

Tom Izu interview August 13, 2024 on Zoom  
Former Director of the CHC and Yu Ai-Kai Care Center  
De Anza College Summer 2024 quarter  
Steve Nava interviewer  
Spaces of Belonging Project: Hidden in Plain Site/Sight  
NEH Grant

#### Summary:

In this oral history interview [Tom Izu](#), civil liberties activist leader shares intimate moments of his life growing up within the context of racial contradictions he faced in a society where a clear understanding of the Japanese American experience was scarce. He reflects on the meaning of generational and economic change and the future of San Jose's Japantown during time of rapid change. Mr. Izu is the former Executive Director of the California History Center and served for three years as the director of the Yu-Ai Kai senior center of San Jose, Japantown. He is active in the work of the Japanese American Museum of San Jose and an integral part of the leadership of the Nikkei Resisters multi-generational civil liberties grassroots organization which he co-founded with his partner, celebrated local and national activist leader [Susan Hayase](#).

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/twKhJdl9bGc>

#### WEBVTT

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00:00:02.320 --> 00:00:09.119

Steve Nava: Alright. Hello! My name is Steve Nava. Today is August 13th 2024, and I'm interviewing Tom Izu.

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00:00:09.530 --> 00:00:14.890

Steve Nava: And I want to start this oral history interview with this basic question, could you just tell us a little bit about yourself.

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00:00:16.550 --> 00:00:18.670

Tom Izu: Let's see, I am

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00:00:19.140 --> 00:00:21.040

Tom Izu: 66 years old.

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00:00:22.580 --> 00:00:25.000

Tom Izu: Born in Seattle, Washington.

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00:00:26.170 --> 00:00:30.689

Tom Izu: I've lived most of my life, though, in the South Bay area.

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00:00:31.675 --> 00:00:35.309

Tom Izu: I grew up in Sunnyvale, but lived

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00:00:36.306 --> 00:00:39.959

Tom Izu: moved there when I was three from Seattle, Washington.

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00:00:40.860 --> 00:00:41.540

Tom Izu: and

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00:00:43.010 --> 00:00:46.736

Tom Izu: but since I've been living in San Jose.

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00:00:48.090 --> 00:00:52.705

Tom Izu: let's see, what else can I say about myself? I did.

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00:00:53.950 --> 00:00:55.470

Tom Izu: Let's see.

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00:00:55.660 --> 00:01:01.807

Tom Izu: After school. K-12, mostly in Sunnyvale. I went to

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00:01:02.390 --> 00:01:03.650

Tom Izu: UCSC,

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00:01:04.989 --> 00:01:05.729

Tom Izu: and

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00:01:06.930 --> 00:01:10.889

Tom Izu: graduated from there in 1980.

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00:01:11.399 --> 00:01:16.239

Tom Izu: And from there I moved to San Jose, Japantown.

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00:01:16.659 --> 00:01:21.050

Tom Izu: The reason why is that during that time period at UCSC.

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00:01:21.140 --> 00:01:22.506

Tom Izu: there was

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00:01:23.260 --> 00:01:25.430

Tom Izu: a growing Asian American

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00:01:26.025 --> 00:01:31.810

Tom Izu: student movement. They didn't have Ethnic Studies yet, but they did have some classes

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00:01:31.830 --> 00:01:34.510

Tom Izu: in Asian American studies that I

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00:01:34.560 --> 00:01:44.339

Tom Izu: helped work on advocating for with some other students and the help of a college Provost at UC Santa Cruz at the time

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00:01:44.440 --> 00:01:46.480

Tom Izu: named Herman Boike

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00:01:47.410 --> 00:01:55.172

Tom Izu: So during that time there were older Asian American students there that really helped

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00:01:56.540 --> 00:02:01.830

Tom Izu: promote the idea that students of color, and it should

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00:02:01.930 --> 00:02:09.379

Tom Izu: be part of this movement to go back to their communities of origin. In my case, Japanese American community

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00:02:09.739 --> 00:02:17.210

Tom Izu: and to help those communities. And this was generally referred to as serve the people. And this was kind of part of the

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00:02:17.717 --> 00:02:28.652

Tom Izu: overall mass movement, and also part of [the New Left](#), too, in their outlook of trying to help oppressed communities. So I took that to heart.

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00:02:29.140 --> 00:02:37.300

Tom Izu: I had. My family, primarily my parents, my family is primarily from San Jose area and Los Altos area.

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00:02:37.380 --> 00:02:42.339

Tom Izu: and I had a grandmother and grandfather who lived in San Jose, Japantown.

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00:02:42.390 --> 00:02:44.699

Tom Izu: So, I figured that's where I should go help.

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00:02:44.950 --> 00:02:47.120

Tom Izu: and that's what I did. And so.

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00:02:47.270 --> 00:02:56.548

Tom Izu: working, I worked there in Japantown, lived and worked there and primarily in the senior center called the Yu-Ai Kai Senior Center

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00:02:57.140 --> 00:03:00.930

Tom Izu: that helped Japanese American elderly

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00:03:00.990 --> 00:03:10.760

Tom Izu: because they really couldn't get any services that were in Japanese, Japanese American culture at that time, except through the efforts of the community.

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00:03:10.830 --> 00:03:15.719

Tom Izu: So I became involved in that and the general community.

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00:03:15.790 --> 00:03:26.180

Tom Izu: and later became involved in a couple of different organizations, one that was very directly involved in the movement for redress, reparations for Japanese, American

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00:03:26.310 --> 00:03:31.059

Tom Izu: Americans during the world, for the World War II mass incarceration they experienced.

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00:03:31.250 --> 00:03:34.499

Tom Izu: And I had that had a tremendous impact on me.

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00:03:34.620 --> 00:03:35.394

Tom Izu: And

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00:03:36.190 --> 00:03:42.414

Tom Izu: Since then, you know, I've been involved in a lot of different things. I eventually worked at the

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00:03:43.090 --> 00:03:47.770

Tom Izu: California History Center and became its Executive Director.

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00:03:47.850 --> 00:03:52.190

Tom Izu: I believe I was at the history center at the Anza College for

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00:03:52.300 --> 00:03:56.310

Tom Izu: well, probably at least 25 years, if not a little bit longer, if I include

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00:03:56.370 --> 00:03:58.110

Tom Izu: my volunteer time

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00:03:58.518 --> 00:04:04.089

Tom Izu: as the I became the Executive Director of that museum and I organization. I

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00:04:05.750 --> 00:04:13.540

Tom Izu: worked for a couple of years as a volunteer executive director because the college cut the funding from that position for a while.

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00:04:13.770 --> 00:04:20.180

Tom Izu: So, my background is mainly in social service organizations, community based ones.

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00:04:21.133 --> 00:04:21.826

Tom Izu: and

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00:04:23.210 --> 00:04:27.180

Tom Izu: local history work that I did through the California History Center.

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00:04:27.390 --> 00:04:30.630

Tom Izu: and a lot of my experience with local history was really

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00:04:30.700 --> 00:04:31.940

Tom Izu: influenced

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00:04:32.150 --> 00:04:36.050

Tom Izu: by my concern about communities of color in particular.

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00:04:36.130 --> 00:04:41.439

Tom Izu: and my experience doing community work in Japantown is kind of an inspirational point.

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00:04:41.510 --> 00:04:43.629

Tom Izu: because while I was doing that work.

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00:04:43.930 --> 00:04:48.350

Tom Izu: I was also connected to some other community organizations.

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00:04:48.420 --> 00:04:52.150

Tom Izu: including those that were fighting for the

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00:04:52.480 --> 00:04:57.079

Tom Izu: interest of (at that time it was called) the Chicano Movement

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00:04:57.686 --> 00:05:02.243

Tom Izu: and the undocumented. Call them undocumented. And now but

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00:05:02.910 --> 00:05:04.941

Tom Izu: *mejicanos* [Mexicans] who

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00:05:07.840 --> 00:05:10.400

Tom Izu: Or either immigrants.

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00:05:10.570 --> 00:05:17.560

Tom Izu: or had some long time experience in San Jose, since San Jose originally was part of Mexico, of course.

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00:05:17.920 --> 00:05:23.169

Tom Izu: but through them I learned a lot about the movement, the Chicano movement.

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00:05:23.280 --> 00:05:26.410

Tom Izu: and had a much deepened view of

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00:05:27.081 --> 00:05:33.180

Tom Izu: the similarities and the needs for our communities to work together. That also had a big impact on me

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00:05:33.310 --> 00:05:38.629

Tom Izu: during my social service. Non-profit work. Besides Yu-Ai Kai.

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00:05:38.640 --> 00:05:45.050

Tom Izu: I spent some time working with an organization called the Cannery Workers Organizing Project

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00:05:45.715 --> 00:05:48.294

Tom Izu: Which focus mainly on

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00:05:49.110 --> 00:05:55.090

Tom Izu: helping to organize me counter workers because they were the majority of the cannery workers at the time.

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00:05:55.180 --> 00:06:08.929

Tom Izu: and their efforts to take over their union, which was the teamsters to run for office and become the leaders because they had been kind of iced out of being the leaders. Many of them. Most of them were women, make on a women.

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00:06:09.180 --> 00:06:23.439

Tom Izu: and my job with the county workers. Organizing Project was mainly to write grants and raise money and do administrative stuff so that we could fund organizers who did the labor organizing work, since that was really not my background.

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00:06:23.930 --> 00:06:29.019

Tom Izu: But when you add all of these things together, that's kind of what into went into my appreciation.

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00:06:30.350 --> 00:06:33.419

Tom Izu: community, the value of community

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00:06:33.948 --> 00:06:36.879

Tom Izu: the importance of people understanding their history.

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00:06:37.716 --> 00:06:38.353

Tom Izu: and

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00:06:39.140 --> 00:06:42.450

Tom Izu: doing some of the work I ended up doing at the California History center.

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00:06:45.137 --> 00:06:47.919

Tom Izu: Excuse me. So I retired

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00:06:48.030 --> 00:06:51.220

Tom Izu: officially from De Anza College in 2019,

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00:06:51.330 --> 00:07:03.930

Tom Izu: and I continued to be kind of a volunteer director for the Center for a couple more years beyond that, until the college was able to work out a deal where they

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00:07:05.150 --> 00:07:18.030

Tom Izu: paid for faculty time for the executive director position and Lori Clinchard is now the executive director, and I still help try to support the California History Center in different ways.

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00:07:19.233 --> 00:07:20.460

Tom Izu: More recently.

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00:07:20.480 --> 00:07:23.829

Tom Izu: I've been spending a lot of time focused on the

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00:07:24.470 --> 00:07:32.809

Tom Izu: the needs of San Jose, Japantown, and people are very concerned about this future and its viability long term.

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00:07:32.910 --> 00:07:36.379

Tom Izu: And that's kind of what I've been enmeshed in

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00:07:36.550 --> 00:07:41.609

Tom Izu: right now, including an organization called San Jose Nikkei Resisters.

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00:07:42.195 --> 00:07:54.599

Tom Izu: I also worked on an augmented reality art project in the community through a knight foundation grant. And this was during the middle of the pandemic, and it created augmented reality. Art pieces

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00:07:54.660 --> 00:08:03.110

Tom Izu: that talked about the shared history of San Jose, Japantown between Chinese in Heinlerville, which was the main

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00:08:03.290 --> 00:08:19.190

Tom Izu: reason why there's a Japantown because there was a Chinatown there first, and the Japanese American community in Japantown and the Filipino American community in what is we call now call Pinoy Town. All three of those groups have overlapping shared histories in Japantown.

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00:08:19.290 --> 00:08:25.510

Tom Izu: and I now am also involved in the Japanese American Museum of San Jose. I'm on their advisory board.

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00:08:26.410 --> 00:08:27.230

Tom Izu: So

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00:08:27.940 --> 00:08:30.050

Tom Izu: is that good enough for a background or...

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00:08:30.050 --> 00:08:34.567

Steve Nava: Yeah, that's good. That's plenty. And I'm probably gonna bring up some of those issues and organizations again, but...

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00:08:34.850 --> 00:08:35.340

Tom Izu: Okay.

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00:08:36.620 --> 00:08:37.080

Tom Izu: Sure.

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00:08:37.080 --> 00:08:40.716

Steve Nava: This question is more about just what was it like growing up?

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00:08:41.580 --> 00:08:43.799

Steve Nava: And during the time that you were

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00:08:43.900 --> 00:08:46.509

Steve Nava: growing up, what was it like as a kid.

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00:08:46.510 --> 00:08:52.209

Tom Izu: Sure. So as I was saying, I spent most of my childhood

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00:08:52.240 --> 00:08:55.839

Tom Izu: in Sunnyvale. We moved back when I was 3

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00:08:56.407 --> 00:09:02.392

Tom Izu: and this was the south end of Sunnyvale, actually really close to De Anza College,

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00:09:02.870 --> 00:09:31.449

Tom Izu: And it was a new development at that time. All the orchards are being chopped down. Most of the growth I think you can attribute to [Lockheed Corporation](#). I wouldn't necessarily say Sunnyvale was like a company town, but it was almost like that, because Lockheed Missiles and Space Company was a big, a big company, and there was a lot of other smaller companies. That kind of served the aerospace industry, and this was a time period during the Cold War.

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00:09:31.480 --> 00:09:35.170

Tom Izu: and so a lot of the

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00:09:35.430 --> 00:09:51.682

Tom Izu: industrial organizations had shifted from agriculture, which had been the whole area before prior to this, to a kind of the military, industrial complex, as people call it, because of the incredible increase in spending on military

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00:09:52.380 --> 00:10:02.269

Tom Izu: hardware in this case. For Lockheed it was developing missiles and the components of missiles for submarine launch, as well as different kinds of aircraft

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00:10:02.360 --> 00:10:18.250

Tom Izu: parts, and my dad was an engineer for Lockheed. He had been one for Boeing first of all. That's why I was born in Seattle. But he moved back to be closer to his own family, especially after one of his brothers passed away, and he wanted to make take care of his his mother.

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00:10:18.300 --> 00:10:21.200

Tom Izu: So, anyway, growing up in Sunnyvale.

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00:10:21.410 --> 00:10:31.960

Tom Izu: I went to Cupertino, Junior High. I went to Elementary school, Sierra Elementary, which is close by to where we lived. Cupertino, Junior high, and then eventually Homestead High School.

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00:10:32.595 --> 00:10:39.559

Tom Izu: and my experience at that time was this area was very, very much almost all white.

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00:10:40.207 --> 00:10:45.630

Tom Izu: I'm trying to remember, I think, focusing on Homestead High School at that time.

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00:10:45.770 --> 00:10:57.140

Tom Izu: I think it was. God. I can't remember now. It was something like the out of the majority of 400, some students in my graduating class, I think there were maybe

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00:10:57.200 --> 00:11:08.699

Tom Izu: seven Asians, maybe seven or so Latinos, and maybe one black person, and that's it. So it's changed tremendously since then. But at that time it was almost all white.

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00:11:09.000 --> 00:11:10.126

Tom Izu: and I

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00:11:10.840 --> 00:11:14.388

Tom Izu: My my childhood memories are that

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00:11:15.060 --> 00:11:19.199

Tom Izu: I wouldn't say we're very pleasant, because most of the time I felt very, very

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00:11:19.570 --> 00:11:21.902

Tom Izu: alienated and isolated.

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00:11:22.710 --> 00:11:25.579

Tom Izu: I felt like people didn't understand who I was.

