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Title: Gary Yamagiwa Interview
Narrator: Gary Yamagiwa
Interviewer: Anna Takada
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<Begin Segment 1>

Gary Yamagiwa: 00:00 You just start by stating your full name. My name is Gary Yamagiwa.

Anna Takada: 00:04 And um, where are you from?

GY: 00:08 I'm born and raised in Chicago, Illinois.

AT: 00:10 When were you born? What is your birthday?

GY: 00:14 May 8th, 1953.

AT: 00:16 Okay. Um, so to start, can you just tell me a little bit about your family, your parents maybe were where they're from?

GY: 00:26 Sure. My mother, uh, Tesui Kashino was born and raised, well I believe in Santa Ana, California. Uh, there was eight children.

AT: 00:43 Where was she in the group?

GY: 00:45 She's probably maybe fourth, third or fourth. Yeah. So she's older and um, they, I guess they farmed, had a farm. As a family, they ended up going to a Poston, Arizona for camps. My father and his, ah seven, the seven kids and his mother went to Tule Lake. Well, they were born in Bellevue. They lived in Bellevue, Washington. They too were farmers. My dad started out and going to Manzanar and then the whole family. He reunited with his family in Tule Lake.

AT: 01:39 How did that, how, how were they separated? How did that work?

GY: 01:43 Um, my father was a, a, a roguish individual, you know, he went out and he found work on his own. He traveled around the country on the East Coast, I mean on the West Coast on his

own, because that's what he liked to do. He liked to go out and meet people. So he kind of left. And then when the evacuation came up here, I think he was caught in California. So went to Manzanar.

- AT: 02:16 So was he on the older end of his siblings?
- GY: 02:20 Yes. Yes. She was the eldest
- AT: 02:25 Do you know anything about your grandparents, where they were coming from?
- GY: 02:31 My father's grandmother was from Nagano area. And my mother's grandmother, I mean my mother's mother was from Wakayama. Uh, I never knew my grandfathers, either one. They had passed away by that time, I was young.
- AT: 02:56 Do you have any sense of when they came to the US or what they were doing in Japan?
- GY: 03:01 No. Um, I believe they were both a picture brides. So they came as young people and maybe about, oh, in the 1910s or somewhere around there.

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<Begin Segment 2>

- AT: 03:27 So your, your mother's family are from Santa Ana. Did they go to any assembly center? Did they go straight to Poston?
- GY: 03:35 That? I'm not sure. I'm sure, they did go to an assembly center.
- AT: 03:43 And what, maybe, like stories are family memories, how you've heard from your family or have been passed down around camp. Do you know a whole lot about their experience?
- GY: 03:58 Not a whole lot. We didn't talk too much about that kind of thing until later when I was old. We just knew that they in camp I knew my dad was, he told me he would try to get out every chance he got. So when they wanted someone to pick vegetables he would be picking vegetables for
- AT: 04:28 Work leave?

- GY: 04:29 Yeah, work leave, you know he, he liked to wander so whenever he can get out he got up. My mother's family, they were very close knit so I'm sure they managed. They had a big family but I never heard anything bad from her or negative from her. And so growing up we didn't know what happened. We thought oh it sounded bad, but they never bad mouthed what happened. So it's kind of ah, we weren't um really sure about the negative side of it until we heard from other people we ask more in depth questions.
- AT: 05:36 How old were they at the time of the break out of the war?
- GY: 05:38 So my dad I think was about 25. So he was 25, 26 and so his siblings were all younger, probably down to early high school age. And my mom was probably, she must've been about twenty. She was one of the older ones, and then she's got siblings that were probably early teens.

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<Begin Segment 3>

- AT: 06:18 And uh, where, where did both of your parents go after camp and when?
- GY: 06:22 They came to Chicago. My dad's family came to Chicago in part, because one of the older daughter's got a job working in a person's house. And so that was a reason for the whole family to come to Chicago.
- AT: 06:52 So did she leave before
- GY: 06:53 She did leave before, and then they all came, they all followed and they all lived together. And the same is true. I'm not sure about the employment, but my mother's family also came to Chicago directly from camps.
- AT: 07:12 Was it a similar situation where one person had come up first or did they all come?
- GY: 07:18 I think they probably all came together. I didn't hear anything about how or why.
- AT: 07:29 And do you know where they first were, when they came to Chicago, which neighborhoods or part of town?

