

# Donald Watanabe

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**Cohen:** [00:00:00] Hello, is this Mr. Watanabe?

**Watanabe:** [00:00:03] Right.

**Cohen:** [00:00:03] Hi, this is Leah. How are you?

**Watanabe:** [00:00:05] Fine, thank you, and you?

**Cohen:** [00:00:07] Fine, thank you. We were practicing talking a little bit to make sure the sound quality is good because the production manager is in the room here for the recording. So I'll just ask you some silly questions like what did you have for breakfast today?

**Watanabe:** [00:00:23] Oh, some cold cereal and a banana. [Cohen coughs]

**Cohen:** [00:00:29] And a banana Oh, sounds good. He said it sounds good. [Production staff "So you guys are set."] Thank you. Thank you so much. Sorry [coughs again], a little cough here, but I'm doing okay. All right. Let me just take a little sip of water. And so if it's okay, I'll, I'll introduce you. Then I'll ask some questions about your background, and that... The focus being on your service and a little bit about your life after the service and your reflections. Okay. So today is Wednesday, July 21st, 2021, I'm Leah Cohen, the Oral History and Reference Manager at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library on behalf of the Library and Museum. I am pleased to interview Airman First Class Don Watanabe, who served in the U.S. Air Force from 1953 to 1957. He was on tour both in France and Germany during the Cold War itself. So thank you for speaking to us today.

**Watanabe:** [00:01:39] Oh, ??? Hear from you.

**Cohen:** [00:01:41] Thank you. And also, did I pronounce your name correctly?

**Watanabe:** [00:01:46] Usually, we pronounce it Wa-ta-na-be. [emphasis on second to last syllable]

**Cohen:** [00:01:49] Watanabe, okay? Oh, thank you. Okay, um, where and where would you born?

**Watanabe:** [00:01:59] On September 20th, 1936, in Chicago.

**Cohen:** [00:02:07] I think you had mentioned that your mother arranged for you to live with the foster family when you were still an infant. So where was this foster family?

**Watanabe:** [00:02:20] Oh they, at the time they lived on the north, north side of Chicago, as far as I know. Okay?

**Cohen:** [00:02:32] Did you did you did you grow up with this same foster family?

**Watanabe:** [00:02:38] Yeah. I mean, they took me in when I was three days old, and I lived with them until they both died. And the father died in 1949 and the mother died in 19--52 or '51, '51, I guess. I can't remember exactly but, yeah, I think '51. Anyway.

**Cohen:** [00:03:11] Were there any other children in the home?

**Watanabe:** [00:03:16] Well, they had seven natural children, but the youngest one of their children was thirteen years older than I was. So, you know, they were pretty much adults most of the time that I can remember.

**Cohen:** [00:03:34] So where did you live after your foster mother passed away?

**Watanabe:** [00:03:41] Well, I lived with one or another foster sibling until I finished high school a year and a half after she died.

**Cohen:** [00:03:56] Oh, okay. So which schools did you go to, growing up?

**Watanabe:** [00:04:02] Well, I started elementary school in Chicago public schools, say -- when and where? In the fall of 1941 on the West Side of Chicago. They had moved from the north side to the West Side by the time I was of school age.

**Cohen:** [00:04:27] Oh, okay. And and what about high school?

**Watanabe:** [00:04:33] Oh, high school? Well, we moved to northern Michigan when I started high school. That's where they were originally from. They moved back there, my foster parents and I. And so, I went to my first three years of high school in the Upper Peninsula of Northern Michigan in a town called Calumet, Michigan, and the name of a high school, which was a public high school was Calumet High School. And and by the time I was, well, in the spring of my junior year of high school, the second my second foster parent died. So then I moved back to the Chicago area to start my fourth year of high school. And then for the last semester, I moved 100 miles south of Chicago to a town called Milford, Illinois, to finish high school and live with another foster sibling and her family.

**Cohen:** [00:05:51] Oh, it sounds tough. Which, which --I don't know -- which school did you like best or which area did you prefer?

**Watanabe:** [00:06:06] Well, I liked the high school area in Michigan because of the small town and people were friendly and it was just easy living. It was, you know, it wasn't as complicated to live as it was in Chicago, you know, 'cause Chicago is such a big city and so forth. So I for that reason, I enjoyed living in Northern Michigan, and ??? okay, you know. But, you know, I lived through the World

World War II years, 1941 to '45 and beyond, in Chicago. So they were difficult for me because I was Japanese and experienced a lot of racial animosity.