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00:11:25.650 --> 00:11:26.329

Tom Izu: and

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00:11:27.340 --> 00:11:37.040

Tom Izu: you know, i 1 experience I'll share briefly, is, when I was a little kid in the neighborhood I had some friends. I wasn't really close to them, but you know I'd hung out with them

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00:11:37.371 --> 00:11:52.148

Tom Izu: from school, and I remember one day walking down the street from not too far from. I lived in the suburban track I lived in. I went with one of these people. Friend, and another guy comes up who later ironically, would become another friend of mine

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00:11:52.470 --> 00:12:03.500

Tom Izu: comes up to greet us. He greets the (they're both white except for me) and he greets the white friend by saying, "Hey, how come you're hanging out with Jap-face?" And this totally, you know, of course

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00:12:03.800 --> 00:12:25.219

Tom Izu: was very upsetting to me. The other white friend I had goes, "Oh, you shouldn't say that! That's not nice. Besides, the *Chinks* invented gunpowder, don't you know that," or something like that? So, I think at the time I really didn't understand what these people were talking about, but I kind of got this feeling this guy was trying to stand up for me by saying, I think the Chinese invented gunpowder and firecrackers, so

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00:12:25.220 --> 00:12:34.120

Tom Izu: you know, you should be nice to them, even though he didn't understand that I wasn't of a Chinese background, but it didn't make any difference [to them]. And while

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00:12:34.250 --> 00:12:40.209

Tom Izu: I know there were some nice parts of my growing up, these are the things that stand out most. Is that

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00:12:40.480 --> 00:12:47.829

Tom Izu: just feeling that people didn't understand what I was, cause, you know, people would ask who I? What what I really was, where I was from

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00:12:49.080 --> 00:12:51.213

Tom Izu: It didn't make any difference.

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00:12:52.170 --> 00:12:56.559

Tom Izu: if if my ancestors came from Japan or not, they were all kind of the same. There's

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00:12:56.660 --> 00:13:10.210

Tom Izu: during the end of the Vietnam war. So the main thing in people's minds was these words used against the Vietnamese during the US War there, like Ok, so I was called that sometimes by people

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00:13:10.240 --> 00:13:21.750

Tom Izu: "*chink*" sometimes all sorts of stuff, and it didn't make any sense to me, because I knew that I was of Japanese ancestry, but that part I didn't even know very well, either, because my parents really didn't talk that much about it.

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00:13:21.770 --> 00:13:23.480

Tom Izu: My grandmother.

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00:13:23.600 --> 00:13:30.160

Tom Izu: grandfather, well, on my mom's side lived in San Jose, Japantown, so now and then, probably once a month, we'd visit them.

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00:13:30.619 --> 00:13:35.609

Tom Izu: So I knew we were Japanese, but I couldn't talk to my own grandparents because they didn't speak much English.

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00:13:36.143 --> 00:13:48.700

Tom Izu: And my grandfather barely spoke at all. He just sat in this fine recliner chair, and I thought that was just normal, that old people just didn't talk to their grandkids, you know. I didn't realize part of it

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00:13:49.030 --> 00:13:56.879

Tom Izu: was of what he went through, because he actually one of my older brothers told me later. He knew that my grandfather actually did speak

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00:13:56.950 --> 00:14:00.809

Tom Izu: English fairly decently, but he just didn't communicate with people.

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00:14:01.110 --> 00:14:09.290

Tom Izu: and later I would learn that this was related to his experience being put in one of the concentration camps that Japanese Americans were put in.

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00:14:09.330 --> 00:14:13.759

Tom Izu: and that they lost almost everything, including my mom's family.

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00:14:14.910 --> 00:14:18.309

Tom Izu: so it was a very childhood that was

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00:14:18.560 --> 00:14:20.835

Tom Izu: filled with these big, empty

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00:14:21.350 --> 00:14:25.160

Tom Izu: missing parts that I didn't really understand

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00:14:25.720 --> 00:14:31.050

Tom Izu: what was missing other than that something just wasn't adding up right, like my parents usually talked about

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00:14:31.400 --> 00:14:36.820

Tom Izu: the camps, but it usually was when they met another Japanese American.

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00:14:36.870 --> 00:14:41.169

Tom Izu: and the thing usually would go this way is they would go. Oh.

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00:14:41.260 --> 00:15:02.859

Tom Izu: you know, they would talk a little bit about where they're from. And then they would talk about basically, a question would come up like, what camp were you in? And usually there was some answer. Then eventually they would get to some point where they knew somebody who was either in the camp or close by, you know, in some other person they knew that was in that camp. And so it was kind of this very weird social greeting.

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00:15:02.900 --> 00:15:07.260

Tom Izu: and I didn't know what the camps were. Really, I really didn't understand what they were.

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00:15:07.734 --> 00:15:10.489

Tom Izu: And this is another part of the mystery.

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00:15:11.093 --> 00:15:12.200

Tom Izu: And so

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00:15:13.140 --> 00:15:33.609

Tom Izu: my two older brothers went to college first. There we were very fortunate. We all go to college at that time, and they brought back information to me, telling me that this whole other thing is going on, and what they're referring to is the student movement. And this movement was started in the late sixties for Asian Americans, especially in the early seventies.

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00:15:34.075 --> 00:15:58.259

Tom Izu: And my one of my brothers got a subscription to a news newspaper called Guidra, which was kind of a left leaning Asian American movement paper that a lot of the students put together and had a lot of information about things that I started reading. Probably when I was in Junior High Level or High School, and I didn't totally understand everything. But I started getting this feeling that

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00:15:58.260 --> 00:16:04.680

Tom Izu: there's a whole lot more going on related to my own experience growing up.

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00:16:04.690 --> 00:16:18.020

Tom Izu: That helped start filling into some of these gaps that there was racism. That when I was growing up, when I was very, very young. I just thought there was something wrong with me. Why, people made fun of the way I looked.

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00:16:18.110 --> 00:16:24.869

Tom Izu: Why, people made fun of what the kind of foods that we ate. You know, when I was in grammar school

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00:16:24.990 --> 00:16:26.990

Tom Izu: I made sure my mom didn't

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00:16:27.030 --> 00:16:30.080

Tom Izu: make any Japanese food for me to bring

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00:16:31.480 --> 00:16:46.919

Tom Izu: because other kids would make fun of it. You know, they'd make gagging noises, and they thought it was disgusting. Of course, ironically, years and years and years later all these white people just love sushi and all the stuff that I usually my family usually never ate, because that's more, you know

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00:16:47.010 --> 00:16:54.429

Tom Izu: you didn't usually eat stuff like that, except for special occasions. We ate more peasant style Japanese food, which

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00:16:55.326 --> 00:17:01.729

Tom Izu: but I really didn't understand any of this other than that. It kind of marked me out for being unusual and not fitting in

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00:17:02.020 --> 00:17:02.680

Tom Izu: so

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00:17:04.270 --> 00:17:05.672

Tom Izu: So, anyway, as

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00:17:06.160 --> 00:17:09.529

Tom Izu: I was still in high school, I started to realize that

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00:17:09.920 --> 00:17:15.180

Tom Izu: there was such a thing as we would refer to now as systemic racism.

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00:17:15.210 --> 00:17:20.560

Tom Izu: And that's what I was facing. It wasn't just that there was something wrong with me, personally or individually.

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00:17:21.110 --> 00:17:28.490

Tom Izu: That my parents really didn't have a way of talking about what happened to them, because they never had a chance to really

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00:17:28.740 --> 00:17:37.539

Tom Izu: discuss this, even among themselves, in a very complete way, because they never really learned about oh, some of the things that I was starting to learn about, especially when I went to college.

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00:17:37.660 --> 00:17:40.320

Tom Izu: and my brothers really encouraged me.

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00:17:40.350 --> 00:17:41.820

Tom Izu: When I go to college.

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00:17:41.960 --> 00:17:46.360

Tom Izu: be part of the movement in different ways. They really encouraged me to do this. One of my

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00:17:46.420 --> 00:17:48.639

Tom Izu: my middle brothers, you know.

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00:17:49.003 --> 00:18:14.680

Tom Izu: became really interested in cultural work. He was a musician in high school. He was a rock star in high school, but he really loved music, so he really, and you know he was. He would when he come home from college he was always bringing some new instrument home, and these were traditional Chinese instruments, which also had a Japanese counterpoint, and he would be trying to play them, and they were really unusual. I'd never heard them before, but he really showed me that these are really interesting, and they're very important.

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00:18:14.730 --> 00:18:16.480

Tom Izu: you know, part of our own heritage.

172

00:18:16.510 --> 00:18:27.220

Tom Izu: Then my older brother, my oldest brother. He's the one who really encouraged me. When I expressed an interest to going to Ucsd, because it was kind of an alternative college. And I really wanted to escape

173

00:18:27.330 --> 00:18:36.480

Tom Izu: Sunnyvale and the suburbs, because, besides feeling, I didn't feel fit in because of my race. I also just felt these new suburban tracks were very

174

00:18:37.130 --> 00:18:42.880

Tom Izu: strange and uncomfortable to me it seemed like a fake world. That's the only way I could describe it. I just

175

00:18:42.960 --> 00:18:43.989

Tom Izu: had these.

176

00:18:44.570 --> 00:18:46.739

Tom Izu: I think I was a little bit

177

00:18:47.380 --> 00:19:00.520

Tom Izu: probably unusual as a kid, because I would sit there, sitting around looking at the suburbs and wondering if all these houses were gone, what would be left? Then I started to imagining just the vegetation that was there all the trees that people plant in their yards?

178

00:19:00.710 --> 00:19:06.470

Tom Izu: What if it was only those trees? And it would be a very, very strange forest. And then all the roads

179

00:19:06.770 --> 00:19:10.980

Tom Izu: were kind of like little rivers or creeks that surrounded the properties, and

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00:19:12.540 --> 00:19:15.520

Tom Izu: before all of this was here, and it was

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00:19:15.570 --> 00:19:17.939

Tom Izu: I couldn't figure it out. It was just such.

182

00:19:18.330 --> 00:19:20.930

Tom Izu: because at this time I think I was trying to imagine

183

00:19:21.610 --> 00:19:27.200

Tom Izu: what was here before. And it just it was so artificial. I think that's what I was starting to realize, and

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00:19:28.550 --> 00:19:30.900

Tom Izu: whole suburban life was just

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00:19:31.040 --> 00:19:32.400

Tom Izu: very fake.

186

00:19:32.540 --> 00:19:34.182

Tom Izu: and I felt

187

00:19:35.830 --> 00:19:37.379

Tom Izu: discomfort with that

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00:19:38.427 --> 00:19:44.150

Tom Izu: and this was kind of what I was trying to work out along with this question of race.

189

00:19:44.673 --> 00:19:47.569

Tom Izu: The suburbs. Was it real or not?

190

00:19:48.160 --> 00:19:54.379

Tom Izu: So when my oldest brother went to Ucs. I got to visit him, I decided. I want to go there

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00:19:55.590 --> 00:20:10.700

Tom Izu: to get away from the suburbs, and he did say that. Well, the school is really different. It has a pass, it has a narrative evaluation. It doesn't have grades. So it was considered to be kind of counterculture. In a way, at that time.

192

00:20:11.169 --> 00:20:21.709

Tom Izu: It wasn't like Uc Berkeley, which to me seemed gigantic and a little scary, because I cause I was a pretty shy and reserved kid. So in a smaller university I thought I could

193

00:20:22.080 --> 00:20:27.740

Tom Izu: feel more comfortable. So he really influenced me, said, Well, if you're going to go there, then join the Asian American

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00:20:28.110 --> 00:20:30.700

Tom Izu: organization that's there. And so I did.

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00:20:31.040 --> 00:20:36.169

Tom Izu: And it was a small group of us that were Asian American students. We felt

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00:20:37.170 --> 00:20:40.419

Tom Izu: a kind of bond, because there are so few of us there.

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00:20:41.400 --> 00:20:42.290

Tom Izu: And

198

00:20:43.060 --> 00:20:44.180

Tom Izu: as as I'm

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00:20:44.960 --> 00:20:52.979

Tom Izu: host who was very supportive, and said, I have some funds. So I'm going to hire some instructors to teach some Asian American studies classes because we don't have that.

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00:20:53.140 --> 00:21:00.039

Tom Izu: Herman Blake is African. American. I think he was pretty well known for some of his writing. He was very, very supportive.

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00:21:00.220 --> 00:21:12.110

Tom Izu: And so he said, Okay, you guys get a committee together, and you can. You can hire some people to teach some classes. I'll do all the work for you. Don't worry about it. And it was very flexible

202

00:21:14.210 --> 00:21:20.299

Tom Izu: breeze. They could just be anybody, a community person that we wouldn't, you know, we would encourage

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00:21:21.033 --> 00:21:27.269

Tom Izu: the the Herman Blake to hire to teach. There were only a couple of classes that the this these people could teach.

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00:21:27.410 --> 00:21:31.780

Tom Izu: but it covered real basic things about Asian American history, community history.

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00:21:31.900 --> 00:21:38.790

Tom Izu: And so I was heavily influenced by some of the people that we were able to have teach classes. There was somebody named

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00:21:39.040 --> 00:21:42.490

Tom Izu: Pat Sumi, who taught classes, who's a very famous

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00:21:42.760 --> 00:21:49.859

Tom Izu: organizer activists and Asian American studies stuff, I guess, considered to be radical during that time.

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00:21:50.230 --> 00:21:56.990

Tom Izu: And there are a number of other people, too. And, in fact, Michael Omi, who later became head of Asian American studies at Berkeley.

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00:21:57.030 --> 00:21:59.660

Tom Izu: He retired. I think, a number of years ago

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00:21:59.830 --> 00:22:05.620

Tom Izu: he was a student at Ucsf. At that time. So he taught some classes, and he was also very supportive.

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00:22:05.690 --> 00:22:17.080

Tom Izu: So all of this had a big impact on me in developing a sense of identity, that I was Asian American, that I was a Japanese American, and that I should do something about

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00:22:18.330 --> 00:22:20.860

Tom Izu: to help fight against racism.

213

00:22:20.900 --> 00:22:31.139

Tom Izu: And so the serve the people idea made a lot of sense to me after, especially after Asian American studies, classes that we would go visit like Oakland, Chinatown, San Francisco, Chinatown.

214

00:22:31.479 --> 00:22:37.699

Tom Izu: and you know we talked to different community people. So it made sense to me that I should go to San Jose, Japan town.

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00:22:39.510 --> 00:22:46.389

Tom Izu: So let's see? That's kind of. I'm not exactly sure if I answered your question, Steve, about growing up. There's a lot of other.

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00:22:46.390 --> 00:22:47.120

Steve Nava: Yeah, I think.

217

00:22:47.120 --> 00:22:48.919

Tom Izu: About Sunnyvale. But

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00:22:49.650 --> 00:22:52.829

Tom Izu: it! It seems like it's so much to try to cover.

219

00:22:53.876 --> 00:22:54.670

Tom Izu: I guess.

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00:22:54.670 --> 00:23:04.729

Steve Nava: One question I could follow up with going back to earlier childhood, you know. Grade school level, or maybe early middle school like, what was it? What were some of the

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00:23:05.230 --> 00:23:09.669

Steve Nava: places where you really felt a sense of belonging to a group?

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00:23:10.101 --> 00:23:12.899

Steve Nava: Like physical places that you would go to and

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00:23:12.930 --> 00:23:17.580

Steve Nava: bond with like-minded people or similar

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00:23:18.130 --> 00:23:20.180

Steve Nava: children, something like that.

