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Title: Donald K. Tamaki Interview
Narrator: Donald K. Tamaki
Interviewer: Naoko Wake
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NW: Um, what it's like to work with U.S. survivors? I'd like to sort of get a sense of what you remember in terms of your interactions with them.

DT: Uh, well, you know, they were, uh . . . very, uh, grateful, really that, and of course we were . . . happy to be of any help at all.

NW: Mhm.

DT: But I, you know, I thought they were courageous, um. There's a certain amount of stigma involved in being an A-bomb survivor. Maybe more so in Japan than here. But, but um . . . still, you know. Um . . . takes a certain amount of courage to say, kind of expose your medical problems or issues or potential for . . . to be . . . to develop cancer, you know. And to say yeah, I was exposed. I saw the blast. Um . . . I walked through the remains of the city with all the uh, black rain and other things. And uh . . . you know, you're, they're telling their friends and neighbors who they are. I, I thought that was worth supporting. If they were willing to be that courageous, then we ought to put in the time to, um . . . help them convey that message. And they were—they were very, um . . . adamant about um . . . their feelings about nuclear warfare. Uh, against nuclear warfare. And I thought, that's per, that's courageous and that they, that story should be supported. You know.

NW: Right. Do you think it mattered to you that most of them—well actually, more than half of them—were—even back in the 1980s—U.S. citizens? Not all of them were born in the U.S.

DT: Right.

NW: Many of actual U.S. survivors that we count as U.S. survivors today are born in Japan and maybe because their marriage because there's education or jobs—migrated to the U.S. after the war was over. I wonder if that distinction, um, mattered to you in any way? Or maybe it didn't?

DT: Well—it, uh, mattered to us . . . well, of course, like us, they lived through some of the most anti . . . anti-Japanese, um, attitudes. So . . . after the war, uh, Japan was a very poor country and very defeated. And there was a certain amount of intermarriage that happened postwar that probably was, uh, not looked upon well by either Japanese or Americans.

NW: Exactly.

DT: So, I think they were, um . . . Uh . . . there were certain amount of outcast, kind of, attitude. And then of course, um, following the war, um . . . Americans did not distinguish between Americans of Japanese ancestry and Japanese nationals. And they, the feelings against Japan was uh, pretty strong. So, um, lots of housing discrimination, job discrimination, um, and some of this stemmed back to early days of, of, um, the West Coast in particular in California.

NW: Mhm.

DT: I mean . . . as you know, you know, from the mid to late eighteen hundreds, there were lots of anti-Asian legislation on the West Coast . . . in California, Washington, Arizona, in particular.

NW: Right.

DT: And so, um, those laws, uh, caused these communities to be pretty much, uh, cloi, cloistered together, um, in areas that are otherwise known as Japantowns. But that was due to discrimination. You know, imm, Japanese immigrants could not legally own most kinds of property.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And uh, so, uh, people were just basically, you know, eking out a living . . . uh, under, under those kinds of conditions. So . . . when, um, the war happened, I mean, the single most unpopular, unwelcome group on the West Coast were Japanese Americans.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And then after the war was over, um, Japanese Americans were, um, had been relocated because internment camps. And many ended up in different parts of the United States, on the East Coast and Midwest. But some of the . . . a lot of the people came back to the very communities that they were exiled from in the first place.

NW: Mhm.

DT: So their, their message was keep your mouth shut and . . . be . . . as American and as white as you can, as fast as you can.

NW: Mhm.

DT: And it just was a survival message. And so, the people who emigrated from Japan postwar, that's the environment they came into. So . . . we, we had a common, um, historical experience in that regard. But they were . . . very unique individuals because of their status as A-bomb survivors.

NW: Right.

DT: Which I didn't—was not aware of, uh, you know, until quite a bit later. So . . .

NW: Mhm.

DT: When, when, uh, it came to our attention that there were A-bomb survivors in the Bay Area, that was interesting to me. And I thought, um, they would have a good, an interesting story to tell. Not a good story, but a story that was newsworthy and important.

NW: Mhm.

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