GY: 07:36 They started out around Diversey, Clark and Diversey part of the family, and part of my, um. Both families ended up in Uptown area. They started out living on Kenmore, just north of Irving Park, Kenmore and Wilson, they had an apartment building in there. Then we moved north to Uptown. Broadway, Wilson Avenue.

AT: 08:10 And so where were you born?

GY: 08:13 I was born on Eastwood, in the building that my grandmother owns. She ended up buying this like ah rooming house building. Don't ask me how much, how she got the money to do this. But when I was born there was the building. That's where we kind of grew up.

AT: 08:47 This is Eastwood that's in Lakeview or?

GY: 08:50 No, it's Eastwood in Uptown. It's Wilson and Sheridan. A block north of Wilson Avenue, so Wilson and Sheridan.

AT: 09:00 Do you know any more details about like when it was purchased or

GY: 09:04 It was probably purchased, um, around 1949, 1950.

AT: 09:14 You remember the address?

GY: 09:15 918 West Eastwood.

AT: 09:22 And so who is she, who was she leasing to?

GY: 09:24 It was like a rooming house with one and two room apartments with a little kitchenette. I think you have to go down the hall to go to the bathroom, take a shower. So, um, there were some long time ah renters, but there were a lot of more transient renters. She rented to Japanese students that would come in and she went and she had a lot of friends that were Alaskan, you know, they came to Chicago for work and they ended up, we had a little network Alaskan Indians that would live there. And then various people.

AT: 10:19 And this is um, early, mid fifties that she had it?

GY: 10:28 Fifties, sixties. Yeah. Up until the seventies. Yeah.

AT: 10:38 And so did she sell it?

GY: 10:41 They eventually sold it, yes. But as long as I lived there, you know, my grandmother lived there, she had her apartment and we grew up running around there.

AT: 10:55 And then just to clarify, is this your mom's dad or your dad's dad, mom? Sorry.

GY: 11:01 This is my mom's mom. Shimei Kushino. Yes.

AT: 11:11 And can you tell me just a little bit about your own family? Do you have any siblings?

GY: 11:18 I do. I have ah, I had an older sister, she passed away. I have two younger brothers, so there were the four of us.

AT: 11:30 How can you use, were you at the boarding house?

GY: 11:35 We were there, um, for the first 19 years of my life? Yeah. We were there a long time. We essentially went to grammar school, high school in that, living there.

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<Begin Segment 4>

AT: 11:55 And your parents, what did they do when they come to Chicago?

GY: 11:59 My mother worked at ah Gin and Company, which was a book, they created books. My father was, he started out working with sheet metal and then he and his buddies opened up a auto repair business on North Broadway. So that was, it was nice. It was always ah, you know, the family. He had his own business with his friends and family, my uncle.

AT: 12:42 And Gin and, do you remember where that was?

GY: 12:46 No, no, I'm not sure, this was before I was born. I think once we started showing up. That was it. She stayed at home, took care of the kids.

AT: 13:04 And um, where on Broadway was your Dad's shop? Do you remember

GY: 13:08 5745 Broadway, yes.

AT: 13:09 What was the name of it?

GY: 13:10 Uptown Auto Service. So it was a well known in the Japanese community, so we had a lot of clients that were Japanese Americans.

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<Begin Segment 5>

AT: 13:30 Okay, and then as far as schools, can you tell me where you went to elementary school?

GY: 13:40 I went to elementary school at Stewart School, which is on Wilson and Kenmore. Um, I went there first through seven and a half, seventh grade. Always had a Japanese kids in my class as my classmates. There were a lot of Japanese to live there. And then we went to Stockton School, which is ah Montrose and Clark and we've made a lot more Japanese kids. And then went to Kane Tech. Lot of Japanese guys there.

AT: 14:26 So it was still all boys?