225

00:23:20.490 --> 00:23:24.063

Tom Izu: Well, you know I can't think of any

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00:23:24.980 --> 00:23:31.680

Tom Izu: I'll I'll share one story. But before I get to that, the only thing I think that's kind of what you're talking about is.

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00:23:31.720 --> 00:23:36.010

Tom Izu: I would go with my parents to visit my grandmother at my mom's side

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00:23:36.070 --> 00:23:40.889

Tom Izu: in Japantown, and my mom had a you know, a couple of

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00:23:41.090 --> 00:23:51.949

Tom Izu: a sister who had a family, and a and a and a brother, and they were cousins about my age. So we used to hang out together at my grandmother's house in particular.

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00:23:52.020 --> 00:23:56.140

Tom Izu: and and those used to be the main people I would interact with.

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00:23:56.290 --> 00:23:59.599

Tom Izu: And I would ask my mom if I can go visit

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00:23:59.620 --> 00:24:09.770

Tom Izu: my cousins, and she would say, sure, and so we would, you know, take she would drop us off there, or they would come over to our house, and those were the people that I, as a really young age

233

00:24:09.790 --> 00:24:22.099

Tom Izu: I hung out with and played with mostly when we're at my grandmother's house. I remember hanging out with my cousins, and we'd be running around like crazy. You know. This is when we were in grammar school, really young.

234

00:24:22.170 --> 00:24:28.149

Tom Izu: screaming our heads off, I assume, and my grandmother was very good natured, she would always say.

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00:24:28.160 --> 00:24:55.859

Tom Izu: and I didn't know what that meant. I didn't know what Japanese was, and then later, I learned that meant, they're sure noisy, aren't they? And then all I remember is, my aunts just complaining like, Hey, stop that! Don't run like that. You're gonna poke your eyes out. Put that away. Don't break that. You're gonna break grandma's bowl, and they would always be doing this. Because I, years later, when I became a parent, I realized how stressed was having kids. They're mostly boys in this case, running around like crazy. I could see how scary it was for my aunts.

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00:24:55.860 --> 00:25:04.210

Tom Izu: but that's the I have fond memories of that. And then, when there was the Obon festival which the Buddhist church did they would have like a little

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00:25:04.540 --> 00:25:13.989

Tom Izu: what would you call it? Like booths with arcade kind of games, you know it was a fundraiser for the Buddhist church, where you'd nickel tosses, dime toss things like that. Nothing. Fancy

238

00:25:15.210 --> 00:25:40.939

Tom Izu: So I would go there and hang out with my cousins. And right, really close to where my grandmother's house was was a Wiener Schnitzel restaurant. You know, you know what that is, and we thought that was really cool, because we never went to restaurants of any kind. So we'd get these hot dogs, which now I go. Ew, why did I eat that? But at the time it was fun. So you could just my parents say, Okay, take some money. Now, just go and get out of here. So I, you know, do things like that with my my cousin. So

239

00:25:41.290 --> 00:25:44.809

Tom Izu: you know, I guess that's the closest of feeling like a belonging.

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00:25:44.940 --> 00:25:46.639

Tom Izu: although I would say, though.

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00:25:46.690 --> 00:25:49.869

Tom Izu: that I did not go to the Buddhist church

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00:25:49.960 --> 00:25:54.489

Tom Izu: or the Methodist Church in Japan Town. The Buddhist church is where my cousins went.

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00:25:54.550 --> 00:26:00.490

Tom Izu: and they would tell stories about going to going to the church and being part of some of the activities.

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00:26:00.580 --> 00:26:05.037

Tom Izu: And I don't remember asking my mom and dad why I didn't go

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00:26:05.460 --> 00:26:17.019

Tom Izu: And my mom said she kind of told me, and I don't don't think I understood until later that she didn't really see herself as being part of these groups, because she thought that they were really

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00:26:17.040 --> 00:26:20.120

Tom Izu: kind of like a small town kind of mindset.

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00:26:20.180 --> 00:26:21.879

Tom Izu: that Japan town

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00:26:21.890 --> 00:26:41.060

Tom Izu: was kind of like a little village, and the Buddhist church in particular. She because that's the church she grew up with to some extent, was like that very much. Everybody knew everything you did, and everybody would be watching what you did, and they made it clear that if you did anything wrong, you know we know who you are.

249

00:26:41.090 --> 00:27:03.059

Tom Izu: and this is, you know your parents are going to be really ashamed of you if you do anything wrong. So basically, she was telling me that she just didn't want to be part of that, and she was, in fact, experimenting when I was a little kid. I remember being taken to a

Presbyterian church, not the Japanese American Methodist church in Japantown, but this white church that was in earned close by in Sunnyvale.

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00:27:03.230 --> 00:27:05.799

Tom Izu: and she kept checking out these different churches.

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00:27:05.890 --> 00:27:18.659

Tom Izu: I also remember once, these these groups of people when I was really young, coming to our house in Sunnyvale. They're all dressed up. They're all Japanese and having some talk with my mom. Then leaving. And I asked Mom, who are those people?

252

00:27:18.770 --> 00:27:28.620

Tom Izu: And she said, Oh, they're from the whatever church it was, and in this case they were usually from a Christian, Japanese, American Christian church. Some that were one that I think was in

253

00:27:29.220 --> 00:27:37.220

Tom Izu: might have been in Palo Alto, and may maybe the one in from Wesley in San Jose, Japan town. But she told me one day that

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00:27:37.470 --> 00:27:39.939

Tom Izu: we're we're agnostics.

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00:27:40.210 --> 00:27:49.469

Tom Izu: and I didn't know what the hell that meant, but he just said, We're agnostics. So we're not going to be part of those churches. So I thought that was cool, so I told

256

00:27:49.500 --> 00:28:02.369

Tom Izu: but what? What people I knew in my grammar school that I'm an agnostic, even though I didn't know what that meant. But it sounded good, because sometimes kids would say what they were. They're Presbyterian or Protestant, or whatever. So I thought that was cool.

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00:28:02.470 --> 00:28:03.210

Tom Izu: But

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00:28:03.620 --> 00:28:09.830

Tom Izu: so I didn't really belong to any of the Japanese American organizations other than we would go visit Japan Town

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00:28:10.000 --> 00:28:11.800

Tom Izu: like my cousins did.

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00:28:12.885 --> 00:28:13.580

Tom Izu: So

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00:28:13.590 --> 00:28:16.620

Tom Izu: my experience in grammar School.

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00:28:17.230 --> 00:28:19.559

Tom Izu: Junior high and high school

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00:28:20.216 --> 00:28:25.060

Tom Izu: was pretty lonely. I I just did not feel comfortable hanging out with anybody.

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00:28:25.487 --> 00:28:39.479

Tom Izu: I think that's partly my personality. I I was very, very shy kid, too, so I was just not very outgoing, and I didn't want to go at to it. Got to the point where I really didn't want to go to even the Japanese American things

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00:28:39.600 --> 00:28:47.439

Tom Izu: like, I didn't insist, my parents, that I could go to one of the clubs or something, because I just didn't know anybody. I felt like I wouldn't fit in there, either.

266

00:28:48.750 --> 00:28:50.790

Tom Izu: So in high school

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00:28:51.150 --> 00:28:51.880

Tom Izu: it

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00:28:53.470 --> 00:28:56.320

Tom Izu: about like, what do you do at lunchtime who you're supposed to hang out with.

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00:28:56.380 --> 00:28:58.260

Tom Izu: So the people I hung out with

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00:28:58.380 --> 00:29:08.979

Tom Izu: at one time in high school was at lunchtime. Really, I wasn't like great deep friends with them. But one guy was. He was a Jewish kid that very strongly identified as being Jewish.

271

00:29:09.870 --> 00:29:20.380

Tom Izu: was a Mormon kid who identified as being Mormon. So we were the way I look at it, not to be disparaging to them, but we were kind of misfits, so we just hung out together and had lunch together.

272

00:29:20.430 --> 00:29:23.789

Tom Izu: and the Mormon Kid and the Jewish Kid would have these arguments.

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00:29:23.800 --> 00:29:26.840

Tom Izu: and the Jewish Kid was a self-proclaimed Marxist.

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00:29:26.890 --> 00:29:30.750

Tom Izu: and he kept quoting things from the Communist Manifesto.

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00:29:30.820 --> 00:29:44.010

Tom Izu: And and so it was kind of an odd arrangement, and the Mormon Kid was definitely a very liberal Mormon, you know. But but he was still identified with being Mormon, and I, you know, really didn't identify with anything as far as I could tell.

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00:29:44.200 --> 00:29:47.600

Tom Izu: But so I so I was kind of a misfit. That's how I look at myself.

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00:29:48.750 --> 00:29:53.330

Tom Izu: and other than my connection to a family Japanese American stuff.

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00:29:53.470 --> 00:29:56.280

Tom Izu: I really didn't feel like I had a place to belong.

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00:29:56.690 --> 00:29:59.540

Tom Izu: The other only other thing I would say belonged is that

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00:29:59.550 --> 00:30:00.610

Tom Izu: my?

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00:30:00.750 --> 00:30:02.370

Tom Izu: But mom and dad had a

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00:30:02.440 --> 00:30:07.320

Tom Izu: had a garden or yard, and so I helped my dad

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00:30:08.950 --> 00:30:13.760

Tom Izu: dig things up, plant things. I felt comfortable with that.

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00:30:14.030 --> 00:30:14.625

Tom Izu: and

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00:30:16.307 --> 00:30:18.292

Tom Izu: I guess that's about it.

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00:30:19.230 --> 00:30:22.870

Tom Izu: it. It just seemed, being Japanese American at that time

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00:30:23.400 --> 00:30:27.510

Tom Izu: was something that I was, but it didn't seem very helpful to me.

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00:30:27.540 --> 00:30:30.520

Tom Izu: The other experience I'd share is in 4th grade.

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00:30:30.660 --> 00:30:33.549

Tom Izu: 4th grade. They studied Japan in.

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00:30:34.310 --> 00:30:39.990

Tom Izu: I still don't understand why, cause, I think, usually in 4th grade in California. You study the missions.

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00:30:40.030 --> 00:31:00.800

Tom Izu: But we studied Japan later. I figured it's probably some effort on the part of some groups in education in the United States to promote the idea that Japan was an ally, even though it was a weird, exotic, foreign country that had been our worst enemy. It was now an ally against the Communists and against, you know, because it's the Cold War.

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00:31:00.910 --> 00:31:10.779

Tom Izu: That's the only thing I can think of. So they're really promoting Japan and friendship with Japan. And some of it was obviously good intentioned because people wanted to broaden people's perspective. So

293

00:31:11.314 --> 00:31:17.960

Tom Izu: we, my 4th grade class did a play based on a Japanese folk story.

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00:31:18.090 --> 00:31:26.590

Tom Izu: and so they had to pick an Mc. For the play. So guess who they picked. They picked me because I was the only Japanese American.

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00:31:26.620 --> 00:31:40.510

Tom Izu: and even though I didn't know Japanese, I probably knew how to pronounce some Japanese words better than any kids. And I when I came home, I said, Mom, I need a happy coat, you know, when it's a Japanese thing, you know. So to. So

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00:31:40.760 --> 00:31:47.630

Tom Izu: mom said, Okay, Okay, I'll get one or make one for you, you know, she she when she discovered that I had to be in this place, she said, Okay, I'll help you

297

00:31:48.130 --> 00:32:07.000

Tom Izu: and my dad, because the play involved chopping something down with an axe. So my dad was really good at word working. So he built a fake axe out of plywood for me, so I was very well supported in this, you know, premiere of my being in a in a in a theater production, even though it wasn't very much.

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00:32:07.270 --> 00:32:09.759

Tom Izu: and I had to learn to sing Japanese songs.

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00:32:09.760 --> 00:32:10.370

Steve Nava: Hmm.

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00:32:11.030 --> 00:32:15.959

Tom Izu: So that was. But but see, the cultural thing was so. It was kind of weird. It was like.

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00:32:16.040 --> 00:32:23.479

Tom Izu: I'm promoting being Japanese, even though I didn't really feel I was Japanese. But I had to play a role like that.

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00:32:24.160 --> 00:32:36.389

Tom Izu: So it it was a very, you know. Strange kind of experience, I think, ultimately very alienating. So it wasn't all bad, I know, but it ultimately was just filled with these contradictions.

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00:32:38.120 --> 00:32:41.405

Steve Nava: Did you feel like during high school? You

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00:32:42.140 --> 00:32:44.420

Steve Nava: maybe worked out some of the

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00:32:45.550 --> 00:32:47.450

Steve Nava: contradictions, or

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00:32:47.990 --> 00:32:49.250

Steve Nava: better understood.

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00:32:49.650 --> 00:33:01.657

Tom Izu: Well, well, one part as I get older I realize, because I mainly tell the story of being very alienated which I was, and being the misfit which I was and not being very social. But it wasn't like I was like a

308

00:33:02.857 --> 00:33:14.251

Tom Izu: I think in Japan they call them hikikomori and hikikomori are shut ins. You know, where they just stay at home. They don't go out. I met people like that. Even. I think one of my cousins was kind of like that.

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00:33:14.570 --> 00:33:26.330

Tom Izu: so I wasn't like that. I wasn't very outgoing. I didn't go to a lot of places. But I think what was what I did do, which I realized is that I started developing this kind of intellectual

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00:33:26.950 --> 00:33:32.299

Tom Izu: kind of interest in things because I was saying, I was trying to figure out what was this place like.

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00:33:32.430 --> 00:33:43.280

Tom Izu: you know, 50 years ago, 100 years ago, what was what was here. I really started wondering about things like that. And over time it became a little more sophisticated because I knew more. So you know, I started learning about.

312

00:33:43.300 --> 00:33:53.039

Tom Izu: You know what was here before. It was mostly farmland, and before that what was here trying to imagine what the landscape was, and that had gotten changed by people. People changed it.

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00:33:53.130 --> 00:34:07.060

Tom Izu: And so I started getting really interested in that. And I started getting interested in philosophical issues. At the time, I didn't realize. This is kind of related to sociology, you know, so sociological imagination.

314

00:34:07.130 --> 00:34:23.989

Tom Izu: But nobody told us that although I remember in one middle school the somebody. Some teachers telling us about dialectical materialism, even though they really didn't explain what the hell that was. They just said, Oh, yeah, this is what Mark said, and Mark was all wrong because he

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00:34:23.989 --> 00:34:45.219

Tom Izu: he the means, never justify the end. And he believed in revolution. So it's bad. But that word still stuck with me. That sounds interesting. And and if you're a kid who's kind of intellectually inclined, you want to go look it up. So I started looking up these things. I still didn't understand what it meant, but it kind of started me down this path. And then, by the time I was in high school. Later I realized I went to Homestead High School.

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00:34:45.219 --> 00:35:02.720

Tom Izu: that it was a pretty good high school because they had teachers there that were trying to teach things that were not in some of the high schools in another part of Sunnyvale that were mostly Latino High School, like Sunnyvale High, I think, was like that where they didn't have classes like we had. We had class of this guy who was basically a philosophy class about ethics.

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00:35:02.780 --> 00:35:07.549

Tom Izu: And he and he tried to approach it from all these different kinds of philosophies, including Eastern philosophies.

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00:35:07.580 --> 00:35:31.439

Tom Izu: which I became really interested in, because nobody usually talked about that we had classes talking about? Why is there war? And we had people bringing up all of these different things about? Why is the us, you know, engaged in this Cold war with the Soviet Union. What is the Soviet Union system? And so that's brought me back to starting to understand. Oh, there's a whole other way of looking at society.

