

Densho Digital Repository
Naoko Wake Collection of Oral Histories of US Survivors of the Atomic Bombs Collection
Title: Kathy Yamaguchi Interview
Narrator: Kathy Yamaguchi
Interviewer: Naoko Wake
Location: San Francisco, California
Date: June 15, 2011
Densho ID: ddr-densho-1021-1

<Begin Segment 1>

NW: Hopefully this is working [laugh]. So probably you can begin by telling me a little bit about your history of engagement with the group of survivors. Geri told me that you were going to be a very busy person in the coming few days.

KY: Right, right. I got started in, I can't remember what year it was. So it was probably '83?

NW: It's a long time ago.

KY: Yeah, in the late, I think from 1979, '80, I was involved in a group. It was an informal study group of. We called ourselves the East Bay Socialist Doctors Group. And we were a group of progressive doctors who were working in, mostly in public sector clinics in the East Bay, and we used to get together and talk about things. And through that there was a, a doctor, who had heard about these, the A-bomb survivor exams, the medical exams, that had been done at the public health service hospital but since that closed, they were looking for some people to organize it outside of the public health service hospital, so, that's how I learned about it. [...] and at the same time, through the Physicians for Social Responsibility, you know that group? Because of that group, Richard Fleming was, they found Richard Fleming. And I knew Richard a little bit because he was one year behind me in medical school. We went to the same medical school.

NW: Where did you go?

KY: UCSF [University of California, San Francisco]

NW: USCF, mmhmm.

KY: So somehow, we got together, and we're working on helping organize the 1983 medical exams; we did it at UC.

NW: Hmm, I see.

KY: So that's how it started, and I think I must have met Geri, I don't know this was too long ago, I must have met Geri that way

NW: She was just, just around the same time, getting involved in Friends of Hibakusha as I understand it.

KY: Yeah, right, so it was right around that time, um, so I got involved with the East Bay Socialist Doctors Group and then we just, you know, we did it. Oh, I must have missed. Maybe I just did it once? And then I moved to New York temporarily, so I was not here from '84 to '86, I was in New York, so I probably was gone, and then when I came back in '87, um, I helped out at one of the exams. I didn't organize it but I helped out, and then somehow I think Geri probably got me. I somehow joined Friends of Hibakusha.

NW: Hmm, I see.

KY: So somehow, and I can't even remember when I started getting so that, um, I and Richard were the main people organizing the volunteers. I don't remember – I don't remember when that started.

NW: But when you say then first, survivors in the States were getting treatment in public health care system but then they were not eligible anymore?

KY: The, no the hospital closed.

NW: Hospital closed. Okay.

KY: The hospital closed, so there were some public health, doctors, I guess. US Public Health Service doctors who were organizing it, and because the hospital closed down. It was totally closed.

NW: There was no . . .

KY: They had totally closed.

NW: . . . future for that

KY: Yeah, so that we took over, and yeah. I don't even know how long they had been doing it.

NW: Right. Well, my understanding was that, well, there was no American hibakusha medical, free check-ups, that they can have an access to in the States, whereas in Japan, obviously, . . .

KY: Right,

NW: . . . they are getting free medical care.

KY: This one's supposed to be the 18th. The one we're doing, now

NW: Yeah it is, it is,

KY: the 18th, so that means it's been happening for like 36 years.

NW: That's right, that's right, that's a long time.

KY: So 36 years, it's been going on since when? The 60's?

NW: '77, I think that . . .

KY: '77?

NW: Yeah.

KY: Ahhh. Okay. Okay

NW: Yeah.

KY: So it happened a few times, then we started doing it.

<End Segment 1> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 2>

NW: So first you said it happened in UC San Francisco's Medical Center?

KY: It was in UC, it was at the, the Ambulatory Care Center.

NW: Okay. And when did it shift over to Saint Mary's?

KY: I think, you know, I'm trying to remember, it shifted over because of the problem of Monday. Cause they used to do it in three days. They used to start Friday night and do it Saturday, Sunday and then Monday. And we couldn't . . . UC could not give up that space on a Monday. Understandably, I mean, everyone's short of space. They couldn't do it, so I remember one year, we did, we did Saturday and Sunday, we did it at UC and Monday, there was one time we actually came here. Before this clinic was what it is now; it was just a public health site . . . they just did public health things and then in the late '80s, we became a primary care clinic. So that's, so. God, you know, I don't remember, I don't remember the years at all. Jerry might have data, I don't know. I kept things, but. So one year it was, we did UC for two days and then we did here. And then there was another time where we did two days at UC and we did a day at CPMC – California Presbyterian Hospital.

NW: Oh okay.

KY: Doing it once, the Monday, and it was very short. Just, very few people on Monday. And then, we just kept saying, "Let's try to do it in two days. Let's try to do it in two days."

NW: Right.

KY: And then, no, first, then we did it at Saint Mary's. Because John Umekubo . . .

NW: Right, right

KY: . . . was, you know. He was a staff physician at Saint Mary's. and so that was a great, great to get that. I'm pretty sure we were happy to do that because we could use their, we could use them Monday morning. So, there were maybe one or two where we did Saturday, Sunday, and

Monday morning. And then they got better and they could just do it Saturday Sunday, which really helped.

NW: Yeah.

KY: That really helped, yeah, it really helped.

NW: Do you know if Doctor Umekubo has been involved in this since the beginning? Around when did he become?

KY: I would say he got involved, um, you know, I, when did he get involved? Did he just get involved when we went to Saint Mary's? I don't know.

NW: I was told that he, because of the affiliation that he has with Saint Mary's, it was really a nice link that he . . .

KY: No, no . . .

NW: . . . was able to offer

KY: I'm trying . . . I don't know if he was involved before then.

NW: There might have been some form of contact . . .

KY: That's, I think that he probably was, I think he probably was involved before. And it makes sense. He's a primary care physician; he's an internist right in Japantown.

NW: Hmm, That's right.

KY: So, yes, no, no. I'm pretty sure he was involved during the UC times, too. Although, um, he was, the way I look at it, Richard and I did more of the, the kinda the, y'know, the . . . oh, I don't know, I don't have a good word for it. We did the more . . . details, organizing it. He was, had bigger. He was sort of more a . . .

NW: Yeah.

KY: Overall planning, but we –

NW: You did it more . . .

KY: Richard and I took care of, y'know, all the letters, the communication, the organizing . . .

NW: Right.

KY: The scheduling, yeah.

NW: Yeah. That's fascinating.

KY: I'm just sad. This year, Richard's, Richard and his wife are not here, so I'm a little bit worried.

NW: Oh. Wait, wait, where are they?

KY: They have been, y'know, you never know when this is going to happen, right?

NW: Right.

KY: They had vacation.

NW: Oh I see.

KY: So they're gone this weekend and *my* thing was that's been hard is that I had a family reunion. I have relatives still here, so most of the reunion was last weekend, and this weekend was not the best weekend for me either, but . . .

NW: Yeah.

KY: . . .you don't have

NW: Yeah

KY: You don't really

NW: Your own life as well.

KY: We don't really have any say, and . . .

NW: Right. Yeah, they are coming from Japan, so I guess they . . .

KY: Right.

NW: . . . they have to decide based on their schedules.

KY: Right. They have to . . . Yeah, yeah.

NW: Right. Probably, you can tell me a little more about this East Bay Socialist Doctors' Group

KY: I know [laughs]

NW: And then probably it sounds very interesting to me!

KY: It's funny . . . it's, we were just a study group, and . . . and it was a time when we really wanted, we wanted a single-payer national health plan. Y'know, we wanted something like Japan.

NW: We are still working on it [laughs]

KY: Yeah, but we're still working on it!

NW: Yes.