GY: 14:28 It was all boys, but you know, we, we knew each other from the neighborhood. So, um, we hung, hung around together. Japanese Americans.

AT: 14:44 As far as your own social circle were mostly Japanese American growing up?

GY: 14:51 Well, it depended on the day of the week. On the weekends, you know, there was family gatherings, you know, with all the kids. I always had a lot of cousins, so we spent a lot of time around the family. And also on the weekends we went to Church, was Christ Church of Chicago, which is a Japanese American congregation. So, um, all the people we were around, were Japanese American. We were part of the Japanese American community Christian community. And then during the week, and you come across everyone else.

AT: 15:43 So how were you going to try TRI-C since you can remember?

GY: 15:47 Yes.

AT: 15:49 And where, where was it located?

GY: 15:51 Ah 701 Buckingham, which is right around Halsted, just north of Belmont. That's Buckingham. There was a big building, so there were a lot of activities, a Scout's youth group activities. That's where I really got to gain, a feel of being Japanese American because they were, we always were always around other families, JA families. The men there are, you know, they're the role models and the women. So it was a strong influence for me.

AT: 16:51 When you say that, are there any people are names in particular that stick out to you?

GY: 16:57 Sure. I could go on and on. Would you like me to know there was, uh, one of my good friends was Yosakai. He was a judo instructor, a cook and you know, he kinda took me under his wing and really taught me so much about how to live life. There was people like Mr. Katahiro, Ken Katahiro the funniest, funniest guy. Had a hilarious dry sense of humor.

AT: 17:40 They were leaders in the church?

GY: 17:41 Yes.

AT: 17:46 And um, can you tell me more about the family gatherings? What would you do?

GY: 17:58 We would gather at people's houses and we would eat and then the kids would go outside, you know, to the yards and play at that point in my life, I'm not sure what the adults were doing. It might have a been about conversation and beer. But you know, that's....There were always a lot of kids. We played tag, we played a guns. Hide and seek. Yeah.

AT: 18:40 Was that something you looked forward to?

GY: 18:41 Oh, sure. Oh, it was great. Great fun. Well, you know, these are people you grow up with, you know. Know, you're comfortable around them. People are nice. They're supportive.

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<Begin Segment 6>

AT: 18:57 I want to ask you about, um, Japanese language. Did you, was that scoping in your family? Did you have to go to Japanese school?

GY: 19:08 I never went to Japanese school. Japanese was mostly a one way thing in our house because my grandmother spoke Japanese. She lived with us the whole time she was alive. She spoke Japanese. I learned to understand a little bit. I would respond in English and she would eventually figure out what I was saying. And so we had a way of communicating without me being able to speak Japanese. It was good experience for us.

AT: 19:49 And

GY: 19:50 Well, one more thing about that. There was always um, Japanese being spoken when, uh, my parents and my grandmother didn't want us to know what they're talking about so they will just flip right into it. And it was interesting.

AT: 20:26 So you had mentioned that you were pretty aware of your Japanese American identity given your, the time spent within the community, you know, the church specifically. Can you tell me more about that. Was that something that you knew from a young age, you know. What was your experience with your own personal identity?

GY: 20:57 You know, it just felt real natural to be around groups of Japanese, Japanese Americans. Um, I think our family was able to function real well in non Japanese groups because we would go to the, the, the boys club every day and we would, uh, you know, fool around at school and, you know, play little league and we were on the swim team and this was all with non Japanese people and so we were comfortable there. But then when we were with the church group or with family, it was comfortable too. So you know, I think we were able to, really feel a comfort level no matter where we were, which was we thought, you know, I thought it was natural. That's the way it is for everybody.

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<Begin Segment 7>

AT: 22:12 You mentioned little league and swimming, I'd like to hear more about is, um, what did you do for fun outside of school?

GY: 22:20 We ended up going to the, uh, the boys club. McCormick Boys' club everyday.

AT: 22:32 Can you tell me more about that?

GY: 22:32 Sure.

AT: 22:34 What is that?