**Cohen:** [00:07:13] I was about to ask you if you experienced that, you know, in particular after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

**Watanabe:** [00:07:23] Right. Yeah, yeah, I did. The way it started was I was five years old in December 1941 and attending kindergarten and on Pearl Harbor day, I remember vividly being sent out by my foster mother to buy, to go down to the corner store and get a newspaper and that's because, you know, to get the news about Pearl Harbor and then later that day -- and of course, it was a Sunday -- I remember that, too, I went over to a neighbor kid's house. It was directly across the street from us. And who was there? What I thought was a close friend of mine, and her mother answered the door and told me to get out of the neighborhood because I was a Jap.

**Cohen:** [00:08:21] Oh no, geez. You're five years old.

**Watanabe:** [00:08:25] Yeah, right. And that's how I learned I was Japanese, actually. I had no memory of being aware of any racial differences among people until that day because my foster family had always treated me as one of their own. And since I had no memory at that time of my birth mother, I thought I was one of their family. Anyhow, following that, the next day, Monday, December 6th, my foster mother told me I wasn't going to school, and I later found out it was -- They thought it would be safer for me to stay home and out of school. And so for two weeks, I stayed at home and out of school and then someone from the school called and told them that they

**Watanabe:** [00:09:33] Were required to send me back in the school. So that's how I got back into school. And in the meantime, excuse me. And meantime, they had made it, my foster parents and made arrangements actually with a neighbor who was delivered milk to the house for his son, who was in the sixth grade to walk me back and forth to school for protection purposes. And he did that, you know, for

a while. I don't remember how long. And it was really helpful because, you know, other kids would taunt us and throw rocks at us on our way to school and back home and so forth. So that was my experience during World War II.

**Cohen:** [00:10:31] Were there any other Asian children at the school?

**Watanabe:** [00:10:35] No, I was the only one one who wasn't White. Yeah. You know, Chicago had at that time very strictly racially segregated.

**Cohen:** [00:10:52] True. Was was your foster family White...?

**Watanabe:** [00:10:56] Yes. Oh, yeah. you know, my foster mother...her parents were, and her father was of German descent and her mother was Irish. And my foster father was of Swedish descent. And he may have been an immigrant. I can't remember for sure. She was not, she was born in Michigan, I guess.

**Cohen:** [00:11:29] Were people gradually like, well, you know, willing to be friends with you over the course of the war, like they get over it in some way, like some of your classmates?

**Watanabe:** [00:11:44] Yeah, I mean, the animosity wore off with time slowly but surely. So that, you know, by the time I was in, by the time, I was actually, by the time I left Chicago, it was...any animosity towards me was pretty, pretty much over. And then since I was the only non-white person up in the small town in Michigan, I was you know, I was, I didn't really experience any racial hostility, I guess maybe because, you know, I was no threat in the war and the war was over and so forth and so on. Anyway, so things got back to kind of normal.

**Cohen:** [00:12:49] Oh, okay. Do you want to talk now about your your mother's family? I know you had written that you had contact with with them when you were a bit older, when you were twenty-two years old. But would you like to talk about what happened to them during World War II?

**Watanabe:** [00:13:06] Well, I have very limited knowledge of what happened to them during World War II, but ah, I'll give you a little history and tell you some of what I know and can remember. My mother was born in 1909 in Seattle, Washington. Her parents were immigrants from Japan who came over, her parents came to the U.S. from Japan in somewhere around 1900. And they, she lived in Seattle, my mother did, until she was about twenty-one. I don't know the exact age, but somewhere around 1930, she she moved to Chicago more or less on her own, as far as I know. Now, most of the information I got was from a report I read from the FBI on her, and limited contact with her from the time I was age sixteen years, and and between the time I was sixteen. And then I lost contact with her until I was twenty-two. And then I had an intermittent contact with her for a year or so after I was twenty-two. And then almost no contact with her after that, until she died, in 1971 in New York City.

**Watanabe:** [00:14:55] But anyway, in terms of her family history, she was one of seven or eight kids in Seattle. Her her father was a physician and her mother was, I guess a housewife. Like the father left the family somewhere around, oh I don't somewhere around 1920 or so and moved, relocated to Los Angeles. Or they actually chose first Los Angeles, California, and then Fresno, where he died maybe by 1925 or so. And so her mother was left with a bunch of kids in Seattle. I don't I don't know how they lived, or I I actually found out where they lived when I moved to Seattle in 1992. But anyway, she, my mother came to Chicago, I think I may have said, I think either alone or with a friend, I'm not certain which. And she made her way in Chicago and became friendly with the Al Capone crowd.

