and then, uh, my parents split up. So my mom though, when she first came to Chicago, she was working for a publishing house called McClurg's and I guess they hired a lot of Japanese Americans and she had various jobs. But that's the one I remember the most her talking about. I think there they published like Spiegel catalogs and think things that of course didn't, don't exist anymore. And uh, my grandmother worked for a manufacturing company called Seng, s e n, g and so did my aunts. Uh, and they were very good to us cause I remember the company had big Christmas parties and we used to go to those Christmas parties. So I didn't know any difference between Caucasian and Japanese American or, or whatever at that time. I just remember having a good time cause we all used to go to those Christmas parties and they would have picnics. So that company, I don't know how long they stayed in business, but they were obviously very good to Japanese Americans. Um

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<Begin Segment 3>

AT:	<u>00:10:30</u>	Um, before we get a little bit more into kind of life in Chicago with your family, can you tell me a little bit more about, um, where, uh, your parents' families were during the War? And um, what happened when the evacuation orders went out? So before, just life, pre-Chicago?
Kelly Seeder:	<u>00:10:54</u>	You can talk about MIS.
SS:	<u>00:11:01</u>	So my second father who my mom married and he adopted us, which I consider my, my dad during most of my years. He was in, um, Awahoo and he was there as a teenager. Of course when Pearl Harbor was bombed. Um, I remember my aunts telling stories about them getting upset because my dad and his brothers actually flocked to that side. I, I guess they drove or whatever so they could see what was going on. It was very exciting to them as teenagers. Of course, very dangerous where everybody uh. And then he joined the services, and was in the Air Force for awhile. Um, he got into trouble because he went AWOL to visit a girlfriend. And somehow or another he got placed into the military intelligence service, MIS and, um, posthumously use, uh, awarded the Congressional Medal of honor for his, his work. He didn't talk about it too much, but I know he did a lot of translations and things, things like that. My first dad, my, my biological dad, he was in the 442. He was, um, his family, I don't know what camp they were relocated to, but my dad joined the service I know pretty quickly along with many of my uncles.

AT: 00:12:34 So he must have been around 18 at the time?

SS: 00:12:36 Yeah, he was, he was actually a couple of years younger than my mom. So my mom was born in '25 and he was born in '27. So he, so, yes. And he, uh, he remembers in, during the service, but my dad's family didn't talk about the camps that much. It was my mom's family. My Dad's family stayed in, the two dads, they stayed in Hawai'i, in California, and my mom's family all migrated to Chicago. Uh, my mom talked a lot about California and her working in the diner quite a bit. I think it was just kind of, uh, you know, it was a difficult life. She didn't complain about it, but I know that they had to do a lot of washing and catering to customers. And I remember her actually having an accident where she fell into a vat of boiling water that they were, um, and she was okay, but you know, there are lots of, probably non OSHA stuff, that happened at the time. Uh, she went to a primarily Caucasian high school and I remember my aunts dating a lot of, um, Caucasian guys. My mom, she didn't talk about dating any of them, but I know she, in her high school yearbook, there are several girlfriends that were not Japanese. And then when she got into camp, you know, that's, um, when she sorta went boy crazy and dated. And then, uh, you know, both of my dads are Japanese. And I know that that was important to her because my, um, the father and my, and my children is Caucasian and that my parents did not like that at all. They did not want me to marry anybody, but another Japanese, Japanese American. They didn't even wanted me to marry any other Asian, uh, uh, nationalities. They had their own line of prejudices.

AT: 00:14:57 Did you have, um, did, were there conversations about that or did they express why or was it just

SS: 00:15:05 They were there probably little nasty conversations of different, um, you know, different things with trust and other very weird things that were in their brains and they really, yeah, they, they really gave my first husband a hard time um

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<Begin Segment 4>

AT: 00:15:27 And um, your, your parents, um, well, first I want to ask about your, your mom's, I wanna know more about the, the diner, um, because I feel like in our conversation with her, it was brought up for a second, um. But did she talk about it a lot? Like, do you know a bit about the family's business?

SS: 00:15:55 Yeah, not too much. It was just basically a diner. They served American food. It was obviously in a, not fancy because they catered a lot to dock workers, and you know, basically laborers and they lost that business. I don't recall. And my mother doesn't either, whether they sold it or they just had to give it up.

KS: 00:16:28 Auntie said they gave it up.