KY: And since we were all working at community clinics with pretty progressive politics, we just all got together to do reading. You know, to read the literature and discuss it, and, one of the people in the group, in fact, the person who got me involved, is the husband of the mayor of Oakland now.

NW: Ah, okay.

KY: Floyd Huen, he's married to Jean Quan.

<End Segment 2> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 3>

KY: And they, I mean, so the interesting thing for me about all this, and I don't know if you'll ever get to this, but there's a lot of connections with sectarian politics. Do you know what that, sectarian politics, what . . .

NW: You can tell me about it.

KY: Well, I don't know about it, but in the '60s, late 60s, 70s, there were some very Left-wing groups, there was Progressive Labor, there was Communist Worker's Party, there was League for Revolutionary Struggle, Spartacist League, all kinds of these very radical groups. Okay. And, I've only been, I can only piece this together and people don't really talk to me about it. For example, Floyd, and Jean, were in the Communist Workers' Party. This was when they were underground.

NW: Okay.

KY: I sh . . . probably don't want to mention their names.

NW: Okay.

KY: Because she's now the mayor of Oakland.

NW: Okay. I understand.

KY: And they, and they keep it out of the news, it's very interesting. It's not in the news that she and Floyd were very involved in the CWP. And Richard, my coworker, my, my colleague here, he was very, he was involved in League for Revolutionary Struggle, which a bunch of my other friends were also involved in. So this whole history there that no one talks about. And what was very uncomfortable in FOH, and I don't even know if Geri, she probably didn't mention this.

NW: I don't think so . . .

KY: There was a huge, very unpleasant, competition within FOH between LRS and CWP to take control of . . . 'caus there . . . take control of FOH. It was very ugly. It was extremely unpleasant.

NW: Hmm, was it mostly political dispute?

KY: Oh, totally political. In fact, I don't even know if there was a difference in approach. All, all I know is that CWP tended to look, as people would say, towards USSR, and LRS tended to look towards China. Now, I don't even know what that means, but, it . . . LRS had more org . . . commun . . . Japantown community organizations than CWP did. They had a lot of, they had a lot of . . . depending on your viewpoint, they had infiltrated or taken over or they were key people, and I just, I don't know this. Because I was never part. Although . . .

NW: It was before your time?

KY: Oh, yeah.

NW: Okay.

KY: It was before my time, and I, I was never a joiner, although I found out later from someone in FOH that they assumed I was CWP. Because I was friends with Floyd. [background noise] I mean they just assumed that I was CWP. I was, I mean, I have no idea, you know. I just, I was sort of an innocent. I didn't know and, and I'm sure Geri was aware of this but she just didn't wanna, you know, acknowledge it. And, and, it was very unpleasant. 'Cause at one point, Jean, Quan, current mayor of Oakland, was very, as far as I can tell, briefly, in FOH. And, I just know it was really, really ugly. It was so ugly. People were like saying bad things about each other within FOH. It was, it was horrible. I mean, and that bad feeling would spill over to the survivors. Some of the . . . Reverend Hanaoka . . . I don't know if you'll ever . . .

NW: Yeah, I just talked to him yesterday.

KY: I think he was, I think he understood there was something going on.

NW: Huh.

KY: I sort of recall, he was very savvy. He understood there was some stuff going on in this. I don't remember how many years it went on, but it was ugly. And I think, I don't know, somehow, by the time I was leaving for New York in '84 and coming back, this was all over with. Because CWP didn't exist anymore, it became aboveground instead of being underground. It was sort of all gone. And, you know.

NW: So, in a way, you came back at the right time?

KY: Right, but I'll never know. I mean, no one ever talks about who was what. It's not, it's not, I have never heard Richard say, he would tell me about their newspaper, but he wouldn't talk about being a part of League for Revolutionary Struggles; he probably wasn't anymore. And a lot of Japantown, a lot of Asian politics were, you know, somehow there was an intersection with the very sectarian left groups.

NW: Really, huh.

KY: I just don't, I just don't, I don't know enough to really even talk about it. But I just know that I was aware of something going on, but many people were aware of that, that was going on. I am fascinated by groups, and especially when they are ideological and people are fanatic about things . . .

NW: Right.

KY: So I've always like, you know, stayed around long enough to find out about them but wasn't gonna get involved.

NW: Right, right. So your sense is that it's not necessarily a problem within Friends of Hibakusha but also something that involved the whole Japanese American community.

KY: A lot, a lot of the groups, I think a lot of the groups, I just don't know the, I just don't.

NW: Remind me, CWP refers to the . . .

KY: Communist Workers' Party.

NW: Okay, alright, LRS is . . .

KY: I think, I'm not sure, it all; it's LRS, and I think it's League for Revolutionary Struggle.

NW: Okay.

KY: I'm not positive about those initials, but, 'cause there was another group that . . .

NW: League for Revolutionary . . .

KY: . . . I was on the edge of, in the medical field and that was the Coalition of Concerned Medical Professionals and another part of the Communist Party; I mean it was all kinds of weird stuff going on in the early '80s. Late '70s, early 80's. And it was best for most of us to stay clear of it. But . . .

NW: But so you were saying then, you were not really politically interested in this when you became involved in Friends of Hibakusha, or just helping out.

KY: No, I was, just to help out the survivors.

<End Segment 3> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 4>

NW: Why do you think you, I mean, I think, you can look around, and in this country you can really find a lot of medical injustice. For people who wouldn't have access to public health services and so forth. Why do you think you particularly interested in survivors?

KY: I just was a Japanese. I, I don't know that I'm particularly interested in survivors, it was just that, I mean, I wasn't gonna seek out, wasn't particular. I mean I, antiwar, antinuclear, but I wasn't, you know, I wasn't looking for a group. It just happened; it seemed appropriate for me as a Japanese American physician to be involved. It just seemed like I should do this, it was only every two years, you know.

NW: Did you that it's going to be such a long term relationship with?

KY: No. No. Not at all. No.

NW: So do you feel that you are happy with the way that your work went with survivors?

KY: Oh yeah, my, my . . . yeah. I don't do much, Geri does all the work. Geri is what holds it together.

NW: She seems to be very good at making network and keeping it.

KY: Sure. Right. And she has a vision too. I don't. I just wanna do what's placed in front of me. That's, I have a, I'm not, I don't have. And if it's in front of me, then I'll do it. I . . . I don't. I think it's a good, it was a good issue. And, one thing I was frustrated about was I was interested in you know, like, a national health plan, and if we had a national health plan, the survivors wouldn't have to work about healthcare, 'cause they . . . everyone would have it. It was frustrating because survivors did not wanna be political at all. Because they were worried. They were too scared to, they didn't want to make any political statement at all.

NW: Right; yeah.

KY: So I found that frustrating because . . .

NW: Right

KY: . . . I wanted to fight for single-payer national health plan and they didn't want to say anything. It was totally nonpolitical. I thought that was, I found that frustrating, but that's the way it was. It's okay.

NW: Yeah, yeah, but it is frustrating, especially given the fact the Japanese government started to give Japanese survivors and then American government supposedly was able to do the same for American survivors because many of them American citizens.

KY: Yes, yes, yeah.

NW: I understand that 1970s there was a lot of struggle to get the governmental recuperation.

KY: Yeah

NW: Do you think that's sort of American, unique American environment for American survivors kinda contributed to your engagement with them? Because I think that . . .

KY: Oh, yeah. Probably. Yes, yeah. Because it sort of fit in with the fact that I thought everyone should get healthcare. I mean, I work here, and I take, we take care of the people without insurance. You know, we totally just take care of the poor.

NW: Hmm, right.

KY: And that's what I've done; my whole career has been taking care of the underserved, you know.