**Watanabe:** [00:16:21] And so, her first child and my only sibling was an older brother, was born about 1932 and his father was reportedly by my mother listed as a guy who was who worked for Al Capone running a speakeasy during [the] Prohibition on liquor, liquor was prohibited, illegal. And so, anyway, and again, I found this out because I decided about twenty years or so ago to to see what the FBI had on her. So I submitted a Freedom of Information Act request, FBI, and I got back 100 pages on her.

**Watanabe:** [00:17:21] So a lot of what I learned about her as an adult and a little bit about her growing up years was from that report. When I would ask her about directly, questions about that, she didn't have much to say. For example, I asked her who my father was. And I don't remember her saying why she wouldn't tell me, but she wouldn't tell me. Anyway. The doctor who delivered me told me that he was Japanese as far as he could see, my brother's father, of course, is not. So she was quite a character. [Laughs] I mean, that same doctor who was her doctor was my foster family's doctor, that's how [I knew]. So, I'd seen him, and he would he kept in contact with her, but he would relate things to me when I got to be a teenager, such as my mother would call him at night and tell them to come down to see her because she was sick. So he would go and see her and he said he would go down to a hotel in the Gold Coast area around what is Russian or what are Russian Oaks streets today. And he said, you'd walk into her hotel room and there would be a bunch of gangsters looking guys sitting around a room with guns on the table and piles of money. [Cohen laughs] And he he would get scared, and look at her and try to tell her, "Take two aspirins, and I'll call you in the morning. Goodbye." [Both laugh]

**Watanabe:** [00:19:14] So, anyway, yeah.

**Watanabe:** [00:19:20] And by the way, to verify some of this, my brother and I found her. We decided to try to find her and to with the help of this same doctor, we located her on the West Side of Chicago and and reunited with her. I was sixteen and he was, I guess, twenty years old. And we we stayed the three of us stayed together in a hotel around Madison and then Hamlin, a large hotel, because that's the neighborhood she was living in with her boyfriend at that time, who was a Chinese American guy. Well, actually he was an immigrant Chinese guy. Anyway. So when the three of us got together again, I'm sixteen and my brother was twenty at the time, she; we met, we talked the first afternoon. My brother then said he had to go out on a date that evening and he left, and my mother said to me, "Well, what do you think of him?" Meaning my brother, of course,

and I thought, 'Well, that's kind of a screwy question'. I say, "He's okay, he's my brother. What do you want? You know, what do you mean?"

**Watanabe:** [00:20:49] She said, "Well, I don't like him. He's kind of naive. He wants the three of us to get together and be a family. What kind of, you know, kind of silly stuff is that? And I said, "Well, you know, he misses you, I guess." And so she said, "Well, anyway, I need a drink. Let's go down to the bar." So we went down to the bar and hotel and it was Saturday night. You know, there were quite a few people there. And I noticed that that there was a guy sitting at the end of the bar and every couple of minutes he jumped up off his bar stool and go in the public phone booth. And I said to my mother-- excuse me, I'm a little hoarse this morning --

**Watanabe:** [00:21:34] I said to her, "He's booking horses out of the phone booth like, you know, like like they do it these days, right?" And she said, "Yeah, he's a friend of mine. I'll call him over. So she called him over and he she said, "Donald, I'd like you to meet my friend, Matti Capone.

**Cohen:** [00:21:55] [Laughs] Oh no.

**Watanabe:** [00:21:58] Yeah, I had that kind of reaction that you had. And and he she said, "And Matti, I'd like you to meet one of my sons, this is Donald." And I remember him saying to me, "Well, Kid, what do you want to drink?" So he ordered me a whiskey and he said, "I'm sorry, I got to go back to work. See ya, Kid". And I asked her after he left, "Did you say Capone like in Al Capone?" She said, "Yeah, he's he's Al's older brother. Yeah. And it occurred to me that he wasn't a big shot, but he had a job working horses, anyway. So and after that, she wouldn't have anything to do with us, after that weekend. And it really kind of emotionally upset my brother for years. And I... he did not have as nice a foster family as I did. So I do I think that was the reason he was so and so earnestly wanted to be accepted by our mother.