SS: 00:16:28 Yeah. So apparently they just had to give it up. And then, uh, I just remember they didn't really have a house cause my mom talked about sleeping with your sisters, don't backroom of the diner. So it wasn't a large place that they spent time, time there. And my mom never really talked about having a house or an apartment. She talked about sleeping at the diner. So I don't know the living arrangements or you know, if my grandmother and grandparents slept there or not. But I know that the girls slept there. They uh, yeah, they really didn't talk too much about it. And I know, all I know is that they cooked American food. And my mom also knew how to cook some Spanish food. I mean we were probably the first kids in Chicago that knew what Tacos were like. So we used to have tacos and enchiladas and, and they were all homemade

KS: 00:17:36 Tamales

SS: 00:17:36 Tamales, yeah, all homemade. Um, so, you know, my, my, my aunts and grandmother would get things from scratch and then make their own tortillas and tamales. And uh, my mom made the most delicious tacos. And so they knew how to make things like that. So they must've been some Hispanic workers also, that they, uh, that they knew.

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<Begin Segment 5>

AT: 00:18:05 And then, um, as far as like your family's war time experiences, was that something that your parents were open about with you or how did you learn about, their experiences?

SS: 00:18:20 No, I, I learned, on some in bits and pieces when things would come up. But my dad, my second dad who I, you know, basically who raised me, wouldn't let my mother speak about the war. I mean, he basically flat out told her to shut up. I, there are a couple reasons. This, my dad's family in Hawai'i, they were wealthy. So when my dad married my mom, they considered low marrying below his class, even though my dad was like the black sheep of the family. Um, my other two uncles are doctors

and my dad, you know, never got a college degree. So he felt embarrassed by some of the those war stories also. And he just would not let her talk about it. So we could only get bits and pieces from like my, my one aunt, my Auntie Masa, not even my grandmother talked about it that much. Um, it's kinda like, you know, they just sort of put it behind them. But my Auntie Masa had a scrapbook and she used to keep like ration cards and things like that and apparently it was lost. Uh, after she passed away, one of her caregivers got rid of it, unfortunately. So a lot of things like that. But I remember going to her house and kind of sneaking and looking around it at some of the stuff. They talk about rationing, you know, rationing sugar and um, flour and items like that. And I think that impacted us because one, my grandmother, my, my grandmother got hit by the Depression and second, the war. So it kind of fostered this hoarding mentality, you know, getting a little packs sugar or jam or whatever and stuffing pockets with at restaurants and making. Actually I'm laughing cause my, my daughter Kelly was trying to learn how to make sweet and sour sauce and my mom and you know, as you're writing different things down and when it came to like part of the recipe my grand, my mom was saying, well you need so many packs of apricot jelly, because she was

- KS: 00:20:48 It was two servings of apricot jelly. And I said, what's a serving? And it was the packets and I said, "That's not a serving that's you stealing."
- SS: 00:20:57 So I just remember, uh, you know a lot of that, oh we need to, we need to save this, we need to collect this, we need to to, I remember being at a restaurant and my mom would, we were in the lobby of the restaurant and my mom just stuffing fruit like apples and oranges in everybody's pocket to take home.
- KS: 00:21:23 The public baths, that always horrified me.
- SS: 00:21:25 Oh yeah. That's the, so apparently in camp also, they, they have public facilities and they were rationing water for bathtubs. So you would take a bath and then your sister would take a bath or your family member. So you take a bath in the same water. And when we were growing up and we did the same thing, it was, we didn't know as kids, but when you talk about now it's, it's kind of disgusting. This thing sat we, we did because you know, a lot of soap and grind would be we were kids, we played in the dirt. We really didn't have grass when we were growing up. So we played in the dirt a lot and then you kind of like just skim all the dirt off the top and the next person would take her bath. And that's how she grew up in the, you know, that's what happened with camps. So she didn't talk about a lot, but there were, there were behaviors that lead you to um, excuse me. That led you to under, understand some of what happened. And

the hoarding too, the hoarding and looking for bargains. I mean, we used to, I was in my mom's basement a few years ago because there was tinsel that she used to save off of Christmas trees. So after we took down our tree, I was saving all the tinsel and she said, put it in the basement against this wall. Well, there was, I don't know, maybe about three, four dozen packets, of unopen tinsel, but still she wanted it. So she collected it because she was afraid she wouldn't have it. And then she also wanted to save the tinsel. So some of that I, I'm pretty sure it happened because of the war. Um

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<Begin Segment 6>

AT: 00:23:32 And do you know what year her family came to Chicago?