NW: Do you think it's unique gratification, satisfaction, pleasure, I don't know how you can refer to it, but I think when the people get involved in volunteer work, or social justice causes, it's a give and take. So you give things for people and then you take pleasure out of your work and whatever that comes out of it. Do you think the satisfaction part for you when you work with survivors is unique? Because of the fact they are survivors, nobody else?

KY: Ah, yeah. Yeah. I really feel that they've been through a lot. I think it was very, experience had to have been extremely traumatic and frightening. And as a group they are so appreciative of all the work that, all the help that we give them. They're very appreciative and I'm used to patients who are like "uehehe" [phonetic] you know, and aren't like that. So it was really nice, to, to spend the weekend with them.

NW: Right.

KY: And they're patient, and they, well-behaved, and they say thank you. You know, whereas we have all these patients "ueheheh where's my blah-blah-blah?" you know.

NW: Right, right.

KY: So it's a nice change. It's a nice change. My, my, and every time I finish, that I love, what I've always enjoyed is I've enjoyed working with the Japanese doctors. 'cause they're, they're different. They're a trip, you know? They're just . . . but . . . every time at the end of it I say 'I'm gonna learn Japanese so the next time they come, I can speak Japanese.'

NW: [laughs].

KY: And I never do it. I've tried many times, but I've not ever succeeded in learning Japanese.

<End Segment 4> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 5>

NW: Well, speaking of Japanese doctors though, do you think then, I was actually asking, I was present at the press conference this morning and I heard Dr. . . .?

KY: Yanagida [phonetic]

NW: Yanagida spoke about the history of his involvement, and I was thinking, looking around the room, and I noticed, there are middle-aged doctors, Japanese doctors from Hiroshima but younger doctors as well. I was wondering what motivates them to choose to come.

KY: Well, from what I gather, they're always told, whenever you ask them, they, they're told they . . . usually the doctors is a bunch of younger ones. There's usually two or three older ones and the rest are really young.

NW: Right

KY: You say "why are you here?" and they says "my boss told me to come."

NW: Oh.

KY: So, I, I have the feeling that in Japan, you know, who's ever the professor, who's ever the medical professor . . .

NW: Right.

KY: . . . tells whoever he wants 'You're going on this trip.'

NW: Well, so then, the, what about the senior professors' motivation to . . .

KY: They, it that may be their area of interest. Plus, it's a great trip; they get to go shopping!

NW: [laughs]

KY: I mean . . .

NW: It's San Francisco! That's after all, that's one of their destinations.

KY: Absolutely! I mean, they, they've, yeah, yeah, they've, they, they, when they're not working, and they work really hard when they're working. They, they're going shopping!

NW: They do.

KY: They're shop-ping! And . . .

NW: I haven't thought about it, but I'm sure they do.

KY: They work really hard, but . . .

NW: Now, do they come with their own family members or do they just come?

KY: Nope! So, so, so, you know, initially, they used to come for four weeks. One team would do all four cities.

NW: Right, four locations, right.

KY: But then and that was extremely tiring and I think extremely stressful on the families.

NW: Right, right.

KY: So then they split it into two, they made it into two weeks.

NW: Do you know anything about how Hiroshima and Nagasaki Prefectures' Medical Associations might do different kinds of work. I know . . . at this time.

KY: I don't know.

NW: Do you mostly work with Hiroshima team then?

KY: They're most, they're mostly from Hiroshima.

NW: Right.

KY: Yeah

NW: right, right. But I heard that actually Yanagida was saying that, well, there was – there is medical association who sends out team of doctors to South Korea. And he was also in North Korea for twice.

KY: Well, there's one, there's a group that goes to South America.

NW: Right. That's right, yeah. And that it started out, yeah . . .

KY: So another group. Another group.

NW: So, it looks like there are numerous groups that are . . .

KY: Yeah, there's . . .

NW: . . . working outside the Japanese government.

KY: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

<End Segment 5> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 6>

KY: There's a lot of different . . . 'cause when I did that, I did a training in Hiroshima in 1996, that HICARE thing.

NW: Right, right. Yeah.

KY: And they took me all over the city to meet all these different people who were all doing so-called research about radiation effects.

NW: How did you find it to? I mean, did you find it effective?

KY: It was, it was, it was, I didn't learn . . . I didn't. You know the point was for us to then be able to take over and you know, see survivors and . . .

NW: Right. In the States?

KY: Yeah.

NW: Yeah.

KY: Yeah. And, I, I don't think the survivors would have been interested in seeing me. Number one, I don't speak Japanese. Number two, I don't have the experience or expertise behind me that they would get as much comfort talking to me as they would from a young doctor from Hiroshima. You know, they just wouldn't. It just . . . so basically, you could look at it as a waste, but it was a nice experience for me. 'Cause I don't think I couldn't, I wasn't able to use it, and especially I couldn't use it because in my system, I see the poor, who are not Japanese. The Japanese, we have a few Japanese patients, young women, you know, young women who have babies here: they're single mothers or they have American fathers who aren't really there. Those are our patients. But not A-bomb survivors.

NW: Right, yeah. So you don't actually get involved, as a physician in the medical health checkup?

KY: No, no. I had one patient for a while, until she turned 65 and got Medicare who was my patient here, but

NW: She was through this clinic rather than through survivors' . . .

KY: Yeah, because she didn't have health insurance, she didn't have health insurance so she came, and I saw her. But, no, I, I don't know. We tried doing some, earlier on, we tried doing some follow-up, like, we offered, Richard and I offered ourselves for consultations from the, with the survivors if they were interested. And, they weren't.

NW: Right.

KY: There wasn't much call for that. You know, there just

NW: Do you think it's mostly American survivors' group trying to get assistance or collaboration from Japanese physicians or Japanese physicians trying to help out American survivors?

KY: Um, I don't know. I think that the survivors here are very, they're very. They really want this. They, I know they really want it. I think the Americans, they say, I mean, the Japanese say what they're doing is a humanitarian thing to do.

NW: Right, right.

KY: But they are also collecting data. They're also, this is part of their, they collect data on this. So they get something out of it beyond the humanitarian, I think.

NW: Right, right. So it's a research data that they could use.

KY: Yeah, but they, but they stress the humanitarian aspect of it.

NW: They do.

KY: It's a huge visit. I mean, they usually, there's suitcases, all the stuff they bring, you know? But I've seen them also have a very good time. You know? They, they, I think, and I don't know everything because I don't speak the language but oftentimes, they, they have a good time with each other, and they have some good meals. I've gone out, I've been invited along with them, to these celebratory, you know, end of the exam, dinner, and, without the survivors, you know. Not with the survivors. Only me or somebody else, you know. And it's informal, it's like I'm one of the guys because I've been around so long. I have, I went to one in Hawai'i; I was visiting relatives in Hawai'i . . .

NW: Oh, what is it like? I was wondering about that.

KY: In Honolulu, and I had already done the one in here, but I was visiting relatives in Honolulu and I knew people who were in that other team; I had a great dinner, at some fancy, you know at a fancy hotel. They're getting drunk, they're hilarious! You know, 'cause they were done, they were finished; they had worked really hard, it was now time to you know, drink and have a good time.

NW: Yeah, yeah, and then they have done a great thing.

KY: They did a great thing.

NW: Nobody . . .

KY: They worked really hard, solid two weeks or something, so it was, yeah.

<End Segment 6> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 7>

NW: Do you think this kind of thing or any aspect of your work with survivors changed over time? So you have quite a history, you started out, including this study group, that you studied out in 1979, it's, it's what? More than thirty years.

KY: Right, did what change?

NW: Any aspect of your work with survivors, do you think? Or your understanding of it, that this project occupies in your professional life?

KY: It doesn't really occupy much in my professional, my professional life, is you know, a totally different patient population. This is a treat because, as I say, they're, they're, the people

tend to be, you know, polite, kind, generous, you know, grateful, they're just, you know, it's so, it's . . . I, I can't say that's part of my professional life.