**Watanabe:** [00:23:17] So anyway, that was the end of what we saw of her until I you know, I finished high school, joined the Air Force, finished my four years there and came back to Chicago.

**Cohen:** [00:23:37] But then you saw her again, right?

**Watanabe:** [00:23:40] Excuse me.

**Cohen:** [00:23:41] But then you saw her again, like after you finished...?

**Watanabe:** [00:23:44] Yeah, after I got out of the service, my brother talked me into looking her up. Oh, I know what it was. I know that after he died in 1959. Well, actually, when he died in the spring of 1959, I was a student down in Champaign Urbana, at the University of Illinois, and I got a phone call with her. And as far as I can remember, the first time I heard from her since I was in high school. And she said, "I want to tell you, your brother died." And and so I went up to Chicago and that's when I saw her again in 1950 [unclear 24:35]. And we kept in contact sporadically until I found out she left Chicago in 1960 and moved back to New York City. And then in 1967, I got a phone call from her. The next time I heard from her, and she was still in New York and then and then she died in 1971 in New York.

**Cohen:** [00:25:11] How did you know about your brother like or did you always know that you had an older brother?

**Watanabe:** [00:25:17] Oh, no. Well, I knew from the doctor that I mentioned earlier, you know, from childhood. But the way we got in contact with each other was just by coincidence. We both we were both with separate foster families, but we ended up with the same social caseworker, the foster care worker. And he he you know, he put two and two together and he introduced us to each other when I was about eight or ten years old. Well, we didn't live, he lived, my brother lived in far northwest side. And we lived in kind of in the Midwest side. So we didn't see much of each other. But every so often we'd see each other until I moved to

Michigan a few years later. And then we didn't see each other again until I guess until I got out for a while and until 1953 when we reunited with our mother and in 1957 when I got out of the service. We used to pal around together after that until, until he died. But anyway.

**Cohen:** [00:26:47] Yeah, well, yeah, just going back to more uh-- I don't know more neutral subjects- which which subjects did you like in school?

**Watanabe:** [00:27:03] Well, that's a good question, I don't know. I didn't I didn't like, I don't think I like any subjects particularly, but but I didn't mind reading or arithmetic. [Laughs] Yes. I guess I like I didn't care for mathematics. I liked reading subjects more than--And writing more than mathematics. I, you know, I actually I didn't like school much because of World War II.

**Cohen:** [00:27:46] Yeah, true.

**Watanabe:** [00:27:47] It was a hostile environment. I used to have to fight kids, so it seemed like every day during World War II, I would sit in school before recess time and try to guess which kid I would have to fight during recess. [Cohen interrupts, Oh God.] You know, it wasn't a happy, wasn't a happy experience. Yeah, anyway.

**Cohen:** [00:28:13] But what about the high school years, like, you know, after the war, so on?

**Watanabe:** [00:28:17] Well, they were, They were friendlier. And as I said, you know, the kids up in Northern Michigan, weren't as racist as they were in Chicago. And a lot of that had to do with the fact that the war was over, I suppose, if not all of it did, it had to do with that. So, you know, got along well in high school. I got along well in high school And and better than I did in elementary school. And it was a friendly environment. Yeah.

**Watanabe:** [00:28:57] Yeah. And actually, I guess we didn't feel as poor in Northern Michigan as I did in Chicago because we were I always felt like we were the

poorest family in the neighborhood, you know, and and up in Michigan, I didn't feel that way.

**Cohen:** [00:29:17] Like everybody was on a level field, let's say?

**Watanabe:** [00:29:22] Yeah, pretty much although you know, in our neighborhood, we might have been one of the poorer families. But it was, you know, was a lower middle class, [unclear 29:34] neighborhood in Austin on the far West Side of Chicago.

**Cohen:** [00:29:41] Yeah. Were you involved in any activities or did you work part time in high school or--

**Watanabe:** [00:29:50] What was the first part of it?

**Cohen:** [00:29:51] Oh, were you involved in any activities or or did you work, you know, part time?

**Watanabe:** [00:30:01] Yeah, well, in high school, I actually went out for the basket-- freshman basket-- well, I guess at that time because the freshman sophomore basketball team. But in the meantime, I got a job in in the local bowling alley setting up pins. So I quit the basketball activity and which was the only one I was in, actually, I was in high school to make a little money on the job. So I worked in the bowling alley until almost three years until I left Michigan, after my junior year of high school. And outside of that, I was just activities in the neighborhood with neighbor kids and stuff like that. Nothing, no, nothing organized. Excuse me. It was a small town and didn't have, you know, any baseball, leagues, or football leagues, you know, like they have in the parks and schools among the schools in Chicago. I mean, you know, it was only one school in town.