SS: 00:23:38 Uh, I know I was born in '49. They got married in February '49 and I was in November '49. So I know around that, I think it was right after the war.

AT: 00:23:56 And, um, how about your dad's, your biological father?

SS: 00:24:00 Same. Well, he came, my, his, the rest of his family stayed in California, he was the only one who came here. He had, um, a brother and two sisters and they stayed in California. And he's the only one who came here.

AT: 00:24:14 And what kind of work he was doing?

SS: 00:24:17 He was doing bartending, uh at. And then he was doing odd jobs too. I remember seeing pictures of him selling, you know, like Venetian blinds. And so there he was doing odd jobs to supplement, um, the bartending. But, uh, he didn't really have any steady profession. I think when he moved out to he moved back out to California, he was still bartending.

KS: 00:24:47 [inaudible]

SS: 00:24:47 And then my, yeah, my second dad, he was a cab driver. Uh, he almost finished college with an accounting degree. So he, uh, he got, he became friendly with people at the American Cab Company, and I don't know that exists anymore, but it was an independent cab company owned by Italians, Italian Americans. So he became their bookkeeper, uh, after, you know, he decided not to try the cab anymore. Uh, and he became pretty close to, you know, that organization.

AT: 00:25:29 And um, do you know what your, uh, your, your parents met your second time?

SS: 00:25:37 Okay. Well they met because my dad's were best friends and it was around the time when my, my parents are splitting and he was splitting with his first wife. I think that was around when I was um, about eight or nine. And I know they got married in '50, '59, but they, I think they started dating in '58 cause I know that they sort of waited a little while. They said they waited a year or so, around '57, '58. I think they was when the spl, their divorces were there, it was like at the same time they were getting divorces.

AT: 00:26:21 So, um, any, um, when, when your parents came to Chicago, um, what neighborhoods were they settling in?

SS: 00:26:42 They were in the Lincoln Park area, because a lot of the streets now that are very trendy like Hampton Court and Burling and Orchard, they were all in that area. We lived in a coup, on a couple of those streets. But we ended up on Vine Street, which was on North Avenue on Larrabee. And there were two, two flats that were back to back. They were not Burke, they were wood and they were connected by a porch. So we lived on the for front top. My grandmother and grandfather and my aunt lived on the bottom. And then my, my, my aunt and her husband lived on the top back and my mom's sister and her family lived on the bottom half. So we were all like one big nuclear family. And I said nuclear, nuclear, nuclear family that were, you know, all connected. Now, what had happened was the first mayor Daley was coming through with this urban renewal program and he basically tore down that whole street. My aunt was the last to leave. She was literally, it was the only house left and she was forced out of there. They gave her \$10,000 for that property. So yeah, she did not want to leave, that's Auntie Masa.

KS: 00:28:06 Sounds like it

SS: 00:28:06 Yeah. Uh, so that whole street is gone now.

AT: 00:28:12 And do you have siblings?

SS: 00:28:14 I have a sister and two brothers and my sister lives in the, the city. And my youngest brother lives in the city and my other brother lives in Woodstock. So they, and they've stayed in the city? They have not moved anywhere else.

AT: 00:28:29 And uh, everyone was born here.

SS: 00:28:32 Yes. Everyone was born here.

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<Begin Segment 7>

AT: 00:28:34 And um, so then most of your childhood was that spent in Lincoln Park then?

SS: 00:28:42 Yes. Yeah, they had a, I went to Waller High School, which was now Lincoln Park High School. At the time, it wasn't such a great high school. We had probably a lot of civil rights violations cause we would have locker checks and pat downs and one of the teachers was actually knifed in the gymnasium. So it was, um, it was a mixed neighborhood. There were, and I think a lot of people, immigrants after the Second World War, cause there were Germans, there were Italians, there were what do you call it? Gypsies, I guess their Serbians or Croatians now. Um Polish. So it was a very few, uh, African-Americans. Primarily Catholic, all going to Saint Michael's School, uh, School. Um, and that School but Church. And then there was Catechism on like once, Tuesday, Wednesday afternoons. It was just me and this little African American girl that were left in the and in school cause everybody else was off on Catechism. So it was primarily Caucasian. Again, but mostly immigrants. And uh, um, of course that neighborhood's changed quite a bit now.

KS: 00:30:01 That's not where you graduated from.

