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Title: Geri Handa Interview
Narrator: Geri Handa
Interviewer: Naoko Wake
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<Begin Segment 3>

NW: Now, let me sort of completely, sort of, switch the gear here, and probably ask you a question about yourself a little bit. Because, you are obviously one of the main organizers of this effort and I really like to know you as a person who had a motivation to do this. It's a lot of effort that a person can put into. So, I'm wondering if you can tell me a little bit about yourself by telling me things like where you were born, and when you were born, and how you were growing up as a young child, probably something like that. Yeah.

GH: Well, I, I was born in San Jose, California, in 1948, March 3rd, 1948. And, um, so growing up in San Jose was like growing up in a small community, and my parents have always been involved in the church, and, and . . .

NW: Which denomination?

GH: The, the, the Buddhist church.

NW: Buddhist church, okay.

GH: San Jose Buddhist Church. Buddhist church.

NW: Yeah.

GH: And so we, we grew up in that kind of environment. So, it was, um, you know, very kind of supportive environment. Church is located in Japantown, San Jose Japantown. And so, we always had the feeling of connection with community. And so when I decided to leave San Jose, but I was always involved in the community work, to go to school, um, UCLA School of Social Welfare. Um, that was in the early '70s. I had a chance to, when I got there, to work in, um, the main focus was on community organizing, and so I worked. One of the areas that I worked in as a student social worker was Keiro Nursing Home.

NW: Yeah.

GH: And then, and then, my main project was in organizing or helping to organize Asian seniors. Yeah. As a coalition. And so, um, I worked on an Asian senior council and so I worked with Filipino, Korean, Japanese, Samoan, Chinese, you know. And then, whenever we met, it was like having an Asian UN, because you know, we'd, they'd all be . . .

NW: Right.

GH: . . . speaking different languages . . .

NW: Exactly.

GH: . . . we'd have to have interpreters and, and then we'd have to work together to define what we wanted to do, and, and . . .

NW: Right.

GH: . . . what the goals of the organization would be. And at first I was really kind of nervous because, I thought "Well, you know? A lot of these people probably remember the war and their common enemy was Japan."

NW: Right. That's right. Absolutely.

GH: The Chinese, the Filipino, and, and Koreans.

NW: Koreans, of course.

GH: Also. So I thought, "Oh my gosh, is this going to work?" You know?

NW: What year was it? Was it . . .

GH: It was in the . . .

NW: You were born in 1948, so '60s sometime?

GH: It was, actually 1971.

NW: 1971.

GH: We went, when I was going to school.

NW: Okay.

GH: '71 to '73. But anyway, so during that period of time, we tried to do this, and, and, I was, you know, young and naïve and gung-ho, so I thought, you know, we'd be able to do this.

NW: Yeah?

GH: And, I worked with, and I got to meet so many other people who were working within those various communities, but I loved working with the seniors!

NW: Right.

GH: And one time when we were meeting, oh, they were arguing and things like that, and I think it was probably because of all the feelings they had because of the war. One senior citizen spoke

up and he said - and he was Filipino - he says “When we, before, in the past, you know, we might have been enemies. But we are here in America, and we have to learn to work together because we have something in common: we are all seniors here in America, and there are certain things that we face, which is common in terms of, because of language, sometimes we do not get the services we need, and, you know, we all must work together to, to find some common goal.” And after that, everybody in, all [?], it was all translated, in the different languages . . .

NW: Wow.

GH: . . . everybody applauded. So we were ready to move on.

NW: It was a little delayed, but then everybody understood it.

GH: So they all understood that, yes, there’s one thing we all have in common: we’re all seniors in America, you know, and all of us speak different languages, which is something that we all know that if we speak a different language, sometimes we are not able to communicate what we mean, and so therefore we need bilingual services.

NW: Right, right. That’s something common as well.

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