**Cohen:** [00:31:32] So people just get together and play a game just like that. Like on the street.

**Watanabe:** [00:31:36] Neighborhood games, yeah. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [00:31:43] Okay, so you're back in Chicago and you graduate high school in June of 1953. So I think you said your foster family of one of the siblings had asked you to leave. Like, why did they ask you to leave or, you know, what was going on?

**Watanabe:** [00:32:03] Well, you know, they were-- all my foster siblings barely had enough money to feed their own--

**Cohen:** [00:32:16] Yeah.

**Watanabe:** [00:32:18] --And I was really an imposition on their livelihood.

**Cohen:** [00:32:26] Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

**Watanabe:** [00:32:29] So that's why, you know, I moved from one foster sibling to another. I think I lived with five different ones during my last year of high school.

**Cohen:** [00:32:39] Okay.

**Watanabe:** [00:32:42] And for the last semester I lived with a foster sister and her family, her husband and three sons who were all younger than me. And and they they were trying to make a living and weren't very successful at it. They moved to a small town 100 miles south of Chicago and opened a hardware store. So in the spring, I moved down there for the last semester in high school in January, say, of '53. In April or thereabouts of '53, my foster brother-in-law said, "Well, you know, our business is failing, we're going to move to Tennessee, going to try to sell this, move to Tennessee. Where are you going?" And I said, "Well, you know, I hadn't given any thought to now, but I will." Well, you know, I had a few months to finish high school, and as it turned out, they didn't move before I finished high school and they didn't move before I turned seventeen. So I stayed

with him until I was seventeen and got a little summer job after I finished high school and then moved went to Chicago, came to Chicago to join the service.

**Cohen:** [00:34:15] What were your...go on, sorry,

**Watanabe:** [00:34:16] Because that was the easiest in my way of thinking. That was, you know, that offered free room and board.

**Cohen:** [00:34:25] So [Laughs]. Well, that's true but were you concerned, you know, about the Korean War? I mean, I know I know you enlisted in September and the armistice was July, but were you nonetheless concerned about being deployed to Korea?

**Watanabe:** [00:34:46] No, no. Actually, I volunteered to go to the Far East and specifically I volunteered to go to Japan, you know, for obvious reasons. I thought...[being] Japanese. But no, I. You know, all I as I remember, all I knew was I needed a place to stay, I didn't have any other ideas, but the military saved me in a way, you know.

**Cohen:** [00:35:17] So where did you sign up?

**Watanabe:** [00:35:21] Oh, somewhere on --a recruiting office on the West Side of Chicago. I don't remember exactly where it's located, but within three days oh, you know, I turned seventeen on September 20th, and that's when I came back to Chicago and by September 24th, I was in basic training.

**Cohen:** [00:35:51] Wow! [Laughs] Oh, and and why did you choose the [US] Air Force rather than another branch of the military, say, the [US] Army or [US] Navy?

**Watanabe:** [00:36:03] Oh, well, as best I can remember, the Army sounded like more work. The Navy, I didn't want to be on a boat. So it was a elimination of what's the least or what sounded best to me was the airport. And they had nicer looking uniforms I thought, too. [both laugh]

**Cohen:** [00:36:32] I know I know it's kind of funny. I hear this a lot about uniforms. So, okay, a few days later, you're already at basic training. Is that when you're at the Sampson Air Force Base in Geneva, New York?

**Watanabe:** [00:36:48] Exactly right, and I think that was at the time a sixteen-week training course, and then I went to the technical training school at Scott Air Force Base in Southern Illinois for nine months.

**Cohen:** [00:37:05] So what was the what was the basic training like? Like how would a typical day look?

**Watanabe:** [00:37:12] A typical day? Oh, well, you know, the usual things about the military. You have to get up early in the morning, maybe they wake you by six o'clock and get into formation, march to breakfast and then do whatever activity they had planned for you during the day and march here, march there as a unit until it was over, you know. We had...some of the activities were, I guess, military history, education and bivouac and rifle range and stuff like that. And and then it was over and and I was off to Radio Repair School in Illinois.