GY: 22:35 McCormick Boy's Club was a club that started out being for the boys know they come and they have activities, they got game rooms, they have crafts, they have a pool, they have a gym, so they have all these activities. So we would go sign up for activities and go shoot pool, play ping pong, we would just hang out there all day. I think maybe this was the, our parents designed to get us active than to do stuff, but it worked. So we were on the swim teams, which means you go swimming four, five times a week just to practice.

AT: 23:22 Where would you swim?

GY: 23:23 At the club, in the pool and then we go out. We have meets, so pack up the car and go to different other clubs and have meets. That took up a lot of time. Yeah.

AT: 23:42 And do you remember um, like any other Japanese American businesses or restaurants, grocery stores?

GY: 23:53 Yeah, we remember. I remember, um, a lot of restaurants on the North side. I don't remember their names necessarily, but there was one on Broadway and a block South of Foster, Winona There used to be a Japanese restaurant, I think it might be a Zuma House. There used to be a gift shops, little Japanese gift shops. There was one on Clark and Belmore around the corner. Used to go in there. There used to be ah a Japanese, little grocery store across from the BTC, Buddhist Temple used to just go in there, you know, you can always get a Bontan Ame in those places, which is fun for us. That was the highlights.

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<Begin Segment 8>

AT: 24:54 And you, I'd like to talk a little bit more about your experience, I guess understanding or learning about internment and also resettlement because obviously as you're saying you're a part of this Japanese American community, um, which like we was largely there because of camp. Um, so I guess, um, can you just, can you, um, tell me a little bit more about...how you understand camp from a young age and maybe how that

changed over the years when you started asking questions. And things like that.

- GY: 25:52 I think I knew about camp. I knew that they had done all this. They had ah, been interned in these camps. And I would, when I asked how was it. Um, I never sensed any anger in the anguish. You know, I think my parents just, you know, they, they either wanted to just move on. Uh, they wanted to grow their family and not have this be a part of who they are. And so initially, I mean, at this time we just, I just thought, well, it's too bad, but you know, I look at my parents and said, well, I look at my, all, my aunts and uncles. I said, wow, it must not have been too bad. They're all doing well. They're all happy people. I mean.
- AT: 27:20 Did you ever talk about it with your peers?
- GY: 27:27 No, I don't think I do know. It's just not a subject that really came. We were kids trying to lead kids' lives. So we didn't really ah question. You know, we weren't that in tune, curious. We just want to go outside and run around.
- AT: 28:03 And I, was there a certain point that your parents did open up or share? Because obviously you know, some details about where they went and things.
- GY: 28:16 Yeah uh, I think it was a later, and it's probably spurred on by the hearings, you know, I had a friend, I used to teach high school at Senn High School and I had a good friend, her name was Alice Sasaki. She was ah, at the JACL. She was very much in tune with the Japanese American community, what was going on? And she said, Gary, you need to go to this thing. I thought, "What, why?" "You need to hear the stories." So we lived two blocks from Northeastern. So I walked there. I was shocked. It was, it was, uh, too much. I was overwhelmed. I was angry. I was in my late twenties, early thirties, you know, and that's when it, first, what had happened, at first really hit me. You know, and then I became angry at my parents. How can you let this happen to... Misperceive anger. I'm young. I thought...young and ignorant. So, um, so then we talked a little bit more, but the anger, it was overwhelming testimony

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<Begin Segment 9>

- AT: 30:39 Is testimonies that you were hearing. Did your parents testify?

GY: 30:45 No, but the people I listened to were people I knew from the community.

AT: 30:54 Do you remember any of those?

GY: 30:58 Well, I believe Alice, she's testifying. I think Chei told me. He told me. Yeah, she testified, you know, these are people that, you know, we're a community leaders, so you know, you know, but then you're hearing things that you've never heard. William Kimura. So not only was it a, a story that was difficult to listen to, but you know, it became a real. When, you know, the people that

AT: 31:52 Are there any of those stories that have stuck with you?

GY: 31:56 Um, no, because I think in a lot of ways it's almost the same story being told over and over. People from different places. No, they'd have different family situations, but it probably as a whole ah resonated, so. Terrible. Terrible justice.