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00:35:31.480 --> 00:35:37.330

Tom Izu: which is, you know, in in a in a way to look at it, including people called somebody named Marks.

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00:35:37.450 --> 00:35:44.110

Tom Izu: and so by the time I went to college I started, really was really interested in this stuff. And that's

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00:35:44.200 --> 00:36:08.539

Tom Izu: so. I already had a base basis for questioning things, and I was shy, but you know, if the teacher seemed open I would engage them. Usually I would not talk a lot in class, and the teacher said I should talk more, but I was very uncomfortable, but later I would talk to one of my the teachers about all sorts of stuff related to these philosophical questions. And I'd write these really long essays about

322

00:36:08.560 --> 00:36:16.610

Tom Izu: stuff you know, about what is the meaning of my life and how I fit into stuff. I and I cause. I was struggling to develop my own idea of

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00:36:16.620 --> 00:36:28.700

Tom Izu: what is the nature of reality and stuff like that? I'm sure it didn't make any sense, because one of my teachers very good heartedly said, this is a lot of gobbledygook, I think, but he was supportive, you know. He was trying to encourage me to think more.

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00:36:28.790 --> 00:36:31.080

Tom Izu: but I guess I realize more and more

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00:36:31.830 --> 00:36:47.599

Tom Izu: that that's kind of one of the things besides starting to learn about my identity as an Asian American for my older brothers and in college that this intellectual interest probably saved my saved me from, you know, getting

326

00:36:47.840 --> 00:36:51.890

Tom Izu: getting really messed up, meaning, you know, really withdrawing, or something.

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00:36:56.320 --> 00:36:58.830

Steve Nava: And did did some of the.

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00:36:59.910 --> 00:37:00.999

Steve Nava: I guess that

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00:37:01.120 --> 00:37:05.999

Steve Nava: stuff that was happening in your teenage years in terms of like integral intellectual interests.

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00:37:06.800 --> 00:37:08.800

Steve Nava: Shape, your activism. Eventually.

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00:37:09.115 --> 00:37:17.620

Tom Izu: Yeah, yes, it did, because I think it made me open to realizing there are different ways of looking at why, the society, the way. It is

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00:37:17.880 --> 00:37:20.930

Tom Izu: that historical analysis really important.

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00:37:21.030 --> 00:37:26.459

Tom Izu: because when I went to college, there were people who are activists who were teaching these Asian American studies courses

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00:37:26.570 --> 00:37:30.889

Tom Izu: who reintroduced me to what is dialectical materialism and Marxism.

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00:37:31.230 --> 00:37:42.838

Tom Izu: And then I started taking other classes from people who were more academic oriented than the Asian American studies people that they had there who are more community organizers. So they talked about

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00:37:43.777 --> 00:37:50.320

Tom Izu: Socialism. And you know, dialectical materialism and Marxism. And in in fact, I took

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00:37:50.736 --> 00:38:07.299

Tom Izu: a a class, an introduction to political economy, which was the only Marxist economist they had on the campus, I believe, and he explained. I'm only here temporary cause. They're they're not going to hire me ever. And I started learning more about the conflicts in Academia about you know somebody who's a pro.

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00:38:07.510 --> 00:38:14.600

Tom Izu: who? Who's who's self identified as a Marxist economist probably isn't going to stand much of a chance. And at that time and

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00:38:14.670 --> 00:38:20.865

Tom Izu: in in college. So he he! He taught us based, he said, this is an alternative to

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00:38:21.678 --> 00:38:39.259

Tom Izu: I guess you'd call it macroeconomics, and I fought hard. So the Economics department is saying, this is the equivalent of macroeconomics. Just so, you know. And so he taught also all about dialectical materialism. And then the last part of the class he just crammed in all this stuff that's supposed to be in macroeconomics, which was

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00:38:39.260 --> 00:38:56.270

Tom Izu: really, I thought was really bizarre. You know, all these different terms and stuff that didn't make sense to me, because not because they were too hard to understand. But they, after talking about the material basis and historical analysis of things. They sounded really abstract and kind of meaningless about how you look at economics and relations.

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00:38:56.620 --> 00:38:59.779

Tom Izu: And there was another professor there who was a

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00:39:00.720 --> 00:39:18.349

Tom Izu: Well, I'm just blanking out. He was a famous leftist kind of professor and he was in sociology, and he really promoted. And you know which. I didn't really understand what he was talking about, because he was pretty abstract, but about the role nature of the state

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00:39:18.350 --> 00:39:36.660

Tom Izu: and capitalist society and the role it plays. And there there were other instructors who had different points introduced me to these different concepts. So this, this had a big impact on me, and being open to understanding that there were different views that were considered to be radical or considered to be revolutionary.

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00:39:37.143 --> 00:39:44.620

Tom Izu: Views that were part of the world of other people in the world were looking at the nature of society.

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00:39:44.680 --> 00:39:46.990

Tom Izu: So yeah, it had a big impact on me.

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00:39:47.510 --> 00:39:50.301

Tom Izu: And and looking at the fact that

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00:39:51.040 --> 00:39:57.260

Tom Izu: society is created. You know, the way our society is set up is created by humans, humans interacting with each other.

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00:39:57.370 --> 00:40:19.189

Tom Izu: And while individuals can't, don't have determine everything, be based on their great greatness, or something like that. People. People change society, society, change nature itself and change themselves. So this is kind of the basis of this is why, working with other people, you can change society, too, as well as changing yourself in the process

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00:40:19.270 --> 00:40:24.169

Tom Izu: you know, to be open to that kind of change on all that level, so that had a pretty big impact on me.

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00:40:25.490 --> 00:40:30.050

Steve Nava: And one of the questions that comes up is.

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00:40:30.350 --> 00:40:35.370

Steve Nava: And these interviews with other folks in the oral history interviews is the question of ethnic identity.

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00:40:35.741 --> 00:40:42.819

Steve Nava: You kind of covered it a lot, and you know, reflecting on childhood. But how important is ethnic identity to you. And

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00:40:42.930 --> 00:40:46.319

Steve Nava: you know, reflecting on all those experiences that you brought up.

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00:40:47.605 --> 00:40:48.459

Tom Izu: You feel like.

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00:40:48.460 --> 00:40:50.250

Steve Nava: It's still relevant as an as an.

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00:40:50.250 --> 00:40:57.249

Tom Izu: Yeah. Oh, yeah, because I think, understanding my identity as a Japanese American as an Asian American.

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00:40:58.450 --> 00:41:02.230

Tom Izu: help me figure out how I fit in to society

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00:41:02.310 --> 00:41:04.190

Tom Izu: 'where I belonged,' really

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00:41:05.104 --> 00:41:11.799

Tom Izu: but because I also had this kind of lack of a better way of explaining this critical view of society.

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00:41:11.830 --> 00:41:17.334

Tom Izu: This leftist kind of view of society, and this was part of [\*the New Left\*](#), you know. Time.

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00:41:17.790 --> 00:41:21.189

Tom Izu: I didn't understand it at the time, but I was a product of

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00:41:21.340 --> 00:41:29.080

Tom Izu: the my older cohorts, the older part of my generation, and their kind of training and experience as part of the new left

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00:41:31.058 --> 00:41:38.259

Tom Izu: connecting those two things together, my identity as an Asian American, Japanese American, with the desire to change society.

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00:41:38.400 --> 00:41:43.659

Tom Izu: So I don't separate them because there were people on the left, and then you left, which was a big battle.

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00:41:43.840 --> 00:41:45.090

Tom Izu: That

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00:41:45.380 --> 00:42:13.429

Tom Izu: focusing too much on an ethnic identity racial identity gets in the way of organizing the working class because it divides the working class. And that's just a secondary thing. It's kind of this cultural kind of thing that's not ultimately at the real base of society, which is the relation to the means of production. So it's you know, you're the working class, or you're not. The working class is one. You, if you're talking about your identity, just divides things. Yeah, yeah, there is. There is racism and all that. But that's minor.

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00:42:13.430 --> 00:42:27.799

Tom Izu: And we can unite the working class, forget that. But I knew from my experience, as I learned more and more about the history of Asian Americans, and understood my own family's experience that it is not secondary. It's very primary, because it shaped the entire

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00:42:27.800 --> 00:42:54.849

Tom Izu: groups of people, and that there's no way it will change and go away just by organizing the working class in the abstract or something. You have to also work with this racism, which is very, very intense. And yes, it does divide the working class. That's why you have to deal with it directly and has a tremendous impact on society. And over time. I've seen this play out more and more to the point where it's really clear that it's a key part of understanding

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00:42:55.840 --> 00:43:04.430

Tom Izu: it...it governs the chances of our society having dramatic change, or changing the systemic nature of the kind of oppression everybody faces.

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00:43:04.480 --> 00:43:22.309

Tom Izu: So I see my identity as an Asian, American, Japanese, American, not white person being really key in playing a role in understanding my role also in wanting to fight for a multi democratic society and changing the economic system.

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00:43:22.460 --> 00:43:23.700

Tom Izu: You know as well

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00:43:23.780 --> 00:43:26.483

Tom Izu: that I don't think they're that separated.

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00:43:27.354 --> 00:43:29.420

Tom Izu: one of the things that I

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00:43:29.520 --> 00:43:33.019

Tom Izu: became a student of, and

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00:43:33.040 --> 00:43:35.560

Tom Izu: was taught through that

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00:43:36.190 --> 00:43:38.640

Tom Izu: some of the older people I worked with

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00:43:39.140 --> 00:43:46.960

Tom Izu: in college, and then beyond, especially beyond came out of the New Left movement, and they had a very particular view.

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00:43:47.385 --> 00:44:12.919

Tom Izu: They called it. And now, right now I think it's an outdated term which people probably wouldn't recognize or think was kind of odd. They called it "national oppression," and I think they borrowed this from the way people in China, Communist China, and the so former Soviet Union talked about different ethnic groups and groups, and how they were oppressed. They were not only oppressed as workers, but they suffered oppression because they did not have the right to *self-determination*.

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00:44:13.040 --> 00:44:20.137

Tom Izu: you know, and and part of the new left, you have to understand, came out of the 3rd World liberation struggles.

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00:44:20.460 --> 00:44:43.600

Tom Izu: The movements for liberation all over the world and Africa and Asia. And so, as an Asian American, the Liberation struggles in Asia became very central and important to our understanding of politics. That's what everybody was talking about the war in Vietnam when the war ended, what was going to happen, what was going on in all the other countries in Asia. You know, what role did Japan play in all this? What was going on in China?

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00:44:43.610 --> 00:45:03.620

Tom Izu: And of course all the other countries in the world were really key to other people who had roots in the United States like African African Americans. What was going on in Africa? They were all about self-determination. How come these people in their own countries can't determine their own futures, and what kind of societies they have, because imperialism is stopping them?

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00:45:03.780 --> 00:45:15.030

Tom Izu: So this became a really important way to try to look at it. What does this mean for us who are people of color in the United States? Does this perspective help us understand our communities? And

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00:45:15.320 --> 00:45:38.232

Tom Izu: I think it does. And I think it did, because even though Asian Americans, you know, we don't say we have an a nation in the United States. You could see that our communities also did not have the right to self determination, and were really used in all sorts of different ways, and and in some cases almost totally obliterated at the

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00:45:38.750 --> 00:45:45.780

Tom Izu: whatever was needed for our capitalism, and the people who were operating the system. They would do that.

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00:45:46.030 --> 00:45:52.989

Tom Izu: you know, the Government would do it. Everybody would do it if they wanted. They could make money off of it. We were gone, you know, and we were just disposable.

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00:45:53.390 --> 00:45:55.860

Tom Izu: So it the the view became

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00:45:56.140 --> 00:46:04.220

Tom Izu: people like us. We call ourselves oppressed nationalities, which now is an old term, but we in our communities

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00:46:04.250 --> 00:46:07.729

Tom Izu: we could become an ally to the white working class.

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00:46:07.890 --> 00:46:09.989

Tom Izu: And this was going to play a big role.

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00:46:11.050 --> 00:46:21.159

Tom Izu: So I still believe that it's a little bit more updated, though in that people who are oppressed in this country because of their race, they have a very important role to play.

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00:46:21.180 --> 00:46:42.060

Tom Izu: and there are elements in their communities who are not all what you would call working class, but they could be petty bourgeois, they call them, or small business people, that they still represented a fight for self-determination and democracy which could be harnessed with the overall fight for changing the society and democracy.

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00:46:42.230 --> 00:46:45.699

Tom Izu: So that had a big impact on how I look at

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00:46:45.930 --> 00:46:47.800

Tom Izu: my ethnic identity

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00:46:48.285 --> 00:46:54.524

Tom Izu: and that of other groups of people that I feel strongly in solidarity with

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00:46:55.420 --> 00:46:58.057

Tom Izu: So I think it's a little bit different than

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00:46:58.510 --> 00:47:02.400

Tom Izu: Some other people in my own community who might have a view of well.

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00:47:02.570 --> 00:47:07.400

Tom Izu: you know, Japanese American, the point of being a Japanese Americans is just to be proud of how successful we are.

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00:47:07.600 --> 00:47:10.230

Tom Izu: And this kind of model minority view.

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00:47:12.410 --> 00:47:15.500

Tom Izu: so I guess that's how I would explain it. I don't.

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00:47:15.800 --> 00:47:18.516

Tom Izu: I strongly feel

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00:47:19.460 --> 00:47:33.556

Tom Izu: that my identity is very important, because I think it's just reality. It's not just something I just choose because I want to, because it's cool or makes me feel better. I think that's what I am. And that's just the actual reality.

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00:47:33.870 --> 00:47:56.630

Tom Izu: because of the physical forces in the society. It it created me. And people like me. The other thing, though I also realized from understanding historical analysis, is that it's always in a process of change. So when I say I'm a Japanese American that's always in the process of change. It's not like I am this way, and I'm in essence this kind of person, because then people get really easily confused even in my own community, that well.

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00:47:56.690 --> 00:48:13.050

Tom Izu: there are Japanese cultural parts that I'm part of. I mean, I identify with the culture of Japan because I can see some of those things that were passed on to me, but in essence they're not some kind of a central part of who I am, genetically or something, because some people get really weird views. It even leads them to the point of

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00:48:13.100 --> 00:48:28.750

Tom Izu: having. They feel like they have to defend Japan even to this day, no matter what it does. You know I am loyal to that because it's my culture, and it's my cultural roots. And I just tell them like, that's a bunch of *bull*, I mean, don't you even know that there are humans in Japan?

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00:48:28.960 --> 00:48:35.890

Tom Izu: You know they're Japanese, but they have a whole his different history than the people running Japan. Now, right? You don't even know that history. So it's

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00:48:36.290 --> 00:48:48.609

Tom Izu: it's hard for me to explain very succinctly. But it's actually this way of looking at identity. And my Japanese American identity actually does not make me feel separated from people it actually makes me feel.

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00:48:48.640 --> 00:49:00.649

Tom Izu: have the strength to be able to feel like I can connect with all sorts of people, and that played out when I was, I said I helped with the *County Workers Project* and I met Chicano activists in San Jose who are also leftists.

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00:49:00.720 --> 00:49:10.169

Tom Izu: And it made me realize working with these people, and they would introduce me to these other people that these people had these stories that sounded really similar to what my grandparents went through. For example.