**Cohen:** [00:38:13] So did you find it easy or hard to adapt to the discipline of military life?

**Watanabe:** [00:38:24] Well, it was a little challenging because it was so different, you know, so regimented. "Get up". Everybody gets up at a certain time, everybody does everything together at a certain time. And it took a little getting used to. But, you know, it turned out okay. I didn't get unruly or end up in the card house. [both laugh]

**Cohen:** [00:38:52] Was, how was the physical fitness training part of it? Was it challenging or not so much?

**Watanabe:** [00:39:04] Sure, yeah. I think there were challenging parts in basic training. You know, like they had maybe a three-day bivouac where you had to sleep out in a tent or something like that and do a lot of climbing around on obstacle courses and so forth and so on. But after that, after basic training, it was, outside of the regimentation, was pretty easy. You know, it wasn't like you had to march all the time or so. You just did your job. And as a matter of fact, when I got to France and reported in, it turned out we didn't have a job to do because, because they didn't --- it was kind of kind of funny. We got, when I got to -- reported into the air base in France, I found out that they had built this air base, brand new, I guess it was at that time a NATO air base in France. And then when they tested the flight line, the landing strip, it sunk in the mud so they couldn't use it for their aircraft. So they didn't have any need for, you know, radio repairmen for ground radio aircraft. So we didn't have anything to do for the first--

**Watanabe:** [00:40:44] You know, all all they told us was, "If you don't get out of the barracks by 9:00 in the morning, we'll give you a shovel. And you can dig up the dirt for the first four hours and put it back in the hole, the second four hours."

**Cohen:** [00:41:01] This was at Toul-Rosières Air Force base?

**Watanabe:** [00:41:07] Exactly.

**Cohen:** [00:41:09] Okay, okay, so just jumping back to the Sampson Air Force Base, how were you how were you assigned your M.O.S as ground radio repairman? Like did you have to take a lot of aptitude tests? How did it work?

**Watanabe:** [00:41:29] Yes. Well, that's exactly how it worked. I think while we're yeah. While we're in basic training, we took a battery of aptitude tests and then each each recruit, each of us was given a choice among three fields to choose from for training. And I guess, you know, the three fields were based on the best test results you got. And, you know, and I just chose ground radio repair because I didn't want to be up in airplanes where you might fall out or something [Cohen laughs] Something like that.

**Cohen:** [00:42:17] So so which were the which were the three fields out of curiosity?

**Watanabe:** [00:42:23] Well, as best I can remember, a second one was radar equipment repairman, heck, I don't even... the third one had something, I don't, I don't even remember what the third one was.

**Cohen:** [00:42:40] That's okay. But but you knew you didn't want to be up in the air.

**Watanabe:** [00:42:45] That's exactly right.

**Cohen:** [00:42:48] Well, when you were still at Sampson, did you have a chance to travel around the area like the Finger Lakes or upstate New York?

**Watanabe:** [00:42:58] Well, to the yeah. Yeah, well, anything to get off the base and out of the barracks. But I as I recall it, we maybe we had during the sixteen weeks, maybe the last three or four weeks, we could get a day pass, no overnight pass as I don't think. So we would go in town and and try to get served in the bars and stuff like that. What, you know, Sampson Air Force base, which was close to a small town, I don't know, if it was Geneva, New York or Ithaca or somewhere. So there wasn't much to do even when we went to town. So, but try to get served as minors in my case and stay off the grass because those people would put signs on their lawns, "Dogs and Airmen Basic: Stay off the Grass" [Laughs]

**Cohen:** [00:44:04] Oh no, they didn't want to any the unruliness on their property or something.

**Watanabe:** [00:44:11] Right.

**Cohen:** [00:44:14] So we know about President Truman's Executive Order of 1948, abolishing the strict segregation of the forces. So I'm wondering, were there Blacks and Whites in, you know, in the units that you were in and did you notice what was going on in this regard?

**Watanabe:** [00:44:37] Yeah, well, yes, I remember, you know, yeah, you have to remember I'm eighty-five years old. My memory is not the best in the world and it's not improving. But anyway, what I can remember is: In basic training, it was like a second time, I got to know any people of color and of course, it was an all-male unit, I admit, up until that time, I remember meeting one Black kid in Chicago at the Neighborhood YMCA. He didn't live in the neighborhood, but it was the closest "Y" to where he lived. So I would see him once a week for a while. But until I got in the service where the unit, the basic training I had had -- I guess I was the only Asian and maybe two or three Black kids, all the rest White. And we more or less got along. I do remember some racial incidents between the Black and White, by Black and White colleagues, classmates in basic training unit members, and I think our, I remember once the training drill for -- I don't know what the call it -- tactical instructor, who was a sergeant, he had to mediate the fighting. It was mostly White, White racists who started the fighting with them and in some cases trying to gang up on a couple of Black colleagues. But when basic training was over, there was also after that and in various units after that, after I served in there, you know, there was some racial hostility, all the... I was in one, two, three different locations in Europe. And in all three there was [racial hostility]. There was not a lot of racial animosity, but occasional animosity.