AT: 32:49 I think you're the first person I've spoken to who is actually at the hearings. Can you tell me more about what it was like, what the arrangement is? Wasn't just a single day.

GY: 33:03 Uh, I think it was a couple of days, big room packed, chairs and then there's a table in front and a microphone and it was crowded. I ended up just standing and listening. You know, I thought how brave they are.

AT: 33:37 So this was um, something that was open to the public?

GY: 33:41 Yes. Open to the public, it was.

AT: 33:45 And the people who were there, did you know most of the people in the room?

GY: 33:53 No, there were many, many people there. I know a lot of people. And then there were other people that I'm sure we're just curious. You know, it was ah very powerful.

AT: 34:16 And was it just the one day that you went or did you go?

GY: 34:19 I think I went a couple of days. Yes.

AT: 34:25 Did you go alone?

GY: 34:26 I did go alone.

AT: 34:35 Well, thank you for sharing that. Like I said, we haven't spoken to anyone who was actually there.

GY: 34:52 I don't know if I would have gone if I didn't have a friendship with Alice. You know, you hear about it and say, well things are happening. This thing is happening. I still hear her, "You better go here."

AT: 35:16 How do you think things would be different for you? You haven't gone if you didn't have that relationship.

GY: 35:24 Oh, I have no idea how things will be different. I imagine they would have been very different. I know I wouldn't be sitting here right now.

AT: 35:41 Sounds like it was almost like an awakening.

GY: 35:44 It was, it also, um, it really changed my view, of ah, what government is and what people have to do to fight bad government. This anger just changed my view of what it means to live in this country.

AT: 36:41 When you look at the current political climate. You know, given this experience that you have and some of the things that you're saying it taught you. Do you, do you think something like this could ever happen again or, or whether I guess I'm just curious about your own reflections about

GY: 37:24 To a degree, what happened then is happening now. I mean, just the kind of talk, you're hearing from the leaders of the government. Tells you you have to be vigilant. Yeah, sure. Same thing could happen. You know, it's uh, it's like the lessons of the past last as long as you're ah memory allows it then then. So everything is all brand new.

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<Begin Segment 10>

AT: 38:14 What are your hopes for, for future generations, for your kids? Grandkids?

GY: 38:32 Uh, well, what I have noticed and what I appreciate, or the intelligence and the, uh, the heart of the young young adults now. So smart, so dedicated that uh, there's great hope. You

know, we, you know, we're going to have to put our hand. I mean put our lives and in their hands and um, there's no doubt in my mind they can get the job done. It's, it's, um, it's nice to see and you know, I see all these young kids out there, you know, trying to, to change things. So there's great hope. I feel great hope. Although it is pretty much at a low point right now given our current administration.

AT: 39:54 As far as the, the Japanese American community. How, because you've been involved for such a young age, imagining you consider yourself still. How have you seen it change or evolve over the years? What are some of your observations maybe? How would you describe it in those early years? And then how would you describe it now?

GY: 40:29 Well, I just there's not a need for this kind of community to be together like this. Um, in the earlier years when I was young, you know, I think there was a need for her, my parents and their friends, you know, to be together. That need I think as, as lesson. But um, for some people there's still a draw, you know, so be part of a community, a Japanese American community. So whereas, um, the need might not be there. I think nowadays are developing and have a desire to be together.

AT: 41:40 Can you say more on what that means actually was like why? Why was there a need in the earlier days?

GY: 41:49 Well, there was a lot of anti Japanese sentiment. Even I'm in the Midwest, we felt it a little bit growing up, you know, being called names. And I think that's one of the things that drove us into having groups of friends that were Japanese American. I think people were just earlier, people would just finding a way to go on without, you know, without any difficulty. And your rank. Kinda lay low, you know, not make waves, raise your kids.