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00:49:10.400 --> 00:49:22.960

Tom Izu: they went through some of these younger Chicano activists. Also, I thought, Wow, they're all from, you know. They're a farm worker backgrounds. Some of them weren't. They? Came from families that they got to go to college, and they started developing these views

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00:49:23.050 --> 00:49:26.960

Tom Izu: about wanting to change society. And I can relate to exactly how they felt.

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00:49:27.050 --> 00:49:29.349

Tom Izu: And so all of these experiences

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00:49:29.410 --> 00:49:43.059

Tom Izu: really strengthen the sense of identity and what the point of it is, and that it's really is a dialectical process. You know it's a real thing that I am this, but it's determined by society.

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00:49:43.110 --> 00:50:00.310

Tom Izu: and I can't escape it. So instead, I use it, use it for positive reasons, and I still think to this day it plays a positive role in helping other Japanese Americans move in a way that they can help become part of this overall movement for social justice on some level, whatever level they can.

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00:50:00.656 --> 00:50:03.740

Tom Izu: So, I think it's a very positive thing, not a negative thing.

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00:50:03.880 --> 00:50:17.449

Tom Izu: I definitely don't use it to measure against people, because there are some people in my community who do that. You're not Japanese enough or you're not Japanese. American. All Japanese Americans are supposed to be like this, so you don't fit that. I don't agree with that at all. I mean,

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00:50:18.680 --> 00:50:21.509

Tom Izu: Anyway, I could go on and on about that. But that's

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00:50:21.850 --> 00:50:23.900

Tom Izu: a long-winded answer to your question.

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00:50:24.400 --> 00:50:25.832

Steve Nava: No, that really helps

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00:50:26.670 --> 00:50:37.370

Steve Nava: And you mentioned previously. You've done projects like virtual reality. Japan, town History project. You, you collaborated with Yu-Ai Kai, you worked with Yu-Ai Kai for a long time.

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00:50:37.480 --> 00:50:41.289

Steve Nava: and I didn't believe you said you helped start Yu-Ai Kai. Is that right? You helped.

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00:50:41.290 --> 00:50:46.689

Tom Izu: No, I was. I worked there, and I became the director of that.

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00:50:46.710 --> 00:50:49.670

Tom Izu: the Ui card, but that was after it had already started. It started.

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00:50:49.670 --> 00:50:50.190

Steve Nava: Oh, I see.

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00:50:50.190 --> 00:50:57.830

Tom Izu: Before. Before my time there in the early morning, early 1980s. It started in the 1970s.

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00:50:58.097 --> 00:51:03.289

Tom Izu: But it but it is odd, because I started working there when I was quite young, right out of college.

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00:51:03.330 --> 00:51:10.039

Tom Izu: So even though I was only the director there, I mean I worked there for close to eight years in all these different positions.

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00:51:10.050 --> 00:51:14.313

Tom Izu: but I was a director there for under 3 years.

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00:51:15.040 --> 00:51:18.790

Tom Izu: in the even though I was there in the 1980s.

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00:51:19.271 --> 00:51:33.100

Tom Izu: There's a whole lot of other people after me who became the executive director, and they're older than I am to this day, but they refer to me as kind of an old person, even though I'm younger than them, because I was there an earlier period. So sometimes.

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00:51:33.340 --> 00:51:33.780

Steve Nava: Hmm.

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00:51:33.780 --> 00:51:39.849

Tom Izu: Think I was there at the beginning, because I was definitely not there. You like, I was really inspired by the efforts of

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00:51:40.171 --> 00:51:59.398

Tom Izu: students from San Jose, State, and former students from San Jose State, and who are part of this movement in the 1970s. What I that I had described. I went through, but I wasn't. I wasn't at there at the time in San Jose and Nisei, though, the second, the second generation. People who are like my parents. Generation born in the US.

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00:52:00.170 --> 00:52:13.649

Tom Izu: were around during the camps for the most part they, though also really were the main force working with these young people go. Yeah, we better do something. We better do something for their own parents, who are becoming elders

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00:52:13.670 --> 00:52:16.109

Tom Izu: and the community needed help

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00:52:16.160 --> 00:52:34.510

Tom Izu: because nobody else is going to do it, and they already knew that nobody else is going to meet what I mean by that. Outside people were not going to come in. Oh, we'll build a senior center for you, you know. We'll help your seniors, or they can just come to our senior center, and we'll find people that translate for them, or we'll hire people. They're not going to do that at the time. I mean, there's still a lot of racism then.

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00:52:35.071 --> 00:52:40.500

Tom Izu: But so that's how Yu-Ai Kai came about. It was a real community effort.

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00:52:40.610 --> 00:52:51.799

Tom Izu: It was what people now call mutual aid, and that's what it was. And that's something that I also learned about working in the community. That's part of this being an oppressed nationality is what I would call it

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00:52:51.910 --> 00:53:07.890

Tom Izu: the need for your community, all different elements of it, even if you don't all agree on the same kind of politics, and you have long term different differences. You still work together because you're fighting against this oppression that your community has faced over the years and continues to face in different ways. It keeps changing.

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00:53:07.950 --> 00:53:12.430

Tom Izu: But you all have to work together to do that. And this working together builds this potential

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00:53:12.880 --> 00:53:15.969

Tom Izu: in you to see how you can do this

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00:53:17.100 --> 00:53:23.252

Tom Izu: in conjunction with other communities, or even another totally other organizing forms. That is how you have to do this. You have to

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00:53:23.790 --> 00:53:25.760

Tom Izu: work with communities, help them

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00:53:25.770 --> 00:53:28.379

Tom Izu: work with all the elements in the community. So

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00:53:28.940 --> 00:53:36.079

Tom Izu: I also going back to what you're getting at is, I was involved in the Japanese American resource center

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00:53:36.130 --> 00:53:46.156

Tom Izu: early on for a short time, and that eventually became the Japanese American Museum of San Jose and I started being more involved in the Japanese American Museum of San Jose, and

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00:53:46.860 --> 00:53:59.210

Tom Izu: 2014, 2015 time when I was still working at the *California History Center*. It kind of made it sense because every history museum in California History center supports supported other history, local history groups.

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00:53:59.220 --> 00:54:05.190

Tom Izu: So that was the other group that I worked through in the hidden histories of San Jose Japantown augmented reality. Art project

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00:54:05.230 --> 00:54:09.859

Tom Izu: was done in conjunction with the Japanese American Museum of San Jose.

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00:54:12.980 --> 00:54:18.029

Steve Nava: So could you talk a little bit about your current projects? And what's a what's a

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00:54:18.670 --> 00:54:22.369

Steve Nava: an average day like for you nowadays in your work?

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00:54:22.880 --> 00:54:24.470

Tom Izu: Well.

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00:54:24.650 --> 00:54:31.689

Tom Izu: I help still with the Japanese American Museum of San Jose. I'm on their advisory board, so I'm

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00:54:31.960 --> 00:54:35.490

Tom Izu: I struggle a lot with things. The museum struggles with

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00:54:36.010 --> 00:54:38.950

Tom Izu: everything from they have ups and downs.

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00:54:40.030 --> 00:54:49.950

Tom Izu: They've gone through a series of big challenges, and you know they've gone through several executive directors. In a short period of time they operated prior to that, having

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00:54:49.960 --> 00:55:01.640

Tom Izu: having no staff members, it was just all volunteer. So they're going through a lot of changes that I have some familiar familiarity with having been involved in the Japanese American community going back

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00:55:01.770 --> 00:55:09.309

Tom Izu: to the 1980 s. And seeing how this kind of plays out with groups that are primarily volunteer, they aren't hiring a staff.

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00:55:09.360 --> 00:55:11.950

Tom Izu: and then they have to struggle with how to raise money

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00:55:12.000 --> 00:55:16.719

Tom Izu: and how they fit into the community, and then the broader society overall.

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00:55:17.361 --> 00:55:21.060

Tom Izu: So I try to offer help in that way.

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00:55:22.260 --> 00:55:32.060

Tom Izu: The other part, though, that I'm most interested, though, because of my experiences working in the community, you know, being an executive director at the California History Center and Yu-Ai Kai.

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00:55:32.190 --> 00:55:35.829

Tom Izu: I'm trying to get away from doing some of that work because I was very stressful

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00:55:36.020 --> 00:55:36.990

Tom Izu: and

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00:55:37.498 --> 00:55:42.520

Tom Izu: I am kind of a reserved guy, and I don't like having to deal with all of these

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00:55:42.530 --> 00:55:45.590

Tom Izu: personnel issues and conflicts in boards.

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00:55:46.198 --> 00:55:48.350

Tom Izu: It's very difficult. So

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00:55:48.410 --> 00:55:51.192

Tom Izu: my most my main interest is in

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00:55:51.810 --> 00:56:02.939

Tom Izu: more of the programming parts of things like, what is the narrative? The museum is trying to develop and struggle with? How aware are they that there is a narrative that they have

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00:56:03.040 --> 00:56:10.529

Tom Izu: these kind of questions like that, you know. I can't get away with those things that I was always interested going way back and kind of these

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00:56:10.910 --> 00:56:15.194

Tom Izu: lack of a better way to put it, kind of these intellectual kind of bent

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00:56:15.660 --> 00:56:21.780

Tom Izu: kind of focus on things like, why do we talk about Japanese Americans this way? And, what is more

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00:56:22.040 --> 00:56:25.560

Tom Izu: helpful, I think, to our community, and in the long run.

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00:56:25.680 --> 00:56:32.560

Tom Izu: fighting for democracy for everybody. What lessons do Japanese Americans have in that way? So

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00:56:32.690 --> 00:56:37.460

Tom Izu: I've been mostly trying to put my energy and things like that.

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00:56:37.956 --> 00:56:47.050

Tom Izu: But in a community like Japantown that it does not have a real, strong infrastructure, does not have a whole lot of organizations and lots of funding.

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00:56:47.498 --> 00:56:55.229

Tom Izu: So there's not a whole lot of people running around with a lot of time to devote to it. Most people have to work a lot of hours or have other situations where they can't do stuff.

478

00:56:55.400 --> 00:56:57.290

Tom Izu: So you end up having to do

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00:56:57.410 --> 00:56:59.040

Tom Izu: a little bit of everything.

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00:56:59.992 --> 00:57:01.318

Tom Izu: So excuse me,

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00:57:01.900 --> 00:57:02.540

Steve Nava: Anyhow.

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00:57:02.720 --> 00:57:04.519

Tom Izu: So for the museum.

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00:57:05.100 --> 00:57:10.360

Tom Izu: They're starting to hire staff now, but they had very little, hardly any staff, if any.

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00:57:10.400 --> 00:57:17.279

Tom Izu: So any of the projects you wanted to do like this augmented reality, one you had to do on your own. You had to either find some funds to hire people.

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00:57:17.280 --> 00:57:17.750

Steve Nava: English.

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00:57:17.750 --> 00:57:26.149

Tom Izu: And it wouldn't be enough funds to hire somebody like a fulltime job it would just be for a short time. So that's what we did. We did it. We found the funds on our own

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00:57:26.466 --> 00:57:44.530

Tom Izu: my Susan, my partner, and I, by getting a grant through [the Knight Foundation](#), and we were able to just by chance hire some people who are really competent, who happen to

have some time at the time, you know. So that's how we were able to do that project. And then, before the museum started, being able to hire more staff.

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00:57:44.620 --> 00:57:58.980

Tom Izu: I worked with other people to get these small grants, and if we needed somebody to do work, be able to pay them to do some work, to develop some projects that that deal more at things of most interest to me, and so example would be like

489

00:57:59.474 --> 00:58:21.539

Tom Izu: Susan and I did. This whole series called, *Don't Exclude Us*. And this was in the 2016, 2017. This was the lead up, and then right during the heart of the Trump administration, when it was just going after immigrants. Big time, you know. No question. It was like the Muslim ban, and just the anti-immigrant sentiment was just at this on steroids.

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00:58:21.640 --> 00:58:31.199

Tom Izu: So, our feeling was, let's get the Japanese American community because we both felt that our bases in that community we knew it the best. What can we do

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00:58:31.310 --> 00:58:40.289

Tom Izu: to get it involved in the struggle to be able to understand what was at stake, and to and to make sure it took the right stance on whatever level it could, you know.

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00:58:40.340 --> 00:58:43.650

Tom Izu: And so this series of programs had things about

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00:58:43.700 --> 00:58:59.599

Tom Izu: showing the similarities between the [\*Repatriation Act in the 1930s\*](#), our movement in the 1930s that basically deported probably close to 2 million, they say 1 million, probably more, all throughout the country people from Mexico.

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00:58:59.750 --> 00:59:09.050

Tom Izu: And these were Mexican Americans. Probably the majority of them actually were us citizens, but they were kids who got picked up and deported, thrown across the border.

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00:59:09.220 --> 00:59:27.089

Tom Izu: and some of the photos of this happening in the 1930s, and especially in Los Angeles. It didn't happen on the same level in San Jose at all. But in Los Angeles they showed them being put on trains, black and white photos. And we noticed if you get pictures of Japanese Americans being put on trains when they're being sent off to camp. You couldn't tell the difference.

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00:59:27.100 --> 00:59:43.030

Tom Izu: Black and white photos you couldn't tell, because we were kind of brown skinned looking and same thing. They had guards military people there sticking on trains. So we're hoping that Japanese Americans can see this and understand this happened. Maybe they heard a little bit about. They didn't understand the extent of it. This happened.

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00:59:43.100 --> 00:59:52.060

Tom Izu: and it happened to some people in San Jose and people who moved to San Jose later. And this is important to understand. So we did. A program about that. And it was

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00:59:52.810 --> 00:59:56.869

Tom Izu: went was very successful. There are people who came there very emotional.

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00:59:57.245 --> 01:00:01.630

Tom Izu: There was a professor from Cal State, Los Angeles. He's retired now.

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01:00:03.814 --> 01:00:07.555

Tom Izu: I'm just blanking out on his name.

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01:00:08.330 --> 01:00:29.620

Tom Izu: I'm sorry, forgetting his name, but he. He helped write a book about the repatriation, and he's probably one of the experts on it. He came and spoke, and we tried to do it as tried to make these programs as creative as we could. Because that's what we had learned doing other kind of political organizing work. So we. We had people at

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01:00:30.010 --> 01:00:57.820

Tom Izu: these series of events representing different kinds of experiences, talk about the exclusion their communities had faced, but mainly from, not like a lecture, but picking out a poem or picking out some quote from somebody else that they knew of, if they themselves didn't go through that experience, and they would get up and read it. And so

you had this kind of collage of hearing these different people's stories that sounded really similar to what happened to Mexican Americans. And what was happening

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01:00:58.188 --> 01:01:13.309

Tom Izu: we, we later had a program that focused on *Chinese Americans and the Exclusion Act*. And what happened to them and all of these programs. We had Muslim Americans talk about the Muslim ban because I was right at the heart at what was happening at that time period.

504

01:01:13.470 --> 01:01:37.639

Tom Izu: But all of these different voices showing the similarities of their experiences, but showing that there's an emotional tie. So it's not just academic, intellectual, or somehow they can prove that it was the same. That's kind of the danger of parallelism when you say, well, it was just like that. Well, not exactly that. We don't want to say it was as bad as slavery, because it wasn't as bad as but it was kind of like. I mean, all of those kind of weird fights people get into. It was more. No, we can just feel it.

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01:01:37.840 --> 01:01:43.754

Tom Izu: Because, when this program about repatriation, we, the title, we decided, was

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01:01:44.280 --> 01:01:46.299

Tom Izu: I never saw my father again.