SS: 00:30:01 I graduated from Amundson because Waller allowed started to allow what they call it, permissive transfer programs. So if you had an IQ and grades of a certain, you were allowed to transfer. So my parents chose Amundsen for me and I took two buses to get there and my sister chose Senn for my sister, so my sister took buses to get there. Um, my brothers went to Lane Tech.

AT: 00:30:28 At that time, was it still all boys?

SS: 00:30:31 Yes, at the time it was still all boys. Yeah.

AT: 00:30:34 And, um, was your family religious at all?

SS: 00:30:39 No. No. Uh, I think I'm the, well, my brother in Woodstock, I believe his wife took the kids to church, but I think I'm the, the only one who, no, actually went to church and took the kids to church and stuff.

AT: 00:30:57 And, and so growing up you all were in affiliated with any church.

SS: 00:31:02 No, no.

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<Begin Segment 8>

AT: 00:31:03 Um, and given that, um, Lincoln Park at that time, was so diverse and lots of different people, did you ever experience any kind of discrimination growing up?

SS: 00:31:22 I, I didn't feel it so much or I think I maybe I just got used to it. I mean there's typical thing of being called a Jap and things like that, but I didn't feel it from my, from the kids. I know that, um, I was, I was telling my daughter that the discrimination was mostly outside of, uh, the neighborhood. Like when we would take trips to go to California to see my mom's family or my dad's family, um, I remember my dad always sending my mom into the motel cause there were car trips to end, there'd be vacancy signs and we'd get all excited and then in my mom would come out and there'd be no vacancy. And so we kind of figured what that was about. And then when we did stay at a place, my mom was very meticulous about cleaning up the room and making the beds because she said, I don't want any, any other Japanese Americans to be rejected because we left a mess. So on our trips we used always clean their rooms after we were, you know, we, we got up so that we wouldn't leave bad impressions. So, um, so I felt more discrimination as I got older, you know, and it became so commonplace that I'd often point out to my friends, I said, you don't even know. You don't even realize it's happening. And I'd say, see there, there you go again. And at at work I did because they just assume that if you're Asian, you're going to be docile and compliant. And I'm, I soft spoken and I was even more so when I was younger. So they just figured, you know, I was not management material, although I did quite well in my career and, and had mostly management jobs. So, um, a lot of that I had to overcome because my mom always said, you need to be humble. You're not that good. There's always somebody better than you, you know, keep quiet, keep, you know, don't talk. Um, so something that I tried to do with my girls is I wanted them to not be like me and to speak up and to state your opinion. And I think they have, I think they're, I think they have, my oldest daughter is big into animal rights and consumer stuff. And I remember as a teenager she would write to like Proctor and Gamble saying you shouldn't be testing on animals. And then my youngest daughter is very extroverted and she's very diplomatically states her opinion.

KS: 00:34:23 That's a very diplomatic way of putting it mom.

SS: 00:34:23 No you do. I've seen you at work and, and

KS: 00:34:38 My mom and I, her last job of her career before she retired, we worked to the same place.

SS: 00:34:44 So, you know, I was very proud of her and it wasn't, cause I was a mom is because she's just great to work with. Um, so I don't know if I answered your question or not. I kind of rambled there for a little while.

AT: 00:34:59 No, no, but it's all good stuff.

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AT: Um, one thing I wanted to, I wanted to backtrack a little bit. Um, because um, you seem to know a bit about your parents' experiences in Chicago when you first came. And is that just everything that you've learned from like family stories?

SS: 00:35:30 Yeah, family stories. Cause I, I, my parents really weren't talkers that much. They didn't like to talk about themselves. And same with the rest of my family. Not very loud or boisterous, definitely in a fun loving but really not. Oh, Kelly's laughing.

KS: 00:35:53 I never heard that word used to describe our family.

SS: 00:35:56 Well, not my mom so much. My mom was pretty strict, but my grandmother was a lot of fun. My Auntie Masa was a lot of fun. Um, and my um, biological dad was actually very sociable and fun to be around. But so my, my second year was quiet and although my mom would talk whenever you, you know, you'd ask her questions and she's very friendly and very engaging on the personal side. They didn't want to have a lot of friends. We were not allowed to bring people over. Um, they're very suspicious of other people, um, gossipy. And so there neither one of them. They had certain close friends but not a community of friends even though, you know, we had a large family outside of the family and outside of a few close friends and

KS: 00:37:00 That grammy can't go anywhere without running into someone.

SS: 00:37:04 She knows a lot of people cause she's friendly and she will, you know, talkative and stuff but behind their backs not so um, not so.