NW: Okay, okay, I understand that part. But do you think that any aspect of that part might have changed over time?

KY: Yeah, I think I probably got to know some of them more, and it's always interesting for me to learn about other cultures and I find the Japanese-born people really interesting. I know there's some in, in the Bay area. Sometimes, born in Japan people and us, you know, Nisei and Sansei. We, there's nothing much, people think there's not much in common and . . .

NW: Are you a third generation?

KY: Sansei.

NW: Sansei.

KY: Sansei.

NW: Okay.

KY: And, but I find the people really interesting because they're just a little bit different. But then when you can find out you're not so different, that, that's great.

NW: Yeah, I see what you mean.

KY: If you appreciate the differences, and I can learn from them, that's great. So that's where I, it's too bad I don't speak Japanese because the older ones would have a lot to say. But I can't really . . .

NW: Yeah.

KY: . . . speak to them well.

NW: Yeah, they feel probably more comfortable in just explaining things in their own native language.

KY: Right, right, right, right.

NW: Right.

KY: And I think since, with, given what they've gone through, there's something special about them. And to see them also on this weekend, come together with each other and the ones that are friends really, like, you know, spend the whole time together . . .

NW: Right.

KY: . . . talking

NW: Right, right.

KY: It's just

NW: Do you yourself double up that kind of personal/friend-like relationship with survivors or was it always professional?

KY: I'm not that professional, so it's more of, I see, I see people at other, you know, events: Japan, you know, Jap, you know, Japanese-American events

NW: Right, right.

KY: Yeah.

NW: So you have a connection with them outside of this.

KY: Yeah, yeah, it's a "hi," you know it's just "hi." It's not necessarily medical.

<End Segment 7> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 8>

NW: Do you think then, kind of the different version of my, same question, but do you think people perceive you differently because you are engaged with this very unique and worthy work?

KY: What people would . . . who?

NW: I don't know, I mean people in Japanese American community or in Asian American community? Or the medical profession?

KY: I don't think . . . I, I feel, I . . . look, the Americans aren't gonna, they're not gonna care about this. This is not, this isn't something that, that, I, you know, is impressive to UC or San Francisco General Hospital. My coworkers that I'm more friends with, like it because they help me out on this. They, they're eager to help out on this weekend. And, um, you know, they, I complain a lot so they have to listen to my complaining about "oh I don't wueuwue [phonetic]" so. But I, but I don't care, I mean, I don't, I mean, I'm not thinking about what they're thinking about.

NW: What they're thinking about . . .

KY: I just, I don't

NW: Yeah. What about other American doctors, so to speak, like yourself, or probably as a third generation doctors?

KY: I don't think they have, I don't, I don't know . . . I don't, I don't,

NW: Yeah, well, I just . . .

KY: I, I don't know. I just never thought about it, but I don't know. I don't know [muffled].

NW: Yeah, I think . . .

KY: I have no idea, its just pretty, to me, I feel very invisible about this. Number one: I don't like to be in the public. So whenever there's like a TV reporter, I go hide. And I pushed Richard, I said "you go do it."

NW: [laughs]

KY: He doesn't even want to do it either, because he's really qui . . . Richard is a very nice man, very quiet and soft spoken, he's a very nice guy and I'm really glad that he and I do this together because I like him a lot. But I don't like to be, I don't wanna . . . plus I don't feel . . . I'm not comfortable speaking in front of anything. So I don't.

NW: That's interesting. Because . . .

KY: It's too bad, I don't like to do it.

NW: Yeah, but to me it's interesting because it is, to, partly because I am really interested in this issue, it looks like it, this type of work, involves a lot of publicity, and part of your . .

KY: I am very good at hiding.

NW: . . . what you do [laugh].

KY: I mean, very good at being out of the way when anyone comes.

NW: Well, probably it has a nice match with the Japanese mentality where it might mean . . .

KY: Well, I know, I have heard, someone said that, that everyone has a fear of public speaking but that Japanese, I think it's Japanese Americans or Japanese American women have, more . . .

NW: Women . . .

KY: . . . of a problem than most women. I mean I, you know.

NW: Oh. Yeah. Now that, actually . . . that's interesting that you mention Japanese American women, and I think it's true to Japanese women as opposed to Japanese men . . .

KY: Yeah.

NW: . . . problem with public speech. My impression is, okay so you are woman and Geri is woman and I of course know there are male volunteers and leaders in the Friends of Hibakusha or CABS, Committee for Atomic Bomb Survivors, but I think women are very much present in this whole scene.

KY: Women do volunteer work to a much . . . I mean . . . women, I think if you look at most organizations, like I, I for the last three years I was on the board of what used to be called the

Japanese American Services of the East Bay, it was a social services agency in the East Bay, largely for Japanese American elders. And, I looked around, and who's doing all the work? It's the women! And it was women who tended to be retired. Because you had to have the time, so one of the reasons I resign . . . I did my three year term and I resigned because it was just too much time. I mean, it was a board that required too much board time, I thought, you know. But it's the women! It's the women who've volunteer . . . it's . . .

NW: Yeah

KY: . . . and I guess the thinking is that women don't have work that's so important. I don't under, I don't understand that at all because women have as much work as men.

NW: Right.

KY: But women, yet know, I think that you'll find . . . just in terms of volunteering, I think it's way more women.

NW: Right. Right, yeah.

KY: It's the helping out. The men feel like they have to make the money, I guess.

NW: No, because [unintelligible]

KY: But then they wanna go play golf! I don't know.

NW: [laugh]

KY: I, I really, it's a very interesting question, it's a very interesting question and I . . . that's, I'll have to think about that.

<End Segment 8> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 9>

NW: How about yourself, I mean, you being a, a women and being successful in medical profession, especially . . . I, I actually was talking to another historian of medicine who had a chance to interview first generation American women, not just Asian American women doctors but any doctors who are women, who went to medical school, so 1940's and 1950's . . .

KY: Really?

NW: . . . and his question was mostly about how they might have had a sort of unique challenge because of their gender.

KY: Oh yeah.

NW: Do you think that you, you went through some of that?

KY: Yeah, oh yeah. It was very hard.

NW: So you told me you went to medical school in UC San Francisco, and . . .

KY: Yeah, I was; I went, it was very hard for me. I had a very, very, very hard time. Very, very, very hard . . .

NW: How many women students did you have?

KY: We had, we had twenty-five percent women, and this was 1971 and this was the biggest, it was the largest percentage of women, um, except for the women's Medical College of Pennsylvania. Because I think previous it had been like around fifteen percent. And then all of a sudden my year it jumped to twenty-five percent, and this was 1971, women's liberation has started, and then right after that, it just started going up. But being where I was, there weren't very many women role models. And the ones that were there, many of them were, they said "Oh, there's no problem being a woman." They were like out of it, you know.

NW: [laughs]

KY: So it was very difficult.

NW: Right.

KY: It was very, it was horrible. I actually cried my way through medical school and residency. It was, and, and I think it was harder because I don't come from a professional family. My father's a gardener and my mother never worked outside the home until I was out of college. So, I didn't have preparation, I didn't see this kind of profess . . . I didn't see this around me, and the whole idea of making, making decisions, being responsible for other people was very difficult for me. I was a girl. I think I was supposed to just get married. You know, it was very hard. And I just, I had a really hard time. I feel like I had a harder time than most or I was more willing to talk about it but I had a very hard time.

<End Segment 9> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 10>

NW: Could you probably give me specific examples of things you ran into that now looking back on it, you think is a challenge that you had to deal with.