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01:01:46.330 --> 01:02:00.419

Tom Izu: and that was taken out of a book written, or part of mentioned in a book about repatriation, and we thought it applied to Japanese Americans. So there are some Japanese Americans. Why are you sure Japanese American could relate to that? And then we said, Oh, I think they could.

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01:02:00.420 --> 01:02:20.879

Tom Izu: and in fact they did, because some Japanese Americans, when they saw that they knew what that meant, and they would tell us, you know, my father. We never saw him. He got taken away by the FBI before we could put in camp, and he died in custody before before he could be reunited with us in camp, and we had a speaker who was a little kid at the time his father was taken away.

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01:02:20.960 --> 01:02:24.210

Tom Izu: and he died very young, I mean died.

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01:02:24.220 --> 01:02:27.770

Tom Izu: you know, before, yeah, that this guy who could

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01:02:27.900 --> 01:02:29.659

Tom Izu: could interact with him again?

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01:02:30.053 --> 01:02:38.840

Tom Izu: So it was very emotional. So people could do that. And then the Mexican American, identifying people who came to cement. It was very emotional to them, and that

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01:02:39.390 --> 01:02:46.879

Tom Izu: gave them this triggered them to think about. You know how they could connect to our experience as well as we can connect to our theirs.

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01:02:47.190 --> 01:02:50.987

Tom Izu: So that so we did a lot of programs like that.

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01:02:51.690 --> 01:02:59.949

Tom Izu: and but they kept changing. That's why it's hard for me to say on a day to day basis. So after those programs were done. We did the hidden Histories project.

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01:03:00.050 --> 01:03:03.490

Tom Izu: We developed tours based on that project.

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01:03:04.140 --> 01:03:22.113

Tom Izu: all of them with the idea of trying to show that there's we are trying to combat this exceptionalism view that some of the model minority Japanese Americans promoted. We were great. We were proved we were loyal. And now, you know, we're successful, and we want to show what good Americans we are.

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01:03:22.900 --> 01:03:30.780

Tom Izu: what I sensed is that Japanese Americans, even if they weren't full blown into just trying to talk about how loyal we were.

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01:03:30.830 --> 01:03:35.660

Tom Izu: The tendency of the narrative tended to connect mostly with

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01:03:36.090 --> 01:03:47.260

Tom Izu: their relationship to white people without them being conscious of that. That's who they were speaking to is loyal like. Why do you have to say that to somebody else? Why do you have to say you're loyal.

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01:03:47.380 --> 01:03:48.200

Tom Izu: you know.

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01:03:48.410 --> 01:03:56.659

Tom Izu: Where is that in the Constitution it doesn't say anything about being loyal, I mean, even though they're trying to say. Well, we learned lessons about the importance of the Constitution.

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01:03:56.690 --> 01:03:59.389

Tom Izu: There's nothing in the Constitution says that you must be loyal.

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01:03:59.610 --> 01:04:08.829

Tom Izu: I mean, there's laws against, you know, an act of treason against the United States. But this emotional thing about my loyalty, and what you think in your head

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01:04:09.390 --> 01:04:15.340

Tom Izu: is not the same thing. So why is that so? I figured, well, it's because they're speaking to right people.

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01:04:15.580 --> 01:04:25.820

Tom Izu: And I couldn't say that in front of everybody, because they want. They probably get offended, or they wouldn't understand I'm talking about. But that's what I thought. That's what they're doing. Instead of trying to more connect with all.

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01:04:27.860 --> 01:04:29.470

Tom Izu: I don't know. Good here.

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01:04:29.980 --> 01:04:32.631

Tom Izu: Sorry. I just accidentally hit my computer.

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01:04:34.070 --> 01:04:35.540

Steve Nava: What was the last thing you said.

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01:04:35.540 --> 01:04:41.889

Tom Izu: Oh, trying to instead of just speaking in this kind of defensive way without them realizing it.

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01:04:43.300 --> 01:04:43.790

Steve Nava: 30.

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01:04:43.790 --> 01:04:46.733

Tom Izu: Be a better way to say this, which you could probably think about.

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01:04:47.060 --> 01:04:55.980

Tom Izu: instead. Speak more about how you, how you fit in, and that, and see how you are connected with all these other groups of people, including white people.

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01:04:56.110 --> 01:05:06.999

Tom Izu: you know, but as opposed to saying my experience as Japanese Americans. These are the most important things. We were loyal, we were loyal, we were loyal and we're successful. We're let's have and talk about all the great success stories.

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01:05:07.280 --> 01:05:19.330

Tom Izu: I actually don't oppose that, because I understand that's part of heritage. Right? That's part of heritage. You're having a heritage tradition. You want to be proud. My father served in the segregated military unit during World War II.

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01:05:19.360 --> 01:05:37.080

Tom Izu: And so I can understand people being proud of that. You know that there were Japanese Americans who went in to fight fascism, and I I don't. I don't think that's

something you should never say you're not proud of, but to blow it out of proportion when all these other people have done that, and somehow makes you better or special.

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01:05:37.250 --> 01:05:41.468

Tom Izu: and somehow will make you acceptable to white people which it doesn't

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01:05:41.900 --> 01:06:07.742

Tom Izu: except on a very limited way, in some special circumstances. That became an important part of how can we be part of developing a narrative. So in histories of San Jose, Japan Town. One of the things that brought out is that Japan town the only reason Japan town's there is because there was a Chinatown, Heinlerville, Chinatown that was there first, and that there were Filipinos in Japantown. We all shared these the same overlapping histories. Anyway, it wasn't all at the same time, but

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01:06:08.490 --> 01:06:22.770

Tom Izu: and that's our identity as Japanese Americans. So we didn't, Susan [Hayase] and I. It's not that we invented this idea. We're the first to discover. People have been talking about it for a while, but we wanted to put it, bring it to the forefront, especially for Japanese Americans.

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01:06:22.960 --> 01:06:50.400

Tom Izu: So people like Connie Young, you, Robert Ragsac, we knew they were there, so we wanted to give them more opportunities. And so that was our effort to put this into the museum. And now the museum. They talk about it that way. So yeah, you know Japantown, but it also they were trying, and we came. We were here because of Heinlerville Chinatown, and the Filipino community history, so that they're gonna do the Pinoy Town exhibit at the Museum, Japan Japanese American Museum, too, and in the very near future.

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01:06:50.550 --> 01:06:51.849

Tom Izu: So this was all.

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01:06:51.990 --> 01:07:03.799

Tom Izu: I mean, we're not taking all credit for that. But we were part of that. That's how we saw our role is pushing for that. And that involved all sorts of different things. Is it involved creating projects, trying to find funding for it, and involved

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01:07:03.830 --> 01:07:11.269

Tom Izu: and convincing people to do it and finding new people to connect with us. And that's why also why we formed the San Jose and *Nikkei Resister*

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01:07:12.442 --> 01:07:25.020

Tom Izu: was to be able to take positions that were directly against the trump administration and its policies. Some of the other groups in the community, we knew wouldn't be comfortable doing that. So that's why we formed that group.

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01:07:25.030 --> 01:07:27.720

Tom Izu: And it did attract younger younger people.

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01:07:28.318 --> 01:07:44.859

Tom Izu: So going back to your question, which I didn't really answer day to day. It it just kind of depends on what's going on and what's at time what this time period is. So right now, a big focus we have is on trying to figure out how Japantown can become sustainable.

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01:07:45.470 --> 01:07:50.510

Tom Izu: We're very worried about its future, and even though it looks like it's very

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01:07:50.960 --> 01:07:54.635

Tom Izu: very in good shape, very active.

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01:07:55.210 --> 01:08:01.379

Tom Izu: it is very fragile, because a lot of what we call the legacy businesses.

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01:08:01.850 --> 01:08:11.619

Tom Izu: the owners are be are getting pretty old, and if those families sell the businesses we don't know who it'll go to, and whoever goes to could drastically change

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01:08:11.880 --> 01:08:16.219

Tom Izu: the nature of the community what it looks like, what it feels like.

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01:08:16.910 --> 01:08:19.659

Tom Izu: So this is a big struggle. So

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01:08:19.720 --> 01:08:30.010

Tom Izu: we have been going to lots of meetings and having lots of discussions with different people. And what we're trying to do is bring people together to actually talk more because

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01:08:30.279 --> 01:08:40.400

Tom Izu: Japantown community hasn't really discussed this collectively. Individuals talk about it, and have been thinking about it and worrying about it, but bringing them together to actually say, Well.

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01:08:40.590 --> 01:08:42.000

Tom Izu: what do you think we can do?

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01:08:42.160 --> 01:08:45.669

Tom Izu: And if we have differences, that's okay, you know. But we should discuss it.

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01:08:45.963 --> 01:08:50.779

Tom Izu: That really hasn't happened much. And there's a whole bunch of reasons why I think it hasn't

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01:08:51.161 --> 01:08:58.479

Tom Izu: kind of the trauma that people have gone through in the past, and some of the past legacy that we've I mean the legacy that's been

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01:08:58.640 --> 01:09:10.439

Tom Izu: brought forward to us, the positive and the negative parts. That we have to reshape, to make it more possible to have a more democratic functioning in our community and the willingness to struggle over things.

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01:09:11.529 --> 01:09:14.189

Tom Izu: So that's that takes up a lot of time

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01:09:14.370 --> 01:09:15.919

Tom Izu: figuring that out.

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01:09:16.410 --> 01:09:22.420

Steve Nava: And in terms of the effect of Covid on Japantown. Did you see some of that.

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01:09:23.960 --> 01:09:29.159

Tom Izu: Yeah. So the of course, just like every other place, because Japantown has a.

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01:09:29.520 --> 01:09:34.090

Tom Izu: The merchants in their shops are really key, are keeping it operating.

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01:09:34.391 --> 01:09:39.170

Tom Izu: Lot of them. There's a lot of restaurants in Japantown. They had a really hard time struggling.

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01:09:39.803 --> 01:09:50.140

Tom Izu: And I know they were hurt pretty badly. So the mutual aid part of it is that there are efforts on the community's part to do different

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01:09:50.140 --> 01:10:15.900

Tom Izu: activities to encourage people to buy from Japan down. Most Japanese Americans do not live in Japan Town is. It's not a big residential community in that way, but to come to come in and to take out and orders to buy food from the restaurants to help them. And so there are a lot of different efforts like that, but it had a big impact and made it really hard on a lot of merchants and a lot of businesses. And I even to this day, I think they're still trying to recover from that.

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01:10:16.250 --> 01:10:24.840

Tom Izu: The other thing that happened is during this time, because of Trump and the Rightwing movement. The anti-Asian hate thing really took off.

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01:10:25.040 --> 01:10:28.970

Tom Izu: you know, when he, when when Trump said, It's a "China-virus."

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01:10:28.990 --> 01:10:32.229

Tom Izu: And so community members are really worried about

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01:10:32.320 --> 01:10:45.759

Tom Izu: Japantown, and what would happen to it? We were especially worried of the elders who lived in Japantown and walking around. Would they been attacked so? There were members of our community who started safety patrols.

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01:10:46.060 --> 01:10:54.000

Tom Izu: and these are based originally from the group that did the safety group that was supposed to react during emergencies like earthquakes, fires?

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01:10:54.461 --> 01:11:13.729

Tom Izu: So they they decided, let's do a patrol. And the patrol point of the patrol is just to have people walking around. You didn't have to be a retired police officer, or, you know, police are. It was just community people just have a presence to show that people are walking around, and they're and they're looking after

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01:11:14.360 --> 01:11:16.190

Tom Izu: anybody who's in Japantown.

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01:11:16.360 --> 01:11:17.270

Tom Izu: So

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01:11:17.590 --> 01:11:19.720

Tom Izu: *San Jose Nikkei Resisters*

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01:11:19.820 --> 01:11:33.539

Tom Izu: joined it, and I think our role in it was to try to make sure that the safety patrols didn't go too far in the direction some of them were going in other communities, even other Asian communities which were really into like

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01:11:34.003 --> 01:11:43.019

Tom Izu: basically, anti-black stuff. You know, they're just saying, "Yeah, those black people. They're the ones causing problem in our Chinatown. They're the criminals," and really promoting

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01:11:43.070 --> 01:11:47.059

Tom Izu: more police presence and promoting more police violence

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01:11:47.220 --> 01:12:04.690

Tom Izu: as a way of bringing safety. And we didn't agree with that at all. And we knew some of the community members, you know, were really concerned about that. And they thought, Well, maybe we should have more police. So ,our role was to try to push more, to have. No, that's not going to be the answer, you know, and we're concerned, too.

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01:12:04.880 --> 01:12:05.790

Tom Izu: and

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01:12:06.440 --> 01:12:16.291

Tom Izu: that the safety patrols. What we discovered is that the vandalism and things that happen in Japantown a lot of it was more *crimes of*

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01:12:16.950 --> 01:12:18.220

Tom Izu: *opportunity*.

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01:12:18.280 --> 01:12:42.090

Tom Izu: You know that they're in that end. A lot of it was connected to mental health issues because there were people that regularly to this day is still a big problem are wandering through Japantown, and they're have some kind of mental injury, and they're just yelling and swearing, and they're breaking things, especially at night, when nobody's around that happens, and there's still crime going on in the traditional way. But this is more related to mental health issues.

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01:12:42.130 --> 01:12:45.839

Tom Izu: and the merchants we discovered in this process wanted to.

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01:12:47.350 --> 01:12:49.469

Tom Izu: um, called the police on these people.

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01:12:49.490 --> 01:12:58.389

Tom Izu: and they said, it doesn't do any good because the police comes. They might take the person away within a couple of days they're back again. And the reason why is because

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01:12:58.540 --> 01:13:13.999

Tom Izu: there's nowhere for these people to go, and there's nobody to provide care for them. The police aren't mental health people, so they're not gonna provide care for them and then bring them back rehabilitated. And so this came. We discovered there was a movement to start something that became the trust.

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01:13:14.670 --> 01:13:15.800

Tom Izu: Yes, you do.

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01:13:15.840 --> 01:13:26.829

Tom Izu: Which basically was the county should hire mental health people. They should be put in the budget, and they will become you can call them if it's a mental health issue rather than calling the police.

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01:13:26.940 --> 01:13:33.080

Tom Izu: And generally, I think the police were okay with this, because a lot of them said, You know, that's not our job. We can't deal with this.

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01:13:33.160 --> 01:13:38.487

Tom Izu: So we're still struggling over that because we don't think it's strong enough, and they need to put more money into it.

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01:13:39.790 --> 01:13:51.690

Tom Izu: But this all came out of this safety patrol is understanding these problems more, and understanding what's at the basis of it, rather than just putting on a performative thing about.

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01:13:51.710 --> 01:14:00.810

Tom Izu: You know we're anti-police and abolish them all. It was more trying to figure out what is the problem our community face, and what should we push be pushing for?

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01:14:01.100 --> 01:14:06.439

Tom Izu: So we're still struggling with that that hasn't been resolved. But it's something that we learned a lot from.

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01:14:12.620 --> 01:14:14.336

Steve Nava: Now, in terms of

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01:14:14.820 --> 01:14:17.859

Steve Nava: your sort of social involvement in

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01:14:17.990 --> 01:14:25.549

Steve Nava: places like Japantown and other communities, where are some places that you find yourself going to and connecting with community members.

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01:14:25.600 --> 01:14:28.470

Steve Nava: I know you mentioned the museum, is that one of them?