KS: 00:37:18 The first time when chichan ever talked about the war is when Aaron asked him.

SS: 00:37:22 Yeah, my dad didn't really talk about it. And I was sort of surprised that it was uh, of course late in life after Kelly got married that he talked a bit about it. But if we asked him questions, no he wouldn't talk about it. So the things that we, I knew about my family were little snippets here and there and then again from how they, how they behaved. One of the, my mom was always a strong woman and I was proud of her because I remember when she got a divorce when it still wasn't acceptable to get a divorce. And second, she drove like one, one of my aunts still does not a drive, so she'd drive us all over the place and my, my dad would actually send her into stores or McDonalds when a, or he'd send her in for an order. I always thought that was sort of weird cause you know, the man usually does that at least in the American culture. And you know, it dawned on me that I think that, and it started like with the motel story that he was, um, was afraid of being rejected or embarrassed. So he'd always send my mom and who was, you know, didn't really care, um, but my dad was very sensitive about that. I remember my mom telling a story when she walked into Saks and it was when she was, you know making money in Chicago and she wanted to buy something and nobody would wait on her. Nobody would pay attention to her. And she actually went up to a sales lady and said, my money is as good as anybody else's money. And that's how feisty my mom was. I had, and I don't think she ever bought anything from there, but I always had that feeling I didn't want to shop at Saks because of that story my mom told. And uh, uh, so I thought again, that was a behavior thing between my mom and dad cause my mom was a feisty fighter. And so was my grandmother. She was, she was, uh, she was funnier than my mom. She was more on the fun side, but, uh, very strong women in my family. And I don't know of that is left over from as far as the men go, you know, very proud. So they don't want to be embarrassed and talk about times that probably were not pleasant I guess. Yeah. I'm thinking of my, my uncle Jim who was married to my Auntie Masa and we used to like to hang out with them a lot, cause they were just a lot of fun. And they would, they would tell, my Uncle Jim would tell scary stories, but nothing about the war. I mean we would have to walk from back from one flat to the front of the flat. Of course it was a little dark. And tell us about, you know, people jumping out from the garbage cans and stuff like that. So yeah. But we loved it. We loved it. And nothing, I know he was, um, he was also in the 442. And you know, that was a very decorated battalion, but they didn't really, they don't really talk about it.

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<Begin Segment 10>

AT: 00:40:40 And did you in any time in your education, did you ever learn about it in school or class?

SS: 00:40:49 No. Nothing. They made a movie with them. Van Johnson, many years ago called Go For Broke. And that's probably the closest I ever saw.

KS: 00:41:02 They're remaking it.

SS: 00:41:02 Are they?

KS: 00:41:02 It's coming out soon.

SS: 00:41:04 Yeah. That was the only thing. And uh, you know, he was telling Kelly, it still bothers me as far as prejudice goes. Like we were walking inside the building and there was a Caucasian man and he started to speak Japanese to me and I said, I don't speak Japanese. And he continued to speak Japanese to me in, it's like, it just made me, so it made me angry. And I know, you know, people would always do this, like, "Where are you from?" This happened to me last month, a friend's answer, where are you from? I said, "Chicago." And they could tell I have no accent whatsoever for anything. I have a Chicago accent. And she says, "No, where are you really from?" I said, Chicago. And then she says, well, what's your nationality? I said, "Japanese, but I'm, I'm fourth generation" and my mom was born in here, my, my grandmother's born here. And she says, well, where's your husband from? And so I just said, I'm divorced, you know, it's kinda like let it go.

KS: 00:42:10 Welcome to the Hapa experience.

SS: 00:42:14 Yeah. I honestly,

AT: 00:42:16 I'm sorry you had to

SS: 00:42:16 Well, you know, with not it's just people, right? And they still, they see, they see you or, and they make certain assumptions. And, you know, I'm not, I had to hold myself back from being self righteous because my family had a pecking order of prejudices that I still feel now. And I have to think about. So we're all, we all have our, well, we all have our biases and our prejudices for whatever reason. Nothing very logical. Some not based on fact at all. It's just,

AT: 00:43:01 If you don't mind me asking, um, could you, um, describe that a little bit more?

SS: 00:43:10 How embarrassing!