KY: Okay, one thing I had was . . . I grew up in a very non-verbal family. We didn't talk. And, in fact, I went through these sort of family therapy research kind of things about the legacy of internment camps on us. And the family therapist, this Nisei woman, family therapist who was conducting these sessions said my family was way more non-verbal than the average, we were way over on one side of the bell shaped curve, and that our family operated on mind-reading. And my father has a very, he has a . . . he's a nice man, but he had an inhibiting effect on my mother who was normally kind of chatty and outgoing, you know. But he just, he just put a dampener on everything. So, in the house, my mother became very quiet. Whereas outside she's "ehdeehdeeh," you know.

NW: Right, right.

KY: So, um, I didn't learn how to talk. I mean, I couldn't speak, which is why I have a terrible fear of public speaking because I could not . . . I didn't know how to talk. And it was only gradually that I learned to talk. And first . . .

NW: Right.

KY: . . . I, I sort of first found white girlfriends who were Jewish from New York, who talk a lot.

NW: Interesting, they do! Many of them, anyway.

KY: I found I, I was attracted to people who were very articulate, talked a lot.

NW: Right.

KY: So then, and that's what I, you know sort of, I had mostly Jewish friends for a long time.

NW: Very interesting.

KY: And then, I got . . .

NW: Is it mostly because of verbal? Thing that you . . .

KY: About what?

NW: Verbal ability that they . . .

KY: Yeah, I loved their verbal ability, I loved how they could just talk, and I just watched them and then,

NW: Wow.

KY: And then, and then the big thing for me was when we started the, what's called the Sansei Legacy Project where it was a group of Japanese Americans got together basically to talk about how the internment of our parents affected us.

NW: Right.

KY: So, um, when I got into that, when I got into that group, that was and I was, by that time I was, I was, I guess I was at least in my mid-forties. Early forties, mid-forties. I was that old. And that was when I learned how to be able to talk. In a group.

NW: Oh, wow.

KY: 'Cause for me it made a huge to be speaking in a group of all Sansei, as opposed to the normal groups, which are mixed.

NW: Right.

KY: 'Cause you know, how Americans, they're quick. And Japanese tend to be a little slower.

NW: They wait a longer.

KY: I still have trouble in a big group. I . . . if it's a big group, I won't say anything because I can't . . . I feel like I can't think fast enough to, to talk. So, so . . .

NW: Yeah.

KY: Okay, so what I was getting at, was we had to do oral . . . we had to present the patients. You do a patient presentation.

NW: Right.

KY: "This is a fifty-six year old woman who came into the emergency room because blahblahblah." And I couldn't talk, and it came out . . . I'd get nervous, and it would be all garbled, you know. So one nice doctor, one of my nice teachers didn't know what was going on because I seemed like I was intelligent enough, I got into the residency.

NW: Of course.

KY: And he didn't realize until he was reading my written and my written one was fine.

NW: Right.

KY: But I couldn't do it orally.

NW: Right. Yeah.

KY: You know. 'cause I was, you know. And I, I mean I was very aware of this. It was, I don't know how I got through it because I had African American roommate and friend, in medical school. She and I were on rotation for a while and now she's someone who didn't do so well on tests. I did okay on tests. But she had poise, her presentations were incredible, she had all this poise, you know and I'd go "Awwww, I wish I was like that." Because I just didn't have that. I just, I just, you know, I just didn't have it. It's just been a, a very long struggle for me.

NW: That's interesting, not only because you know, usually Asian Americans or Asians tend to be quieter especially in American perceptions but also, I was recently looking at this 1974, 78, the congressional hearing records to obtain the medical bills to support the survivors in the States. And then the way the survivors presented themselves is that "We are the most quiet people, even within the, normally speaking, very quiet community of Asian Americans."

KY: Right, right, yeah, right.

NW: Because they weren't . . . you were earlier talking about how they are kind and very . . .

KY: Yes, right.

NW: . . . you know, gracious . . .

KY: Right, right.

NW: . . . and appreciative of your work. Because they don't, they don't assert themselves.

KY: Right, right, right, right.

NW: It really fits well with what I've been looking at.

KY: Yeah, yeah.

NW: So I think that's kind of . . . it's all there,

KY: Right

NW: This kind of matter of not being able to speak up and . . .

KY: Right.

NW: then, yeah having to struggle with that, so.

KY: Right, right, right, right, right, right. It's been a huge struggle.

<End Segment 10> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 11>

NW: Hmm. Do you think that, that kind of struggle, difficulty that you had might have had something to do with your engagement this Socialist doctor's group? Because it looks like . . . were you active as a student?

KY: As a student, yeah, a little bit. There was . . . I, I don't know that I was so active but I hung around on the fringes, you know. I found roommates who were active. And I was interested in it, so. But I don't think I spoke. We did, I did help out on one publication that came out, you know for a national health plan, I mean I did . . .

NW: Right

KY: I knew the people. I knew people I would help out, but I, I don't think I was real active.

NW: You know, 1970s, '80s, that's when feminist movement . . .

KY: Right

NW: . . . became really established

KY: Right

NW: And also Asian American civil rights movement was huge.

KY: Right, right, right, right, yeah.

NW: Were you aware of that as you go through your . . . ?

KY: Yeah, no, I was, but I wasn't, I didn't feel like I was a part of any of that.

NW: Why not?

KY: The women's, I'm, I'm very grateful to the women's movement because I think if it hadn't been for that, I would not have thought of going to medical school. I, you know, I was gonna be, I was gonna go to graduate school in science and be a scientist. I, I wouldn't have thought of being a doctor. And, like, the, all the ethnic id . . . stuff, I also stayed away from because I think at that time I prob, I remember, and it was the same Floyd, Huen. I remember he and Jean were leaders of the movement at Berkeley. And I remember going to some meeting during the Third World Strike and Floyd saying something about "All you Asian women with your white boyfriends," and I had a white boyfriend then. So,

NW: Ah.

KY: I felt, like, oop, you know [mumbles]

NW: Interesting.

KY: I'm not, you know, euheuh [phonetic], and . . . so I was on the fringe once again. I was on the fringe. And . . . but now because of the Sansei Legacy Project, which was started in about nineties. I now have Japanese American friends. I always had Asian friends, a, a few, but they tended to be Chinese, rather than Japanese because there aren't that many Japanese around, and I didn't feel like I had anything in common with them. They were too straight, I don't know. I didn't, I didn't know! I didn't, I didn't, you know . . . they were either really political . . .

NW: Right.

KY: . . . and I wasn't that. Or they were too straight, you know, so I didn't.

NW: What do you mean by straight?

KY: They didn't do drugs, they weren't into the hippie movement, they weren't into politics, or they just . . . you know, nice girls.

NW: Ah.

KY: Nice girls, boring men. The men would be intimidated by me because I was doing something that hadn't, that wasn't being, that wasn't common.

NW: Right.

KY: Women didn't do this. Women didn't go to medical school, but you know, so they were, you know.

NW: The Chinese Americans or the Chinese or they were different then?

KY: A little different. Little bit different. They didn't have the experience of the internment.

NW: That's true.

KY: You know?

NW: So you mean there was no fear or no . . . ?

KY: Yeah, I think they felt more, I think they felt like they were, not entitled, but they were, they could do more.

NW: Interesting. Hm.

KY: And I think that, and it was all non-verbal, but I was expected to do well in school, but I don't think I was expected to achieve a whole lot. I don't know, but, 'cause we never, my family didn't talk.

<End Segment 11> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 12>

NW: So, your family, um, may I ask you if your family had any relationship to internment camp history?

KY: Yeah. I . . . my parents met each other during those years.

NW: Oh, wow.

KY: Yeah.

NW: Where were they at the time?

KY: They were in Utah.

NW: Utah.

KY: Topaz.

NW: Okay. Topaz.

KY: Topaz. They met actually during the summer, work, working off site.

[Interruption]

NW: So, we were talking about your parents meeting each other.

