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Title: Geri Handa Interview
Narrator: Geri Handa
Interviewer: Naoko Wake
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<Begin Segment 6>

GH: And so when I came back, from UC Los Angeles, I started working with the San Jose Japanese American Citizens League . . .

NW: Oh yeah, I see.

GH: . . . which is located in Japantown, San Jose Japantown. And at that time, I met the Asian law students from Santa Clara University, and they wanted to develop an information referral service, and because of my previous work in doing community organizing, one of the things I suggested was that they go door to door and introduce themselves, and even though they don't have any real services to provide, just to introduce themselves and let them know that they're interested in providing services and what kinds of services that they, that was needed in the community. Because we were also very close to the Filipino senior, um, senior group too, and so that's what they did, and eventually they developed Asian Law Alliance, which is still in existence now.

NW: Right, right, right. Uh-huh.

GH: And, which is very similar to Asian Law Caucus. So they work closely with Don Tamaki, who is involved in with the Asian Law Caucus, and he helped them to, and supported them to have developed the group, Asian Law Alliance, and similar, you know, similar . . .

NW: Asian Law Alliance, yeah, okay.

GH: Yeah. Asian Law Alliance. And then, so, and it's still going on. It's still there. So I got to meet the students there, and got to know them. They all, kind of, after they graduated, we all moved on, except for Richard Konda, who still is with the Asian Law Alliance, he's the executive director.

NW: Really?

GH: So . . . but they, you know, I, I said, "You know, one of the things that you may . . . it would be very helpful is if you got involved in maybe serving on the Yu-Ai Kai board or, you know, maybe volunteered to do something with them, you know, so they get to know you guys, you know?" And just getting more involved in the community. And then, so when I was, after I came back, because of my experience in working with the hot meals program for all those years, I said "Well, maybe this is something that could be, could be happening in San Jose too."

NW: Right.

GH: It was seniors in San Jose, Japanese seniors. So, I went before the Yu-Ai Kai board, and they got very excited about the idea of maybe doing a, kind of a, pilot program, a meals program, a hot meals program. So I got together with a group of other volunteers, and most of them were young mothers, and, but they wanted to, you know, do something in the community, so . . .

NW: Are they all Asian Americans?

GH: They're all, mostly Japanese, Japanese Americans.

NW: Oh wow, are they all . . .

GH: Third-generation.

NW: Third-generation, interesting.

GH: And so, um, we said "Well, hey, let's develop a pilot hot meals program, once a month, you know. We can serve in Western Methodist church or Buddhist church, or go back and forth. And, and prepare the meals," things like that. So we did that. And out of that, you know, the mothers would get together and, and they provided, they said that they could use childcare, so that while they're volunteering with the hot meals program, the children will be taken care of.

NW: Right, right.

GH: And they would provide childcare.

NW: They have to have that.

GH: And, and, it worked out great. It was really great because the mothers wanted to do something, they wanted to provide the service, and they didn't have to worry about their children, the children were right next door or wherever.

NW: Right.

GH: Close-by. And, um, out of that, maybe the mothers decided, well, maybe they can go back to work or go back to school or, you know, do something else.

NW: Oh, God, yeah.

GH: And so they got their taste of doing something, working in the community . . .

NW: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

GH: . . . and also providing a service that was . . . they enjoyed. Providing a service to the seniors.

NW: Yeah.

GH: So, that's what happened there, and then after about a month or so, the county was set up, the county was looking for, to fund a hot meals program. And they said "Well, we understand you have a pilot program going here . . .

NW: Right.

GH: . . . We'd be interested in funding it, but it'd be on a daily basis."

NW: Wow.

GH: And so we said "Oh my goodness, that's a change."

NW: "Is this really happening?"

GH: So, they were able to get the funding for that.

NW: Wow. Did it pay for all the things that you wanted it to, or did it actually help you to expand?

GH: No, it paid for, it was paid for the, at least for the hot meals program on a five day a week basis. So, staff and all that, and for the cost of the meals and things. So, they were able to, you know, do that and they expanded and now, they, you know, they have their own building and things like that.

NW: They have their own operation, yeah, yeah.

GH: And I know, unfortunately, because of the funding cuts and budgets, um, you know, they had to cut back in terms of their hours, you know.

NW: So is this all happening in 1970s or well into . . . yeah, okay. So you are already done with your graduate work, um, college work at UCLA, but then you are already established in this sort of career in community organization.

GH: '70s, '80s, yeah, yeah.

NW: Right, yeah.

GH: It's . . .

NW: Now . . . yeah, go ahead.

GH: . . . so I've always been involved in community work.

NW: Right, yeah.

GH: It's been something of a passion of mine, I've enjoyed doing it.

NW: Yeah, yeah.

GH: And then, and then I work with the, I went to work with the Asian health services in Oakland, and they provide, um, you know, medical services to non-English or monolingual Asians in Oakland, Alameda County. So I worked with them for a while, and then came back to, and then went, came to San Francisco, started working for Kimochi.

NW: Right, right. Yeah, I'm aware of that.

GH: So, yeah.

NW: So, do you work currently there for Kimochi or?

GH: No. No-no-no-no.

NW: Were you married at the time or?

GH: Well, I got married in 1982.

NW: Okay.

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