AT: 00:43:13 I'm bringing this up a little bit selfishly, just because I think, um, in the Japanese American community, there's a lot of work to be done. You know, and it can be, not to like bring my own opinions and thoughts into this too much, but, um, you know, I think so often we return to this story and this experience because this was a huge example of uh, racism and um, just all kinds of prejudice, um, in which our community was targeted. And yet there's a lot of

KS: 00:43:54 Our last trip to Hawai'i, astrophysical, I remember she wouldn't go into any of the stores.

SS: 00:43:58 Yeah. So some of the Japanese that obviously are the top. And I would say there's probably a tie between Caucasian and Chinese. Probably a tie. Neither one of them very acceptable. Um, and then there's probably Filipino, Korean, absolutely. I mean, they wouldn't even go into Korean restaurants. I just totally not Korean.

AT: 00:44:32 So like not even, so it's very much like ethnic prejudice that you've experienced.

SS: 00:44:38 Yeah. And then everybody else was kind of equal, whether you're Muslim, Indian, Black, those are all kind of like at the, I hate to say it, but that the lower tier. But, uh, I remember my, you know, of course I married somebody Caucasian that was just not, that was just not good. And my sister, she was dating somebody at Senn High School and they were so afraid that she was dating cause she was very mysterious. They were so afraid that she was, uh, dating, um, a Hispanic person that they were relieved when he was Caucasian. So she got off, she got kind of good because I was married to somebody and then she. And then my brother was dating as a several, my youngest brother who was the favorite. So they definitely wanted him to marry somebody. Japanese American, he's dating his series of Japanese American women. And then he dated a Filipino girl that, and she was really nice, but that was my parents made his life miserable. He ended up marrying a Japanese American woman and they only were together for a year. And now he's been living with a Caucasian woman for, I don't know, twenty some years, a long time, but they won't, they won't marry.

KS: 00:46:09 No one in their generation married Japanese.

SS: 00:46:13 No, and actually we had a great big family reunion in July of, um, of my mom's side and really no one married any other Japanese Americans. We all married Caucasian people and we all had children who uh Caucasian people. And yeah, so a lot of, I don't like to use the word hapa, but that's what they were. And then so there was like this, this family, they're joking around. It's like there's this core Japanese Americans and then Caucasians and you know, half Japanese, half, half Caucasians.

AT: 00:46:58 And uh, and is this like cousins and so, but it sounds like, um, they're probably also from Chicago?

SS: 00:47:05 Yeah. All Chicago.

AT: 00:47:10 Which the Japanese American community is pretty, it's not huge here.

SS: 00:47:12 No, no.

KS: 00:47:15 You probably know some connection.

SS: 00:47:17 Yeah. Yeah. We were just lamenting the demise of Japanese homestyle Japanese restaurants in Chicago and Japanese grocery stores and things like that. There used to be, you know, a few and now they're all like disappearing

KS: 00:47:32 [inaudible] Sunshine.

SS: 00:47:33 Oh my gosh. That was a sad one.

KS: 00:47:41 One of our family friend's owned. That's like our spot.

SS: 00:47:41 Danny, Daniel.

AT: 00:47:42 Oh yep, he's great.

KS: 00:47:42 He's my uncle's best friend. They live in the same building.

SS: 00:47:48 They live in the same building

KS: 00:47:48 He helps take care of my grannie.

AT: 00:47:52 Well, I'll ask you about how he's doing.

SS: 00:47:54 Yeah.

<Begin Segment 11>

- AT: 00:47:58 Um, well to that point, um, when you were growing up, do you remember? You mentioned the Japanese diner next to Ken's lounge. Um, what other kinds of, did your family go to Japanese restaurants?
- SS: 00:48:12 No, we were kind of poor. So going to, going out to eat was a luxury, you know, going to a McDonalds was like a big deal. Having a can of pop was a big deal. Yeah. We are. Or even for, we used to go crazy over fresh fruit because we used to get things out of cans so when we would have grapes, we used to fight over grapes. So when we didn't go out to eat a lot. Was only when we were a bit older that we could, the family could afford to go out to eat more.
- AT: 00:48:49 And um, one thing I wanted to be sure to ask living in Lincoln Park and then having that, uh, you mentioned that you'd gone to Ken's Lounge, that you had been over there. Um, was that a frequent commute or did you only do that a couple of times?
- SS: 00:49:08 Just a few times, because we were little. And your were, we weren't allowed to hang around in bars. So my mom would take us there to see my dad when he was working during the day, you know, and there weren't very many customers, if at all. And then once in awhile we would uh, we would be allowed to play in the booths and we'd go next door. And, uh, mostly the Japanese food that we had, my mom cooked. And I wasn't until later that I realized that she learned a lot of cookbooks and from, you know, friends because she, she didn't know how. I know, it's like a revelation when I found out then another family friend, her mom was the same way, which I thought was sort of interesting. You know, you wanted to be, um, American so much that it's sort of a shame that we lost a lot of our culture. So I mean there's still a lot that's here, thanks to like Japanese American Service Committee and so on. But a lot of it was lost in our, you know, quest to be American.
- KS: 00:50:21 I just thought of, made a parallel of you bringing me to rainbow when I was a kid. Running around Rainbow.
- SS: 00:50:26 Yeah. My sister owns two bars in city.
- AT: 00:50:29 Currently?
- SS: 00:50:32 Yeah. Yeah. Rainbow Club on Damon and Division and Skylark on 22nd and Halsted.
- AT: 00:50:38 Oh wow.