KY: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, they and because my, and my father was, what, what I would call an assimilationist. Apparently from his father, from his parents, who were in San Francisco, they never lived in Japantown. They didn't hang out with other Japanese Americans, even though his

older brother by twenty years was one of the founders of the JACL, my father was like . . . he, he . . . my father was just not, he just -

NW: From the same family [laughs]. It's such a difference.

KY: Yeah, the same family. He was, he's a member of the JACL, but he was never really active. And, so we didn't, other than relatives, I did not hang around, I didn't, I didn't go to a Japanese American church, I wasn't in, I didn't play basketball with them, I didn't feel a part of that. I just didn't feel like I fit in. I was too separate.

NW: So wait, when you say your father was not really, he was into assimilation, was it after the war experience or is it something that went before? Went back to before.

KY: Ah, I think it's mostly after the . . . no. It seems to me it was after the war, but I interviewed, I did an oral history with him, when he was a kid, oh no, when he was in high school, he said he didn't have any friends. And all the Japanese, he said, lived in another neighborhood and he didn't, so he felt like, he didn't feel part of it. And then he went to Berkeley for college. And I told him, I asked him, why did you quit after two years? And he said, well, he wasn't a good student, he didn't learn good study habits, he was very smart, he didn't learn good study habits in high school because he didn't have to. And he didn't have any social contacts in Berkeley because he didn't know anybody. So he felt left out as well, so maybe, you know, and so his, his family just never lived in Japanese neighborhoods and . . .

NW: Right.

KY: . . . they didn't send us to Japanese school or Japanese church or anything. You know.

NW: But, do your parents talk about how they met? They met in an internment camp and . . .

KY: Yes, yes, yes. Very cute story. It was a, it was a blind, double date, sort of blind date. My mother had a girlfriend who wanted to go out with this guy and her parents wouldn't let her go on this date unless it was a double date.

NW: Right, right.

KY: So they found somebody for my mother to go out with, and at the last minute, this guy, who my mother said was roly-poly, roly-poly?

NW: What is it?

KY: Means he was fat. Chubby. Roly-poly, it was an old term.

NW: There we go, it makes sense.

KY: So, so, he couldn't go, and they found a last minute substitute, which was my father and my father was on an adjoining block and she used to see him because he didn't talk to anybody, he was like, you know, he was like a social, what should we say, probably socially, what's the word, social phobia, he was not, was not a you know.

NW: Social person.

KY: He was not a social person, but she noticed him because he was kinda cute, I guess. So, she was very happy to find out that he was the substitute double date, blind date.

NW: Right, right. Yeah.

KY: And that was it. I don't think he ever went out with anybody before.

NW: Oh, wow.

KY: I don't think he did.

NW: How old was he at that time?

KY: He was probably twenty-five, my mother was a little older, like she was twenty-seven or something.

NW: Oh, Okay.

KY: They were old. They were old.

NW: Yeah, well, people used to get married much younger.

KY: Yeah, I think my, I think my, I think, I think my mother probably felt like she wouldn't not get married. I, I don't, I . . .

NW: Oh, wow.

KY: She had lots of friends but, and I think she was very happy to meet my father and it's a good thing he met her because you know, otherwise, he would've been a hermit!

NW: Well, yeah, if he's very socially shy.

KY: A recluse! Right, right, right,

NW: Do your parents talk about other memories of the camp?

KY: Yeah, I was fascinated: my mother would only say that she had a great time. But every time she said that, she'd have like, her, she'd start having tears in her eyes, which is why I was so interested in, you know, going to the Sansei group. Because there was a disconnect: my mother would say what a great time it was, but what was behind you know the, she would say, what's the word? There's a Jap, a funny Japanese word, something like *kanashii*, or something. There's an interesting Japanese word that means sad and bitter sweet or something. *Kanashii*?

NW: Hmm. I'm trying to think. *Kanashii* is just pretty much sad.

KY: It's just sad? I thought there was another quality to it. Maybe it's just . . . but there was and my father had no, nothing. He just said, well the United States government was stupid. But he

wasn't particularly angry, which I'm grateful for, he didn't pass on any kind of bitterness, he just said "Well, they were stupid." You know, so.

NW: That was that.

KY: That was that.

NW: And then he was ready to move on.

KY: Yeah, he, yeah, pretty much.

<End Segment 12> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 13>

NW: So, would you say, when you were kind of becoming aware of this huge history of Japanese American community of camps, you really didn't hear that from your parents . . .

KY: No, no, no, no, no.

NW: . . . rather you were hearing from somebody else.

KY: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

NW: Who inspired you to think about those things?

KY: It was because of, it was a Sansei Legacy project. Two ministers, Michael Yoshii in Alameda and Diana Akiyama who was a chaplain at Stanford. They had gotten together and decided that they really needed, it was time to a group of Sansei together to talk about the legacy of the internment, and they weren't sure anyone would talk. But they just got, they gathered people, you know, whoever they knew, word of mouth, and I don't know, maybe around thirty, how many, thirty, forty people came and you couldn't keep us from talking. And it was the first time that some of us were in a group of all Sansei. Because most of us, I mean people like Geri, who grew up much more in a Japanese, Japanese American community didn't have this. They didn't have the same thing; they didn't have this outsider, as much of an outsider feeling as I think I did. And also the same thing with the people who were involved in the Third World Strike politics, in the '70s, I don't think they had this problem either. Or people who grew up in a school that had lots of, you know, other Japanese Americans. I had a very close girlfriend who grew up in San Mateo, went to a Buddhist church, her high school and her grammar school had lots of Japanese Americans. She doesn't have any of these issues. So, it just really, depended, and I was fairly isolated. And those of us who meet through the Sansei project are more similar.

NW: So . . .

KY: We don't . . .

NW: So . . .

KY: Much more, we weren't, we had all non-Japanese friends. You know, so a lot of.

NW: So, in some ways, you and your friends in that group needed to have a group like this to get together and then start to talk about it.

KY: Yes. Right. Exactly. Exactly. Yeah, exactly. Yeah, and we were more interested in talking more about feelings, and not politics. You know, so it appealed to a certain group of people.

NW: Right, yeah.

KY: And mostly, and mostly East Bay, as opposed to San Francisco because it's different, you know. San Francisco considers themselves to be the Japanese community.

NW: Right, right.

KY: And if you're in the East Bay or any place else, you say, "Well, what are we?" you know?

NW: Right.

KY: And you don't have that sense of being part of the, the . . .

NW: Interesting.

KY: . . . of the San Francisco community.

NW: In the East Bay, I imagine there is no core of Japanese Americans community like Japantown.

KY: No, no. Except for the churches, and it's much more spread out.

NW: Right, right. Yeah. Do you think that's true to Los Angeles as well? I know that there is . . .

KY: I don't know. Because they have, in Los Angeles, they have pockets, there's areas that have a lot of Japanese Americans. You know, Gardena, Monterey Park, there's certain areas that have that and most of the people I know are from those areas. I know somebody though, who was more like me, and she went to UCLA, didn't have any, she didn't fit in with the Japanese Americans, and she ended up in New York, and did things totally different, and is, you know, never, never was part of a, much more white kind of event.

NW: Right, right. So you said that you were about forty years old when you started to join in the Legacy Project.

KY: Sansei Project, let me see. It was '90, I was born in '48, so I was, yeah I was in my early forties. Early forties.

NW: So, it started out in 1990, you said?

KY: It started in 1990.

NW: And where did you get together? Did you get?

KY: The Alameda, in the . . .

NW: Alameda

KY: . . .The Buena Vista United Methodist Church

NW: Ah.

KY: In Alameda.

<End Segment 13> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 14>

NW: Do you think, what do you think that your parents thought about your kind of new interests in this history of . . .

KY: Oh, of the Japanese?

NW: They are Japanese Americans and they were part of it!