**Watanabe:** [00:47:37] And, you know, I, I got along with folks, but some of the Whites and some boys, and that's usually the way I recall it happened, some of the Whites, especially some from the southern states of the United States, would provoke fights with the Black colleagues and even some of the officers. I remember in Germany, in the last place I was stationed, there was a Black lieutenant in charge of a radio repair component of, you know, the squadron. And he was he was kind of prejudiced towards any of the Black radio mechanics.

**Watanabe:** [00:48:42] But he had -- to the point to, you know, of kind of giving them the short end of the assignments and so forth. But, you know, that's the way it went.

**Cohen:** [00:48:58] Did you find animosity towards you as an Asian when you were in the service or, no, like once the World War II was over, it was over terms of attitude?

**Watanabe:** [00:49:09] Oh, by and large, it was the latter by the end of World War II and and shortly after that, it was pretty much over. But every once in a, very infrequently, I'd get some kind of racial anti-Japanese comment from somebody in the unit or something like that. But, you know, it was nothing to be worried about as far as as far as I was concerned.

**Cohen:** [00:49:42] So I think you said that at the Scott Air Force Base. It was quite a long.... Quite a long course. Like nine months was--?

**Watanabe:** [00:49:51] Yes, yes.

**Cohen:** [00:49:52] I was also reading that it has a reputation as being the communications university of the Army Air Forces or there's a slogan, "The best damn radio operators in the world." So it was a sort of known for, you know, for radios either operations or or repair...?

**Watanabe:** [00:50:11] Yeah, I think it was as far as I can remember, it was only radio repair. [Cohen interrupts: Oh, okay]. I think operators went to a different training, but again, my memory is not the best

**Cohen:** [00:50:29] Oh, it seems vivid to me.

**Watanabe:** [00:50:32] Yeah. Yeah. I don't remember it being touted at that time as the best anything. Of course, it was you know, they told me to go there, I had chosen it, so, you know, I went. Actually, I thought, you know, thirty-six weeks of training was a lot of a lot of investment for the Air Force to put it into one person's training.

**Cohen:** [00:51:02] Which courses did you take? Like, how was it run?

**Watanabe:** [00:51:08] Well, from it was the very basics, like, you know, some like electronic terminology to, you know, to how to...repair a radio without electrocuting yourself. It's very, very rudimentary introduction steps that, you know, "This is a radio. This is what the inside looks like. This is how you take it apart". And step by step until we learned how to actually repair or, you know, they would, they would create problems in inside the radio equipment. And then you had to troubleshoot and figure them out. So, yeah, it was good training I, I think.

**Cohen:** [00:52:12] Yes. Sounds like it. Did the radios you tend to use AM or FM?

**Watanabe:** [00:52:20] Yeah, there were, yeah, AM, FM ground to air, ground to ground, whatever. And there were actually in that training facility, I think everyone went through the same elementary steps in the training for I don't know, maybe-- if the full course of thirt-six weeks for maybe the first twenty weeks or something like that, and then and then the group got split up into those who wanted to learn how to fix airplane radios and those who wanted to fix ground radio. And so we separated at that point into two different types of training, specialized training.

**Cohen:** [00:53:18] So I assume you wanted to work on the ground radios?

**Watanabe:** [00:53:23] Yeah, yeah. I had one. I didn't want to as you said before, I didn't want to fly around very much. As a matter of fact, the only military flight I ever got on was what they used to offer free military transportation to when you took a leave in Europe that, you just had to sign up and space available, you got to go, you know, where you wanted to go on vacation. So I signed up once and only once, and they canceled the flight. I took trains from then on, private trains.

**Cohen:** [00:54:09] When when you were in Europe...? What would you do when you had to leave from the Scott Air Force Base? Where would you go and how would you get there?