SS: 00:50:39 Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, uh, so yeah, it's a, I can't think of other things because you know, they're just all these little bits and pieces that pop up and there's no like, wonderful story line that

KS: 00:51:01 You're doing really well.

AT: 00:51:01 This is great.

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<Begin Segment 12>

KS: 00:51:02 What was it like having kids and being Japanese? Hapa kids?

SS: 00:51:10 Well, it was kind of strange because we were in Northbrook and Northbrook, uh, you know, I thought the schools would be better and the community would be better in Northbrook. And I just thought that Eurasian children are just the most beautiful kids and ever, and you're still, it's like you see a Eurasian person, you know, man or woman, and they're just like beautiful. So I, so I thought that the two of you, and I thought giving you a good education. I know that, that they were, both of you, both you and Julie were bullied in school. So I know that that was difficult, but I know that both, um, my oldest daughter, uh, as well as my youngest daughter were bullied. And I, um, had to go to the school with my oldest daughter, several times to point out to the principal. And I don't think they knew what to do at the time, you know, like, um, somebody stole, my oldest daughter's jacket of her locker and they were, you know, picking on her. Um, and I told the principal and that, and he pretty much said, well, you know, I'll look out for her, but that's kind of how kids are. And it's like, no, that's not how kids are. Um, and then I, I, uh, and she was a good student, so they often, sometimes teachers would say, well, she's quiet. And I said, well, just because she's quiet doesn't mean she's not smart. She's obviously smart. Um, Kel was a bit more boisterous and so she would get check marks for talking and handwriting. I remember going to the school to, with their first grade teacher saying, you know, please come to me. Just don't put a check mark on there and let me find out about it. And she'd make some little nasty comments like, um, well, when I was divorced and being divorced in Northbrook wasn't a good thing so that she made comments about me being divorced, and working. And then she would say, well, you know, if, if she Kelly cared about me, she, her handwriting would be better. It's like, why she care about you? And then I said, well, you know, when we're adults, all of our handwriting's bad anyway. I suppose she didn't like that too much. You know, hand writing, what's the big deal? Why would you make a big deal about that?

AT: 00:53:39 So where there not, um, many other Japanese Americans families?

SS: 00:53:44 No. No. And it wasn't until probably maybe the kids were in junior high or something, there were Korean families that moved into the, the community. But there weren't a lot of Asians period in Northbrook.

AT: 00:54:02 Um, when did you move? What year did you move to Northbrook?

SS: 00:54:05 Oh gosh, I moved, um, see Julie was born there in '76 I think we moved there in '74 a couple of years before she was born. Yeah. Oh, '74. So that was there for a long time throughout, you know, their high school educations and college. And um, and I, yeah, I have to admit that now it's, it's pretty sterile environment and I'm glad I moved back to the city. But uh, yeah, I I thought it was doing well for the girls cause the school system and everything, but maybe not on the social scale.

AT: 00:54:50 And where in the city are you living now?

SS: 00:54:52 Uh, I'm living in Andersonville, Clark and Foster. It's a, it's a great neighborhood. Uh, so I really am happy I moved back. Yeah. I almost, I almost bought a condo in Northbrook and it just like my girls were gone, I was by myself and it's like, no, this is just not, this is just not feeling right.

KS: 00:55:15 Oh, I had to pull you to the city, tooth and nail right?

SS: 00:55:16 So I'm happy, I'm happy I made that decision.

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<Begin Segment 13>

AT: 00:55:26 And I think we can, um, start wrapping up.

SS: 00:55:31 Okay.