KY: Oh, see, see, my father, well, not nothing, he would not, he doesn't have anything to say but for my mother, my mother grew up in Alameda and she was part, there was a very, there were a lot of Japanese Americans in her neighborhood. So she had a lot of ties with Japanese Americans. And, then she . . . they went to camp. So she was Buddhist. She stopped going to church, and she will not, she said it was too far away. I don't buy that, you know. I think that, you know in camp it was probably better to be Christian because it wasn't, it was more loyal. You know to be Buddhist was to be more Japanese.

NW: Oh! To be . . . more Japanese?

KY: And, I don't know—maybe—I don't know what it was

NW: Oh absolutely.

KY: But she stopped going to church and then she met my father, who considers himself Christian but doesn't go to church. So when she married my father, after the war, she was sort of cut off from her community. We used to go, when I was a kid, we'd go to Alameda, so it was kind of a coincidence that that I would play with the kids across the street who went to the Methodist church, the Buena Vista Methodist church. I used to play with them, my brother and I and my brother and I didn't like it. We had other interests. We didn't . . . By the time I think we were in high school, we didn't want to have anything to do with the Alameda Japanese Americans, and . . .

NW: Right, right.

KY: . . . we didn't, he and I, neither of us fit in.

NW: Oh.

KY: And so, we kind of you know. And, so for my mother, I think it was really something that I went back, you know.

NW: Right, right.

KY: Like, umpteen, thirty, forty years later, I go back to Alameda and my focus going to Alameda.

NW: Yeah.

KY: So I think she was really, it was very nice for her. That this happened before she died. You know, because I, and then she would also give a lot of money, to the Sansei Legacy Project . . .

NW: Oh, wow.

KY: She would always donate and . . .

NW: Great.

KY: . . . She and my father came to all our anniversary dinners. She was, she, she got to know all the friends that I'd made because now I have a bunch of, you know I have a bunch of Japanese.

NW: Right, Japanese American, right yeah

KY: You know Sansei friends, bunch of Japanese American friends.

NW: Right.

KY: Yeah.

NW: Wow, wow. That's a very interesting part of history.

KY: Yeah, yeah, So, I'm really happy that that happened. I'm very grateful that it, that it happened.

<End Segment 14> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 15>

NW: Hmm. So you said you have an older brother.

KY: No, younger brother.

NW: Younger brother, okay.

KY: Little bit younger. Not much.

NW: Younger. Okay, so are you . . .

KY: He's in Pennsylvania. He's in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He's got a very Midwestern wife. They don't have kids. I don't. I never married or had kids. So, but I get along with him fine. Now, we didn't get along with each other before, but now we get along fine.

NW: Hmm, is that probably because you? Why is that?

KY: He was a, he suffered because he was a year and a half younger than me. I was a really good student. He had other talents but it was a drag to be the younger brother of me, I think.

NW: Very high accomplisher, then.

KY: So then we went to college, you know. He did, he was, boys, they have a harder time maybe. And he had a hard time and took him a long time to find out what he wanted to do and then he was, you know, he was, unkind, he was, he was, he was mean to me, you know he would just, he was just mean. He was a boy, you know, he got everything in the family; do you have any brothers?

NW: No, I don't. I have an older sister. [laugh]

KY: No, you're lucky. But the Japanese boys, he was a Japanese American prince. They get everything. And so he got everything in the family and I had to just accommodate to his, his, what he needed, or what he needed. So I, you know, it was kind of a mess, but. And he rubbed it in for, he was, maybe he was unhappy, frustrated, whatever but I, I was afr . . . I didn't want to go near him because he would upset me too much. So I like, but I liked his wife, that was fine, I liked his wife. But it's only been in the last fifteen years that I've now had the opportunity to, to, you know spend time with him, you know without his wife and so get to know him and I really like him.

NW: That's interesting.

KY: I mean, I, so in the last 15 years, I've, I really enjoy him, plus my father requires 24 hour care now and . . .

NW: Ah.

KY: He doesn't come out enough, but he comes and, and I f . . . it's, I'm really glad he's, he's around and we just had a family reunion and yeah, I like him a lot.

NW: Yeah.

KY: No, I like him a lot.

NW: Why do you think that changed, I mean it looks like it's all positive changes?

KY: Because he's not what he was when he was 20, you know.

NW: And you're not either. [laugh]

KY: Probably, probably. Right, right, right, right. So I, I really do enjoy him a lot.

NW: Do you think he went through a sort of, a different attitude, a different kind of, or probably a relationship, did he develop a different kind of relationship with the third generation of Japanese Americans like you did?

KY: Yeah, he, no. Because he was in Pennsylvania, or first he was in Chicago. He was many years in Chicago. Well, he's someone, he, you know, he likes Japanese food and he would do some Japanese New Year stuff, he'd go buy, he'd find a Asian store and buy the stuff.

NW: Right.

KY: Um, but he doesn't have the opportunity to have Japanese American friends because of where he is.

NW: Right, yeah. So, location matters, a lot.

KY: Right, so location, right I don't think it's as much of a, it's not in his, it's not in his, I don't think he thinks about it much. Yeah. Where it's become a big part of my life, you know, I sort of.

NW: Right. Right.

<End Segment 15> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 16>

NW: Are you still engaged with, I mean I know that you're engaged with the Hibakusha project, do you have any . . .

KY: That's only, that's really, that's once every two years. It's not a . . .

NW: Right.

KY: . . . whole lot of time, but our Sansei group gets together informally once a month. You know, we meet at someone's house, we share, we order out food, or there's other things that come up, like, we went to a baseball game, you know, the Mariners and the A's because they have all those Japanese players, we went to that. So there's . . .

NW: Right.

KY: . . . some, you know, and we have email contact and . . .

NW: Right.

KY: . . . we get together, there's a couple of different groups that I get together with, and yeah.

NW: In addition to just talk about things and then share feelings about many issues, do you talk about some political issues, social issues, that are unique to . . . ?

KY: Yeah, we do political stuff because we tend to be pretty progressive, left, Democrat, we just, I don't know if why, but there's some very political people in the group who, who actually do a

lot of, you know, political work. So there's several who do that, others of us, all, public sector kind of stuff. No one has a lot of money, no one made a lot of money . . . I work part-time so I'm not, I, I do fine, but I only work three days a week, so I'm, I'm not a full time, full time doctor.

NW: Oh okay. Right.

KY: But it's very gratifying to talk with people, you know, we talk a lot about caregiving, of parents, because . . .

NW: Oh!

KY: . . . because, that's I think that, that Asians tend to feel a lot of obligation to take care of their parents. Japanese . . .

NW: Of course, of course. Yeah, of course, yeah.

KY: . . . so there's a lot of, a lot of that talk.

NW: What are the other particular issues that you talk about? What are the . . . ?

KY: Probably a lot of people have, feel discriminated in the workplace. Or they feel like they get harassed because they are Asian. Now, I work in a place, this clinic, we have, we're like, everyone's part-time except for the medical director. We're all women, we have one very part-time male. An African American male. But the, it's the, this clinic has traditionally been mostly women.

NW: Interesting.

KY: Which really helps. It really, really helps. And we are, we have a biracial African American as the medical director, we have a biracial Filipina who sits there, but she's on vacation. There's me, we have two lesbians, we have a Korean and we have a Korean nurse practitioner. So it's very, it's not a white dominated place.

NW: Right, right.

KY: And I think it makes a huge difference, so everyone else is talking, telling stories about how they got felt slighted, about something, and I don't have those because we're . . .

NW: What do you think then, your friends think about you? Do they envy you, that you don't have to deal with that? Or?

KY: Yeah, yeah. I mean, they're, yeah.

NW: Yeah. Probably has something to do with the fact that this is a public . . .

KY: Yeah, absolutely.