AT: 43:08 One more question before wrapping up and I'm curious to know, um, well, well, first I'm interested in hearing your thoughts about um, the resettlement to Chicago and that, that migration of people in that move with your family from, you know, being put into camps and then moving to a different part of the country. Is that, have you felt in your own experience but that experience of your parents as you know somehow shaped you in any really serious ways or is it just

GY: 44:30 Well, sometimes I, I'm, how things might've been different if they didn't all come to Chicago, I would have loved to grow up and live in Washington, Bellevue, Washington if they had gone back there, but then realistically, yeah, all the things that

happened and ended up with me being here. So to speculate, otherwise would be meaningless. I think it was good that they all were able to come here because it allowed this community though develop to grow, to make life for themselves. Although when I go to the West Coast, they have nice lives there too. Uh, I don't know how, how else to say?

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<Begin Segment 11>

- AT: 45:52 Have you visited other Japanese American communities in different places?
- GY: 45:56 Oh yes, sure. Seattle, San Francisco, San Jose, Los Angeles. I love it.
- AT: 46:07 How, how would you compare that and maybe how we should call it different?
- GY: 46:14 Well, I think seeing a center, of uh businesses, is, is nice, a central area. Um, but also it's cool just to see businesses that have Japanese names on. You know, I was shocked when I go to these other parts of the country, go to Los Angeles and see all these businesses that have Japanese names and I say wow. You know, they've all kind of faded in Chicago. They've sold out. They've. But Seattle, you go there, they're still thriving, get a sense of pride.
- AT: 47:12 Did you feel that in Chicago?
- GY: 47:16 Well I think it's a different kind of a feeling growing up here, it's. You know, it's, you know pride never comes when this is your, uh, your home when this. I mean, you don't automatically are all of a sudden develop pride, but to go to another place and say, wow, this is kind of place exists. That's nice. I like it.
- AT: 47:50 How wuld you feel about having a central area in Chicago of Japanese Americans?
- GY: 48:00 Well, it would be, it will be fun. It'd be great. I would like that.
- AT: 48:08 Just a couple more questions. I guess just kind of point blank, how do you think that the history of your family, your parents, in terms of how do you think that's impacted your life? Maybe you as a person? If at all.

GY: 48:37 Well, seeing what my family, my parents, families have gone through and how they have lived their lives. Uh, it, it really taught me the importance of family. The importance of being part of a community. Yeah, yeah I don't know if, if the families had done something different, whether having this strong big family, oh, would have occurred for me and whether I would have benefited from that. But the fact that they all, all these uncles and aunts and you know, we're here, we shared so much together. It taught me how to live. You know, I'm grateful for that. You know, I can't say that it, maybe this is being selfish, I can't say that it was a bad thing for me.

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<Begin Segment 12>

AT: 50:17 If you could leave your children and grandchildren, any kind of message or legacy, what would you want to leave them with? What do you want them to know?

GY: 50:42 Um, I want them to understand the legacy of the family, where they came from, and then let them find their own way.

Another Speaker: 51:08 I guess, but maybe it's kind of irrelevant. I was just thinking about more maybe like a broader question for you is just what have been some of the most meaningful conversations that you've ever had with who and what are they?

GY: 51:29 Regarding?

AT: 51:31 Just in life? It doesn't have to specifically be Japanese American, just out of curiosity, what are the conversations that have stuck with you?

GY: 51:44 Well, I mentioned one person, Yosh Sakai, we used to spend a lot of time together because we would make noodles together for 25 years and so there was many a day spent in the kitchen where we would just chat it. He really was an inspiration to me. So the time I spent with him. Uh, the time I spent with my father, he was a, a different kind of character, but he knew about everything. And so, you know, after I got over fighting with him, we became buddies and I appreciated him. I appreciated, uh, how he lived life. My mother was not much of a talker, so we spend time sitting together and there are others, others I can't think of right now because, uh, you know, I'll grab information from and you know, listen and chat with them.

Another Speaker: 53:26 Okay, great.

AT: 53:29 Is there anything that you'd like to add or that we might've missed?

GY: 53:34 I don't think we missed a thing. I, I appreciate the opportunity. You might have to do a lot of editing.

Another Speaker: 53:48 No that was good, thank you so much for, for coming in and speaking with us. We really appreciate it.

GY: 53:53 Thank you.

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