AT: 00:55:33 But um, just a couple more questions. Well, one I wanted to ask, um, as far as, uh, your family's history and background, um, when, by the time you had your own children, was that a story that you were sharing with them or

SS: 00:55:53 I think I did talk about it and I showed the picture of my mom that's in the gallery now. And so we, we did talk about it a little

bit. I mean, as as not like a big event though, it was just more like part of our family.

- KS: 00:56:11 I mean you were scared of your mom, so I would ask all the questions. I sort of became the family historian.
- SS: 00:56:11 Yes, my, my daughter did. Yeah. Um, yeah. And I definitely was afraid of my father. So I, my father said you didn't talk about it then, you didn't talk about it. But some of those, some of the things still passed down. Like I remember we had a family meeting about finances and wills and like my parents were, I don't know, maybe in their early sixties and they sat the four of us down and they said that they left the insurance policies and stuff to my two brothers. Now my sister was single, I was divorced at the time raising two kids and they said, because we know that you'll always be taken care of by husband or other men. And my sister was furious. And I always like, oh, whatever. Cause I, you know, I had a good career. I didn't really need anybody to take care of me, but that's just my parents. But my sister was so mad, you know, and I think that's, that's an Asian thing. Um, so here's a, I kind of counter to what my parent, how my parents raised us. I try to raise like girls to be pretty independent and not be dependent on any, anybody, whether it man or woman or whatever. Because of how my parents had raised us.
- KS: 00:57:54 Were you surprised when I got married so young then?
- SS: 00:57:56 Not when you got married so young, cause I got married at 18. How could I judge anybody? I mean I had no position to judge but um. I, uh, I was, uh, surprised that you had made a decision so quickly and I'm not against it. I just, that it was another thing is I nev, I never wanted to impose the same judgments on my daughter's relationships as I, my parents imposed on us. It's a hard sometimes, but.
- AT: 00:58:32 And if you could leave your, your children and your grandchildren some kind of legacy or message, what would you want them to know?
- SS: 00:58:42 I think that it, it goes back to my mom and said, we're as good as anybody else at that, uh, you know, try to have tolerance even though it's hard. You, you know, cause again, we're all built in with our own biases. The, this whole Muslim thing is very disturbing to me because just it does bring back, you know, discrimination without any basis whatsoever. And so I think that that is to try to have an open mind, uh, even fighting those impulses that you may have, like you decided to cross the street cause you strictly based on race or how somebody is dressed to just fight that, you know, just, I remember being on the L and

they all has lot of sketchy people, but there's a workman there and he was really kind of dirty and people were avoiding him. And I just said, looks like he had a hard day and he was really nice, you know? And so like I try to fight those images also. He's just a hard working guy that was really dirty. But he had, you know, that people were avoiding him. So I try to fight that also. Cause I, you know, I think I'm hoping that that's what, how, um, you and Julie feel.

- AT: 01:00:06 And were there any other stories or things we might have missed? Um, the conversation that you'd like to add?
- KS: 01:00:16 I just remember, only thing I remember growing up was when people used to think you were our nanny. That would really piss me off.
- SS: 01:00:22 Yeah.
- KS: 01:00:29 I don't like they come into my head now with my own stories. I'm feeling got mad, I have to do it.
- SS: 01:00:35 Yeah. Or when I'd be speaking and they still think that I spoke with an accent or I wasn't from here. It's like, well what accent is that? I said, "Chicago." "Well, no, you have some kind of accent." "Well maybe it's Hawaiian or because my dad kind of booked broken Hawaiian you know?" No, I have no accent. I was born here. But, but yeah, so it's, it's still still happens. Like I was telling you, walking in the building. But I'm glad though that younger generations, they don't make assumptions like that. It doesn't seem like they make assumptions like that. Like they just assumed that when they see somebody that you can't speak English well for you in United States, maybe you've immigrated and you can speak broken English, but generally people speak English and they don't assume that you don't right away. So I am glad to see that. And there's more tolerance for, um, you know, mixture of friendships and relationships and, and you know, I look, get my granddaughter, I just, she's just the most beautiful granddaughter in the world. And you know, I see her playing with all sorts of different people and it's like, you know, that just this wonderful to me. And it doesn't matter, what you are.
- AT: 01:01:56 Well, thank you so much for coming in and speaking with me.
- SS: 01:01:59 Yeah. Thank you for suggesting.
- KS: 01:02:01 Mom, it was great, see!