NW: Right.

KY: Absolutely.

NW: Facilitate you, can take care of poor people or patients.

KY: Right. Absolutely. Yeah.

<End Segment 16> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 17>

NW: Well, I don't want to occupy . . . monopolize you too much.

KY: I have to go, I have to go too; did you get enough? I didn't, see, I didn't know why you wanted to talk to me because I don't, I'm not, I can't say that the survivors thing is that big a part of my life.

NW: Oh, no, that's fine. I'm really talking to anyone who, who has different kinds of connections . . .

KY: Ah.

NW: . . . and relationships to survivors in the, you, you're wonderful. So,

KY: You know what, I really have to, I have to say that one of the things that I've really enjoyed is the relationship with the doctors. And because they're like, you know, I was very afraid of going on that trip, you know the training to Japan, because I was afraid, and I think they, I had some reason to be afraid, but I thought they, they were gonna see me, they thought I was a lesbian communist.

NW: Oh. [laughs]

KY: I'm exaggerating. But I think that some of those survivors, they didn't know me, they, I never, I didn't, I didn't have a visible boyfriend, I didn't have a family . .

NW: Well, there's nothing wrong with being communist lesbian, but.

KY: No! Of course not. But I was afraid that they'd shun me because of that. But I go there, and the ones that knew me were so welcoming and they keep saying, kept saying things like "That's Dr. So and so, he was in the student demonstrations of the '70s. And I, and I felt like they were really making a point to tell me that they were in, you know, sort of student demonstrations . . .

NW: Right.

KY: . . . anti-war stuff, anti-nuclear stuff, you know all this, and they were just great to me.

NW: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KY: You know, they were really great to me.

NW: So there is sort of a solidarity connections . . .

KY: Yeah

NW: . . . that they were willing to make.

KY: So they've been different doctors all the time and sometimes they carry over, sometimes they're repeats, and they're just, you know. I think of Japanese businessmen here, I don't like them, they're like, you know, they're . . .

NW: Very macho.

KY: Very macho, very entitled, and a who . . . you don't want to be around them. And I was afraid that it would be like that.

NW: Yeah. [laugh]

KY: In Japan, but what I learned was, and I, it, you know, and the doctors here, the older ones, especially years ago are very formal, stiff. But what I found, what I learned was, when you go to their country, and everything is in their language, it's totally different. Because when you can speak your own language . . .

NW: That's very different.

KY: You can be so much more comfortable . . .

NW: Right.

KY: . . . and human. You know?

NW: Yeah

KY: So it was a really good lesson for me, that to not make judgments on somebody's speaking English . . .

NW: Right, right, yeah.

KY: . . . on what their personality was, because they were totally different.

NW: Right.

KY: They were totally different in Japan.

<End Segment 17> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.

<Begin Segment 18>

NW: Well, sometimes, when I talk to survivors, I do it in English and other times, I talk in, in Japanese . . .

KY: Oh, you do it in, right.

NW: . . . as well, sometimes it kind of goes back and forth. And first their part of the interview might be in English and then, then after a while, it might be in Japanese, and I'm really struck by how personality seems to change, the first and then talking to . . .

KY: You can tell that?

NW: I can kind of tell. And I'm sure my personality seems to be . . .

KY: No, no, no.

NW: . . . different as well.

KY: We, I just found, you know, I, I, I go to a quality improvement meetings for our clinics, and there's a clinic in Chinatown that's totally, almost totally, Chinese and is Cantonese speaking.

NW: Oh, wow.

KY: And the medical director, who is, I, my guess is that English is not his first language. He's very American, but I think English was not his first language. And he was doing meetings with his staff, and he learned, he found out that when things were done in Chinese, his staff came up with many more ideas, innovations on how to change things. And they're all fluent, right? They're working, they've been working for years in English.

NW: Right, right, right.

KY: But he found out that there was so much richer, if it's . . . they can speak in Cantonese

NW: If it's in Chinese. Wow.

KY: Yeah, it's, it's very interesting, I know it's like how much we're missing, you know. We do a lot of, we use a lot of video translators or telephone interpreters with our patients.

NW: Oh, okay.

KY: We have a lot of, you know Asian patients, and Russian and Mongolian and . . .

NW: It must be very helpful then.

KY: Yeah, you need it.

NW: Yeah.

KY: Because we don't, the staff here don't have the time to interpret in the room, so we have to use the telephone or something.

NW: Right, right. Yeah, wow. That's very interesting.

KY: But it is. It's really interesting. So I, one of the things I like is the opportunity to get to know the doctors.

NW: Yeah, well it's a bit. It's about people meeting, I think.

KY: Yeah, yeah, it's meeting people, it's like yeah.

NW: . . . and without that, you can't really do anything like this, so. Thank you very much for your time.

KY: Yeah, it was fun.

NW: Is there anything that, what you feel like you didn't talk too much about that . . .

KY: Well, there are other people, I, I've gotten people who aren't Japanese that have helped me out on these weekends, and they all, you know, they really get, I don't know what the term is. They really like coming. They will ask me "When is the next, you know? When are you doing this again, I want to help." They want to help, because I think it's the, I think it's the personality of the survivors. They don't really, just like I keep saying, they're so gracious, and grateful . . .

NW: Right. Right.

KY: . . . and I think that seems to affect my friends who help out.

NW: So, doctors who are getting interested in, ah.

KY: Doctors and doctors, yeah. I've got all these doctors doing height and weight and blood pressures and they love, they love, these patients. You know, so.

NW: Well, that's very interesting. Well, I heard that, in, especially in America, there is a sort of an effort through organizations like Friends of Hibakusha to kind of, expand the definition of survivors. So, what irradiated populations. So it's not so you have to be the bomb survivors.

KY: Right, I mean it could be the downwinders and the, yeah. Right, right, right.

NW: Yeah, so, but, I don't know if that kind of personality carries over to the broadened definition of survivors. Yeah.

KY: No, I can't imagine, can't imagine. Yeah, I can't yeah. It would be interesting. Yeah, that would, nah, this is a special thing with the Japanese and the one, the one Korean guy that comes.

NW: Oh, yeah?

KY: There's one Korean man. Mr. Mark Hwang.

NW: Oh, Mark Hwang, yeah.

KY: Yeah. And did you, you know, this morning, did you meet Craig Lum?

NW: No, I didn't.

KY: He was, I think he went to the press conference, I'm looking forward to meeting him, he helped out decades ago, when he was a, he was a lab technician and now he's a doctor.

NW: Oh, wow.

KY: I haven't seen him for years. But he wants to work all weekend so I'm looking forward to working with him.

NW: Sure. Craig ?

KY: Lum. So, I think he's, he's Chinese, I don't know if he's got Japanese in him but I think he's just Chinese.

NW: Yeah, I think it's good that, it's not just for Japanese Americans . . .

KY: No it's not.

NW: But also, there are other Asian Americans getting interested in this.

KY: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

NW: Well . . .

KY: Are you gonna be around for the? You're gonna?

NW: Oh, absolutely, yeah, so, probably I will see you, and . . .

KY: Yeah, yeah.

NW: . . . I will be trying not to get in the, in anyone's way, because I understand that people are busy, running around, but I'm trying to just introduce myself to people who come see doctors and possibly I have a chance to get to know them, and talk with them.

KY: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

NW: So, I will be at the Saint Mary's tomorrow and possibly on Sunday, as well.

KY: Okay, good. Okay, good.

NW: So, I can see you there?

KY: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Saturday's chaotic, Sunday's much better.

NW: Great. Oh really?

KY: Yes, Sunday, every, by Sunday, things are little more organized and it's a little easier.

NW: Oh

KY: Yeah.

<End Segment 18> - Copyright © 2011 Densho and Naoko Wake. All Rights Reserved.