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01:14:28.470 --> 01:14:32.852

Tom Izu: Yeah, yeah, the museum is cause I'm still doing a lot of projects with them.

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01:14:33.210 --> 01:14:35.730

Tom Izu: And so I like

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01:14:35.870 --> 01:14:49.049

Tom Izu: the people there. There's a person who's running the place as the acting director. I sure hope they stay there because I like talking to her and working with her, and there's a person who's in charge of the education now, and I like working with. And there's some board members I really like working with.

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01:14:50.260 --> 01:14:53.446

Tom Izu: so that's a place I feel I belong to.

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01:14:53.930 --> 01:14:56.809

Tom Izu: Even if I have differences with some people there.

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01:14:56.810 --> 01:14:57.140

Steve Nava: And then.

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01:14:57.140 --> 01:14:59.020

Tom Izu: Still, it's still very close

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01:14:59.180 --> 01:15:06.550

Tom Izu: and dear to me. The *Yu-Ai Kai* is another place, because, you know, because I worked there a long time ago, and there are some people

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01:15:08.070 --> 01:15:10.160

Tom Izu: that Susan and I

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01:15:11.730 --> 01:15:13.003

Tom Izu: worked with

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01:15:14.010 --> 01:15:19.719

Tom Izu: going way back. I left out this whole part, and we were working on the redress movement.

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01:15:19.780 --> 01:15:25.939

Tom Izu: There was another community group we were part of called the [NihonMachi](#) committee, which still exists to this day.

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01:15:26.880 --> 01:15:28.369

Tom Izu: but it's mainly only

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01:15:28.420 --> 01:15:35.940

Tom Izu: exists to put on the day of remembrance event, which is about the signing of [Executive Order 9066](#). An annual event where they commemorate that

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01:15:36.200 --> 01:15:42.439

Tom Izu: but it was heavily involved in the redress movement. So there were a whole bunch of people we worked very closely with during the redress movement

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01:15:42.680 --> 01:15:47.794

Tom Izu: and back in my God, I can't remember. It was 2014, 2015

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01:15:48.532 --> 01:15:54.090

Tom Izu: we held after we were raising kids. We didn't do as much in the community when our kids were over young.

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01:15:54.260 --> 01:15:57.709

Tom Izu: but we wanted to get me involved, get involved again in the community.

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01:15:58.550 --> 01:16:10.712

Tom Izu: So we decided to call some of the people that we had worked with on the redress movement together, because all these people were getting older and broaching a retirement age. So we asked

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01:16:11.430 --> 01:16:20.980

Tom Izu: them to have a meeting which we call the Sansei, Sansei is our generation third generation unfocused group supposed to be made fun making fun of focus groups because.

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01:16:21.470 --> 01:16:23.919

Tom Izu: Work in corporations, focus groups are.

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01:16:24.040 --> 01:16:26.360

Tom Izu: And this was just a chance to talk.

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01:16:26.690 --> 01:16:35.950

Tom Izu: And through that process we are trying to encourage people like, well, what do you want to do now? You know some of you were involved in the redress movement and a lot of other community things.

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01:16:36.070 --> 01:16:37.910

Tom Izu: So we should do something.

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01:16:38.030 --> 01:16:41.639

Tom Izu: And we knew on the horizon these political struggles were coming up.

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01:16:42.900 --> 01:16:44.679

Tom Izu: But so some of them

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01:16:45.012 --> 01:16:48.817

Tom Izu: had already been still been doing things with the Yu-Ak Kai senior center.

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01:16:50.200 --> 01:16:55.929

Tom Izu: and but they started to become so we figured out ways. They can also expand.

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01:16:55.990 --> 01:17:00.710

Tom Izu: you know, and do things that we were involved in some of these activities we were starting to be involved in.

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01:17:02.141 --> 01:17:04.309

Tom Izu: and one of the things on

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01:17:04.610 --> 01:17:06.120

Tom Izu: we helped to start

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01:17:06.520 --> 01:17:09.369

Tom Izu: that came out of it is the Yu-Ai Kai has a

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01:17:10.590 --> 01:17:17.940

Tom Izu: informally known as a lecture series that does these activities aimed at attracting younger seniors. That's what it was started for.

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01:17:17.980 --> 01:17:20.309

Tom Izu: We've covered all sorts of topics

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01:17:21.260 --> 01:17:22.500

Tom Izu: of interest.

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01:17:23.021 --> 01:17:30.199

Tom Izu: One of them was about the origins of Yu-Ai Kai, and during the, you know, out of the 1970s movement

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01:17:30.360 --> 01:17:42.320

Tom Izu: for serving the people. And we did an activity about that a lot of things we've been doing lately seem to be more food related since we don't really like that. But a lot of things have to do with identity

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01:17:42.330 --> 01:17:47.129

Tom Izu: and trying to encourage people to to stay involved in the Japanese American community.

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01:17:47.420 --> 01:17:51.800

Tom Izu: So I like hanging out with those people we meet every month.

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01:17:51.860 --> 01:17:53.670

Tom Izu: you know, with new activities.

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01:17:54.211 --> 01:18:00.510

Tom Izu: So even though some of the activities aren't more political, there's usually some connection to understanding or history better

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01:18:00.710 --> 01:18:11.149

Tom Izu: that I like to promote and I feel very comfortable with them, because I've known them for a long time, most of them, and we it over our involvement in things overlaps quite a bit.

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01:18:11.800 --> 01:18:16.870

Tom Izu: everything from San Jose Nikkei Resisters to the museum that they're also involved in new icon.

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01:18:17.509 --> 01:18:22.780

Tom Izu: So that's another group that I feel very comfortable, even though I don't know a lot of the staff at Yu-Ai Kai anymore.

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01:18:22.790 --> 01:18:24.720

Tom Izu: I feel very comfortable going there.

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01:18:25.630 --> 01:18:30.280

Tom Izu: and I figure, I think, yeah, we actually are senior club members. We finally joined.

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01:18:30.660 --> 01:18:31.290

Tom Izu: Oh.

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01:18:31.290 --> 01:18:31.930

Steve Nava: Okay.

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01:18:31.930 --> 01:18:38.710

Tom Izu: But we are seniors. So we're gonna try to go to some activities more, even to the lunch program. People tell us we should go there

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01:18:39.090 --> 01:18:39.880

Tom Izu: on.

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01:18:41.780 --> 01:18:43.269

Tom Izu: so I would say those are.

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01:18:43.340 --> 01:18:45.289

Tom Izu: There's some places I like to hang out.

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01:18:46.320 --> 01:18:54.469

Steve Nava: And has this work that you've done with. Japanese American History Museum. Also with Yu-Ai Kai

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01:18:55.920 --> 01:19:00.809

Steve Nava: and the activist movements over the years. Has that

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01:19:03.200 --> 01:19:04.620

Steve Nava: has that work

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01:19:04.780 --> 01:19:11.759

Steve Nava: influenced you in developing like special connections to other communities. In addition to the Chicano community.

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01:19:13.240 --> 01:19:19.070

Tom Izu: Well, lately I've been so heavily involved in the Japanese American community, because in Japantown

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01:19:19.160 --> 01:19:26.059

Tom Izu: you get involved, you get pulled into everything, or there's always something to do, so I haven't been able to do as much as I'd like.

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01:19:26.580 --> 01:19:28.400

Tom Izu: It's always in the back of my mind.

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01:19:28.490 --> 01:19:32.100

Tom Izu: and so I want to rekindle more connections

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01:19:32.180 --> 01:19:36.790

Tom Izu: with the Latino community because that's a whole part of

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01:19:36.910 --> 01:19:42.556

Tom Izu: local history and working in the California history center helped me stay in touch with some groups.

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01:19:42.980 --> 01:19:45.249

Tom Izu: The indigenous community is another one.

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01:19:45.652 --> 01:20:00.167

Tom Izu: A whole lot of issues to get clearer, clearer on about the indigenous people who were in this area. I think there's some things that history has almost been erased completely. And then the African American community.

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01:20:00.840 --> 01:20:12.839

Tom Izu: I used to know people in it. I don't know as many people now at all, but also I'm much, much more interested in that community. These are all more local history connected that I want to develop many more ties with, because

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01:20:13.500 --> 01:20:20.189

Tom Izu: to me it's a natural extension of the work I did at the California History Center, and that I'm doing now.

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01:20:21.210 --> 01:20:23.529

Tom Izu: trying to make those connections, because.

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01:20:23.880 --> 01:20:30.229

Tom Izu: you know, we come from a community that was forced, faced, forced removal, exclusion.

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01:20:30.340 --> 01:20:34.120

Tom Izu: segregation, expulsion, all of those things.

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01:20:34.350 --> 01:20:46.960

Tom Izu: And where Japanese Americans understand well, this is kind of very similar. It's actually the same forces, even though at different time periods different. Some different circumstances. In some ways other communities have faced. So I'm really interested in

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01:20:47.160 --> 01:20:48.709

Tom Izu: understanding more

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01:20:48.860 --> 01:20:55.869

Tom Izu: what happened to Mexican Americans after the US takeover, you know in the war with Mexico.

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01:20:55.910 --> 01:21:00.510

Tom Izu: and because they're obviously San Jose was part of Mexico, the part in downtown that was.

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01:21:00.590 --> 01:21:14.579

Tom Izu: I can't remember what they call. There's a bunch of different names, they call it, but was kind of like a little segregated community for a while, as the Yankees took over. And so there's a whole history there that's just almost a race. I mean people some people generally know there are Mexicans here, but they just don't

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01:21:14.790 --> 01:21:16.579

Tom Izu: seem to know much about it. So

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01:21:17.280 --> 01:21:19.769

Tom Izu: bringing that to the forefront is really important.

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01:21:19.970 --> 01:21:33.990

Tom Izu: And then you get into all these complicated issues with indigenous, indigenous people because the Mexicans were there, and they had land grants, and that land grant, and of course land came from the indigenous people. There were the Spanish people before them, after, before the Mexicans

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01:21:34.050 --> 01:21:40.730

Tom Izu: got their independence, they took all the land from indigenous people. So there's this whole string history going through all of those

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01:21:40.740 --> 01:21:50.080

Tom Izu: pretty intense, and I think that's part of why some of the history is hard to uncover, because it's a long period of time like African Americans, which is kind of overwhelming in some ways.

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01:21:52.698 --> 01:22:02.091

Steve Nava: Another question is, has the cost of living and the rise in housing costs affected the Japan town community's ability to sustain

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01:22:03.010 --> 01:22:04.500

Steve Nava: some of the

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01:22:06.090 --> 01:22:08.839

Steve Nava: the work of maintaining it.

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01:22:09.420 --> 01:22:24.029

Tom Izu: Oh, yeah. Oh, I think it definitely has. One thing is, people can't afford to live in Japan Town or around Japantown and I mainly I mean anybody, even older people. But I'm mainly thinking of younger people.

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01:22:24.440 --> 01:22:26.300

Tom Izu: you know, people with families.

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01:22:26.697 --> 01:22:35.522

Tom Izu: They can't afford to live here. So when I was young I got to work at Yu-Ai Kai, and I was working under what used to be called the Siting program, a government program.

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01:22:35.910 --> 01:22:50.829

Tom Izu: And later I discovered this was poverty, level wages. I didn't know that at the time, but I could afford to rent a a studio apartment in Japantown. I mean, it wasn't the most luxurious place, to say the least, but I could live there on my own.

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01:22:51.050 --> 01:22:57.649

Tom Izu: There's no way anybody could live anywhere in Japantown, or the amount of money I was making. So, working in a store or shop.

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01:22:58.116 --> 01:23:09.420

Tom Izu: I don't see how you could afford to be there unless you had a spouse or a family that had more money that could allow you to do that, or you inherited a house or something. You just can't do it. So that means

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01:23:09.530 --> 01:23:13.060

Tom Izu: we're not going to get an influx of young people being

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01:23:13.080 --> 01:23:16.430

Tom Izu: hanging out. You know, it's gonna be a lot harder for them.

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01:23:16.470 --> 01:23:19.332

Tom Izu: They're going to be out further in the suburbs.

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01:23:19.850 --> 01:23:33.769

Tom Izu: and they're going to stay there. Probably, you know, I mean, so that's the problem. Big problem that we're saying we need to have jobs in Japan town. So we can actually have some staff people who can help do things. But we need to make it a place affordable by more people

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01:23:34.160 --> 01:23:40.239

Tom Izu: and not just people with a lot of money, because these housing developments that are going up and wiping out parts of

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01:23:40.260 --> 01:23:42.820

Tom Izu: the area Japan town and around Japantown.

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01:23:42.990 --> 01:23:45.369

Tom Izu: They're extremely expensive. They're just

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01:23:45.490 --> 01:23:47.780

Tom Izu: outrageously expensive, as

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01:23:47.790 --> 01:23:49.925

Tom Izu: you know, every everybody already knows this.

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01:23:50.290 --> 01:24:10.559

Tom Izu: so yeah, it makes it really hard. If somebody sells property in Japan down, it's takes a lot of money to be able to purchase that property after owner wants to sell it to make sure it goes into community, and they can't afford to give it away, because there's all these pressures on them. It has to be close to market rate. And it's just really, really expensive. So yeah, this really makes it harder

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01:24:10.710 --> 01:24:17.399

Tom Izu: to figure out how to come up with the funds to be able to save some of that buildings and businesses.

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01:24:20.300 --> 01:24:35.730

Steve Nava: And one thing that came up in previous interviews in this oral histories, Project focused a lot on belonging to a community and local space. What is the role of the artist, the muralist in the future of Japantown? Do you think.

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01:24:38.010 --> 01:24:39.469

Tom Izu: I think they play

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01:24:39.520 --> 01:24:43.270

Tom Izu: really important role. Because one thing I learned I'm not an artist.

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01:24:43.920 --> 01:24:45.070

Tom Izu: but I learned that

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01:24:45.410 --> 01:24:49.867

Tom Izu: any kind of organizing work you do. And when I say organizing work.

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01:24:50.420 --> 01:25:05.118

Tom Izu: excuse me when I say organizing work, I mean that in very broad way. It's not like professional organizers or a certain kind of radical organizer. When people do things just to make sure their church functions have activities and events.

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01:25:05.970 --> 01:25:10.100

Tom Izu: The thing that I've learned is how important culture

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01:25:10.170 --> 01:25:32.990

Tom Izu: and the work of people who have more of an artistic view can have on the success of that kind of work. And I want more people to see themselves playing that role because they may not see themselves as I'm a real artist. Maybe they'll feel uncomfortable by saying that an example I'll give is, there's always been a tradition in our community Japanese marine community, mainly of women. Mostly. It's been women

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01:25:33.030 --> 01:25:38.570

Tom Izu: who have carried out some of these things that people refer to as traditional Japanese art, cultural art.

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01:25:38.660 --> 01:25:49.530

Tom Izu: But they've also been doing crafts and art which have Japanese cultural aspects to it. But aren't aren't just traditional Japanese run kind of cultural activities. They've been doing this

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01:25:49.560 --> 01:25:54.219

Tom Izu: for years and years and years. And they've been carrying this on through the churches and community organizations.

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01:25:54.260 --> 01:25:57.639

Tom Izu: And when they're called upon to help support things.

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01:25:57.650 --> 01:25:59.309

Tom Izu: they they're really key

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01:25:59.440 --> 01:26:04.779

Tom Izu: because they can call out the people and making food call out the people and making

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01:26:04.910 --> 01:26:07.400

Tom Izu: crafts that they sell or show people.

