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Title: Geri Handa Interview
Narrator: Geri Handa
Interviewer: Naoko Wake
Location: San Francisco, California
Date: July 20, 2011
Densho ID: ddr-densho-1021-2-11

<Begin Segment 11>

NW: Do you think it's important that you're a woman? I mean, you are working on all this, and men could have done it, of course, but as it happened, you're a woman. Do you think that, the fact that you're a woman mattered one way or another in all of your work?

GH: Um, maybe. I mean, you know, charm has something to do with it [?] the ability to just kind of be friendly and, you know, just kind of encourage and, and, you know, you know, just be supportive. I think that probably has something to do with it, too. But, in essence though, it has to mean something to the person you're working with as well. So if you find that in common, then that's what you work with. Because then it's something bigger than yourselves.

NW: Well, I'm wondering though, you know, you were talking about how you became involved in the Asian American communities, and I understand this is the 1970s, and that's around the time the women's movement was also gaining its in force, and just like Asian Americans, many of them anyway, felt that they were treated in a different way in American society. There are many women who felt that way, and you are a woman. And I just wondering if you got, in some way, influenced by this, because many changes are taking place and that's a very interesting era for that reason.

GH: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Well, let's see. Because, you know, it was during that time too, you know, you had like ethnic power, you know, and like establishing your, you know, your identity, you know, either as a woman, or within a certain ethnic group or whatever. I think all that probably had something to do with it, but also, you had to be aware of the culture and how things are done. And you had to be very respectful. And I think, even though you want certain things, you wanna make sure that people understand that, you know, you wanna be respectful, too. That's because I was primarily working with Asian seniors and, of course, they're very traditional, most of them. And, and the role of the woman, and what they, um, how they're supposed to behave and all that, you don't always take on a leadership role. But, I found that within each ethnic group, the women are always very strong. Yeah. And once you establish, um, trust and, and work together, especially with the women, and they confer, in terms of "Yes, we agree that these certain things need to be done."

NW: Right, right.

GH: They will help you to get it done.

NW: Right, yeah.

GH: So you build alliances, allegiances, with those, you know, who want to work together with you to achieve those goals, and I think then you have that commitment, so it's, it's, I think that's how it works and so I've always found that building of that relationship and trust is really key, whether it's a man or a woman. You need to do that, because it has to go beyond yourselves, you know. I mean, maybe it starts of as "Oh, yes I love being in the limelight," or "I want to take on the leadership role, I love doing these kinds of things, and I love the recognition," that's part of it. But on a deeper level, if they understand and you understand, it goes beyond yourselves. Then I think it, you know, the commitment will be much longer, too. And then you, and you have an impact on their life and they have an impact on your life, because of that experience.

NW: Yeah, I can certainly see that. I mean, Friends of Hibakusha is a great example as far as I can see.

GH: Really? Oh, we're just a small organization but . . .

NW: Yeah, but still.

GH: . . . we've been able to, to, interestingly enough, with a lot of different folks, which I appreciate. And a lot of them are, you know, in leadership roles too. I, when we started out, we worked with a lot of attorneys, you know, at first.

NW: Attorneys, yeah, yeah.

GH: And then most of the leadership had either been . . .

NW: Oh, because of the law or, like the medical bill, or?

GH: Well, because of the, the Committee of Atomic Bomb Survivors, they were trying to push a lot of different legislation through, you know, the legislation.

NW: Yeah, California Legislation, right.

GH: And so, but, and also federal.

NW: Right.

GH: But we just like, you know, we just like, it just never worked. Because the United States did not want to assume any responsibility, and they also felt conflict, you know. And so, the bills and everything, even after a decade, they never passed. And, and so because of that, I think the legal community was very interested in what we were doing, and then Don Tamaki, he was one of, you know, he was the one with the Asian Law Alliance and also the Asian Law Caucus. He became involved with the Asian, with our group, FOH, and then we had, we had Ron Wakabayashi who was with the, who was the executive director of the Japanese American Citizens League, he also got involved in, and um, Dennis Hayashi, who was also an attorney,

now he's a judge. So, we, we've had always really interesting people who are involved, you know, on a political level as well as just in doing community services, too. Involved . . .

NW: Yeah, those are two different levels of things, but yeah. It's crucial that they work together. Right.

GH: Did I send you the chronology of FOH?

NW: Um, I have some, but I don't think I received it from you, so I'm gonna remind you, so chronology . . .

GH: I have to update it.

NW: Okay, that's good. So, I'm gonna write it down, so chronology of um . . . right. The name of the planning committee that we talked about earlier, I'm gonna remind you of those things. There may be more, but.

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