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01:26:07.410 --> 01:26:10.930

Tom Izu: It has a big impact on the spirits people have about being involved.

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01:26:11.470 --> 01:26:20.430

Tom Izu: Now, younger generation artists becoming part of that is really really important, not only this traditional part, but connecting all this together to show that

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01:26:21.030 --> 01:26:25.400

Tom Izu: why the culture, why, having this community.

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01:26:25.620 --> 01:26:28.060

Tom Izu: the dynamicness of it.

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01:26:28.180 --> 01:26:29.350

Tom Izu: And how

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01:26:29.830 --> 01:26:32.090

Tom Izu: important it is to have

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01:26:33.017 --> 01:26:38.099

Tom Izu: this kind of a life, because otherwise it's really hard to have any sense of hope

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01:26:38.130 --> 01:26:41.179

Tom Izu: really like hard to have any sense that you could do anything.

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01:26:41.769 --> 01:26:49.309

Tom Izu: It's really hard to have a feeling that you can do anything together, especially so. Artists, I think, can help bring people together. And I think they do.

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01:26:49.340 --> 01:26:50.650

Tom Izu: because

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01:26:50.690 --> 01:26:56.849

Tom Izu: so it is really key part. And that's something that I think some of the younger people who are concerned about the future of Japantown.

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01:26:57.190 --> 01:26:58.869

Tom Izu: I think that's what they're thinking about.

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01:26:59.070 --> 01:27:01.269

Tom Izu: What kind of businesses can we have here

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01:27:01.340 --> 01:27:08.279

Tom Izu: not only support the life of the community, which is restaurants and stores. But the cultural component of it

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01:27:08.400 --> 01:27:11.709

Tom Izu: can some of the cultural art things that are happening now?

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01:27:11.820 --> 01:27:14.370

Tom Izu: Can they become more sustainable in the long term

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01:27:14.480 --> 01:27:18.470

Tom Izu: cause? It's really hard for people to do businesses and arts, you know.

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01:27:19.330 --> 01:27:25.010

Tom Izu: So that's what I'm hoping is how we can figure out a way to work together, because that's going to be a real key component.

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01:27:25.580 --> 01:27:41.630

Tom Izu: I'm really worried, though, that culture, of course, gets used against us all the time, meaning people go well. I really love this cultural thing, and they buy it, and they buy the whole thing out, and then they can make it themselves. But they really can't. It just becomes a commodity. That's it's not the same.

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01:27:41.950 --> 01:27:45.570

Tom Izu: you know. So that's something that we have to figure out how to talk about.

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01:27:48.020 --> 01:27:49.403

Steve Nava: Oh, do you mean like

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01:27:50.600 --> 01:27:52.777

Steve Nava: you mean, like outsiders kind of

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01:27:53.340 --> 01:27:56.659

Steve Nava: mass producing things that they see happening.

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01:27:56.970 --> 01:28:07.750

Tom Izu: Yeah. So I'll give an example. And all of these need to be discussed out. And that's why it's so dynamic. It's like one person can't figure it all out. Yeah. But so there's a people like Anime people like

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01:28:07.950 --> 01:28:14.229

Tom Izu: K-pop, J-pop, you know, Japanese China, Korean culture. We started talking about pop culture.

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01:28:14.250 --> 01:28:23.989

Tom Izu: and there's parts of it that are very dynamic. And I don't oppose that. That's just reality. So merchants in San Jose Japantown. Some of them sell products from this.

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01:28:24.060 --> 01:28:27.839

Tom Izu: It doesn't have as strong a component as like San Francisco, where there's.

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01:28:28.090 --> 01:28:36.040

Tom Izu: you know, San Francisco is a whole other story where large parts of it got wiped out and redevelopment. And so businesses from Japan outside the community came in

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01:28:36.050 --> 01:28:40.296

Tom Izu: and to set up shop. And so now there's a pretty booming

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01:28:40.970 --> 01:28:47.830

Tom Izu: attraction for Asian Americans. Mostly, I think somebody said they thought they're mostly Chinese, but all sorts of people coming in to buy

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01:28:49.430 --> 01:28:51.950

Tom Izu: Japanese Korean cultural

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01:28:51.960 --> 01:28:53.140

Tom Izu: pop culture stuff.

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01:28:53.600 --> 01:28:56.522

Tom Izu: Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. Same thing.

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01:28:57.433 --> 01:29:02.069

Tom Izu: San Jose is much smaller. So it's not quite at that point. But you could see that it's becoming

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01:29:02.160 --> 01:29:03.900

Tom Izu: possibly part of its future.

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01:29:04.270 --> 01:29:06.090

Tom Izu: So how do you deal with that?

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01:29:06.230 --> 01:29:27.910

Tom Izu: And then the layer you're talking about is even more so, not just talking about outside interest from Japan, China, or wherever or South Korea, for example, but people saying, Hey, I can sell Japanese products, and I can even do it better. I can make more money off of it. People like that thinking that they're doing some good thing. And they're actually, really, really, not.

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01:29:29.460 --> 01:29:33.879

Tom Izu: I mean, I mean, I'm talking. The kind of cultural stuff I'm talking about is how people have made yoga.

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01:29:34.110 --> 01:29:51.880

Tom Izu: They say I know, Yoga and I could teach it to you without all the baggage. But there's cultural stuff. I went to this talk, which was really good about some young Buddhist Americans talking about how they're they feel. They're they're really upset about how Buddhism is getting taken over this way.

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01:29:52.330 --> 01:30:06.310

Tom Izu: You know that I can teach you a form of meditation but without all the cultural baggage, what they're referring to is the actual religion that it came out of, or the beliefs that came out of. It's just pure, and your company can take it up without having it to be part of this

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01:30:06.350 --> 01:30:07.629

Tom Izu: cultural stuff.

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01:30:07.680 --> 01:30:23.299

Tom Izu: Yeah, it's like that. So you can see the same thing happening with Japanese, Japanese American products, like people riffing off of the popularity of Ramen Noodles, or whatever, and making it into this new thing. And they think they've discovered something new, because I saw people doing. Really.

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01:30:23.790 --> 01:30:31.820

Tom Izu: you know, having this strange attitude that they're they've invented this kind of Hawaiian style Japanese food, you know, in their white people.

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01:30:32.380 --> 01:30:34.320

Tom Izu: Tell him you didn't invent that.

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01:30:34.580 --> 01:30:35.000

Steve Nava: And.

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01:30:35.000 --> 01:30:47.930

Tom Izu: And and understand how that looks. People are gonna be really mad at you if you do this for good reason, you know. So you have to. I mean, it's not like, you know, you can't be part of this. But if you think you can just take it over it.

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01:30:48.960 --> 01:30:54.519

Tom Izu: you know people aren't gonna like it, because you're kind of erasing who whole history in their culture. So

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01:30:54.640 --> 01:30:58.039

Tom Izu: to try to work with us, not try to take things away from us, you know.

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01:30:58.040 --> 01:30:58.640

Steve Nava: Hmm.

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01:30:59.070 --> 01:31:04.230

Tom Izu: But that's problematic. I mean, you understand, it's so difficult. You need to have a lot more. People talk about it.

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01:31:05.458 --> 01:31:07.200

Tom Izu: How to talk it through.

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01:31:07.340 --> 01:31:10.780

Tom Izu: you know, in our own community, really first, because otherwise

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01:31:10.910 --> 01:31:12.530

Tom Izu: it's really hard to deal with.

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01:31:15.660 --> 01:31:16.740

Steve Nava: Are there any

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01:31:18.080 --> 01:31:25.589

Steve Nava: last things that you might want to mention in it? To add to what we've already talked about? Or is there anything that we left out?

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01:31:25.970 --> 01:31:28.017

Steve Nava: Questions that I should have asked you?

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01:31:29.700 --> 01:31:30.929

Steve Nava: Let me see.

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01:31:30.930 --> 01:31:33.439

Tom Izu: No, there, I think there's just so much to talk about that.

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01:31:33.440 --> 01:31:34.770

Steve Nava: Yeah. It's so much.

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01:31:34.770 --> 01:31:35.470

Tom Izu: Yeah.

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01:31:35.650 --> 01:31:42.270

Steve Nava: I think we covered all the questions that I had. I just wondering if there's anything that you wanted to say that you didn't get the chance to mention.

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01:31:42.270 --> 01:31:44.430

Tom Izu: Not. Really. I think I think I'm just

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01:31:44.650 --> 01:31:47.269

Tom Izu: what I'm most interested in trying to work out now

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01:31:47.970 --> 01:31:52.389

Tom Izu: is just that this dynamic process of understanding

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01:31:52.480 --> 01:31:54.280

Tom Izu: your historical background.

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01:31:54.360 --> 01:31:59.779

Tom Izu: I didn't talk a lot about why, why, I think local history is so important, but it's connected to that.

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01:31:59.960 --> 01:32:01.010

Tom Izu: and that

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01:32:01.520 --> 01:32:05.140

Tom Izu: if you don't, and then, of course, place if you don't have a sense of

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01:32:05.330 --> 01:32:08.770

Tom Izu: you know your history, your place where you came from.

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01:32:09.170 --> 01:32:17.359

Tom Izu: no matter where you came from nothing to be ashamed about because come from somewhere, but that there's this kind of historical process that's taken.

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01:32:17.640 --> 01:32:19.159

Tom Izu: and you can't.

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01:32:19.170 --> 01:32:32.920

Tom Izu: You can look back on it and try to reinterpret it. I think everybody should do that. But there's a fact that that's you came from somewhere, and that's what you have to honor that, but also don't get caught in it because it's not static. It keeps changing.

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01:32:32.960 --> 01:32:34.799

Tom Izu: and if you get caught into it

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01:32:34.930 --> 01:32:42.600

Tom Izu: caught in it, and you think it's, you know, you've frozen in time, and you're you essentialize things too much. Then you're really dooming yourself.

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01:32:42.680 --> 01:32:49.429

Tom Izu: You you'll never be able to deal with some of these contradictions. Very well, because you won't understand what they are. You'll spend all your time fighting against them.

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01:32:49.680 --> 01:32:54.619

Tom Izu: and that's one thing I do not want to end up. I do not as I get older. I don't want to end up being a

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01:32:54.770 --> 01:33:02.920

Tom Izu: prejudice, old Guy. He can't understand anything, and that's a stereotype, but there's some truth to it, but it happens to young people too.

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01:33:03.310 --> 01:33:05.210

Steve Nava: Yeah. Do you think there's

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01:33:06.110 --> 01:33:14.440

Steve Nava: The role of nostalgia plays a role in that sentiment of getting stuck? Or do you think that nostalgia would be a good emotion.

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01:33:14.440 --> 01:33:26.250

Tom Izu: I I think it's an emotion, and therefore you can't say it's bad. It's good, you know something wrong with you, I mean, we all feel it. I think it's how you use it. And the basis you use.

794

01:33:26.550 --> 01:33:36.910

Tom Izu: how you develop what it means. I think that's the main thing is, what is the meaning of it to you? So you can see how nostalgia can get used in a really bad way when they use the feelings in the wrong way.

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01:33:36.980 --> 01:33:53.570

Tom Izu: I mean, the trump campaign is based on that, they're saying, let's go back to make America great again, and they're not even explaining. What? What do you mean? What! America? That was great again, what America? They're not that America they're talking about never even existed so. And it's all based on, you know, a false premise.

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01:33:53.630 --> 01:34:02.070

Tom Izu: and so but you can even see that on locally like oh, this place used to be so beautiful! It's all orchards. But then you're leaving out the history like well, the land was taken from somebody.

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01:34:02.240 --> 01:34:26.980

Tom Izu: You realize that, you know Asian Americans, you know, that they had to work their asses off to make this a beautiful agricultural economic functioning engine. So you are, you leaving all that out in your nostalgia? But there are feelings like that, even people who had to work really hard. There are feelings about back. Then they'll tell you these stories, and and they're not. They are nostalgic stories, but they're not

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01:34:27.190 --> 01:34:33.039

Tom Izu: romanticizing. They're not leaving out how hard it was. But they're still feeling a connection to the land

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01:34:33.330 --> 01:34:35.760

Tom Izu: in this. If it's agriculture. What they grew.

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01:34:35.910 --> 01:34:39.660

Tom Izu: And that's part of nostalgia, I think, because it doesn't exist anymore.

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01:34:40.048 --> 01:34:54.100

Tom Izu: So I'm not at probably not answering a question very clearly. But it's more of what is the meaning of it? I think people need to think about it. So it's not like you. You should be

nostalgic, or you shouldn't, because I I don't think that makes any sense. It's a feeling there's nothing wrong with having feelings.

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01:34:54.610 --> 01:35:03.940

Tom Izu: But it's like, what is the purpose of it, and you can use it in a good way or bad way. Maybe that's what how to try to figure that out, and you have to decide. You have to figure that out.

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01:35:04.470 --> 01:35:06.559

Tom Izu: We have to be open to struggling about it.

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01:35:08.020 --> 01:35:08.760

Steve Nava: Yeah.

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01:35:08.880 --> 01:35:10.495

Steve Nava: that makes sense. Actually,

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01:35:11.530 --> 01:35:15.710

Steve Nava: yeah, it is because you, I mean, everybody has to look backward and see

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01:35:15.770 --> 01:35:18.739

Steve Nava: what they experience. But they stop to make meaning out of it.

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01:35:19.320 --> 01:35:23.930

Steve Nava: Whether it's clear or not, or with contradictory or not. So.

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01:35:24.350 --> 01:35:26.989

Tom Izu: Except the contradictions. I mean, that's the thing that

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01:35:27.140 --> 01:35:29.900

Tom Izu: people need to be willing to accept

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01:35:29.930 --> 01:35:38.979

Tom Izu: contradictions all over the place, because that's what we are, there's no way to escape it, and then learn how to deal with it. To do something positive.

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01:35:39.390 --> 01:35:40.180

Tom Izu: good.

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01:35:41.020 --> 01:35:41.690

Steve Nava: Yes.

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01:35:42.180 --> 01:35:47.140

Steve Nava: yeah, I guess I guess the next conversation could be about how capitalism might play a role in

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01:35:47.330 --> 01:35:50.770

Steve Nava: diversifying the the amount of contradictions that we.

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01:35:50.770 --> 01:35:53.799

Tom Izu: Yeah, yeah, that's true.

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01:35:53.800 --> 01:35:54.535

Steve Nava: That's another

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01:35:55.350 --> 01:35:56.940

Steve Nava: a Pandora's box, I guess.

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01:35:56.940 --> 01:36:01.969

Tom Izu: Yeah, yeah, no, no, you're right. That's something I really would love to talk about, to get a better understanding, because it's

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01:36:02.240 --> 01:36:06.249

Tom Izu: it amplifies some, and makes even new ones out of things that

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01:36:06.390 --> 01:36:09.749

Tom Izu: maybe weren't quite the same kind of contradictions. They are now.

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01:36:09.980 --> 01:36:16.299

Steve Nava: Right. Yeah, alright. Well, thanks, Tom, I appreciate it. We went over time, but I think we got an extra 30 min or more.

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01:36:16.300 --> 01:36:17.450

Tom Izu: Thank you.

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01:36:17.450 --> 01:36:19.140

Steve Nava: Analysis. So thank you so much.

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01:36:19.140 --> 01:36:20.449

Tom Izu: Oh, thank you, Steve.

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01:36:20.450 --> 01:36:21.950

Steve Nava: Alright. Okay.

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01:36:21.950 --> 01:36:22.670

Tom Izu: Bye.