**Watanabe:** [00:54:21] Oh, well, Scott, I never took a leave because, well, I don't think, actually, I don't think we're allowed to because our training was Monday through Friday as I remember and sometimes get guard duty assignments on the weekend. So I don't think you could take a leave during training. But after that and, you know, when you got a permanent assignment, you could take leave. And and as for me, that meant once I got to Europe, I could take, I think...I don't remember how much time we got each year, two weeks or a month or something anyway. So I took trips just, you know, tourist travel trips to other European countries and so forth. And then off duty hours or, you know, we'd hang out in town and see how much beer we could drink and stuff like that.

**Cohen:** [00:55:35] Were the radios that you were using both in training and later, were they considered like the cutting edge of technology at the time?

**Watanabe:** [00:55:49] Well, in during our training, I don't think, we got that they weren't cutting edge, the pieces of equipment, but, you know, they were they were older. They were older pieces of equipment, but, you know, you learn the basics of that kind of stuff and then when you got out in the field, assigned a permanent assignment and then you had to work on whatever they were using. And in some cases, I'm in the ground or radio equipment. The stuff was up to date and in other cases it might have been a little little old or something like that. But it was an easy job, actually, because there usually wasn't much that went wrong with the equipment. It was kept in pretty good shape. You did what was called preventive maintenance, you know, was like you do with a car. You do the basics to keep it going until it wears out and then you replace it.

**Cohen:** [00:57:02] Oh, okay. So they expect...So it wasn't hard and the expectation was to keep the radios in good shape, I guess.

**Watanabe:** [00:57:10] Yeah. Yeah, that was basically it. And, and where I was assigned usually that was most important with it was the ground to air communications radios.

**Cohen:** [00:57:25] So where were you assigned to after you were at the Scott Air Force Base?

**Watanabe:** [00:57:32] Where was I signed?

**Cohen:** [00:57:34] Yeah, like, did you go next to the 619th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron at Toul-Rosières Air Force Base in France? Or did I miss a step?

**Watanabe:** [00:57:48] I'm having trouble.

**Cohen:** [00:57:50] Oh, sorry, sorry, I'll talk up, excuse me, after--

**Watanabe:** [00:57:55] It's not the volume, it's, I guess this telephone, I have is poor quality. It's a sound quality. Well, okay, so--

**Cohen:** [00:58:07] So after Scott Air Force Base, where did you go next?

**Watanabe:** [00:58:13] Okay, that was... I went directly to Toul-Rosières Air Force Base in France. And as I mentioned earlier, excuse me, we didn't have anything that we didn't have any anything to do, any mission there, because, you know, they couldn't use aircraft at the Air Force base. So we just sort of we didn't do much of nothing, to tell you the truth. We would be assigned to go out on an eight-hour shift and in, and keep ground to ground practice, radio communication. And that what that meant was we would sit in this remoted truck that had ground to ground radio equipment in it, and every hour one person per truck and every hour on the hour, we would pick up the transmitter microphone and call another truck and say, "Can you hear me?". And they'd say, 'Yeah, can you hear me?' And [we'd] say, "Yeah, okay." And then we do it again each hour for eight hours. And I think, I don't even know if they did it twenty-four hours a day. So that's about all we had to do for a year--[Cohen interrupts for a year?]

**Watanabe:** [00:59:49] Yeah. And then they broke that unit up, actually transferred it to a place in a small Air Air Force unit location just across the Saarbrücken border

into Germany, where they had Ground to Air communication network. And then we were we were assigned to to maintain the ground air equipment, radio equipment there. And again, but this was for real. I mean, there were they actually had ground to air radio operators and radar operators, stationed there. And we were their maintenance backup. But in my case, with the radio equipment and they kept in communications with with aircraft flying over U.S. aircraft lying over Germany.

**Cohen:** [01:00:59] Was this when you were based in Freising, in Bavaria and you were then part of this 604th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron?

**Watanabe:** [01:01:11] Now, this is and I guess I didn't mention that in my application, this was an interim period between France and Freising. And then, I think it was close to a year of that interim assignment, some of us were were sent to other places because we had too many of the same -- I don't know what to call it-- the same job level at this interim place. So I, I was sent with two or three other ground radio repairman to Freising, and that's why I spent the last So I think the last year or so down around Munich.

**Cohen:** [01:02:04] So, where in Germany were you during this interim time?

**Watanabe:** [01:02:10] Well, all I remember was, is that it was right across the French border into Germany. And I don't even know what part of Germany what it was about an hour and a half train ride from Frankfurt wherever Frankfurt was.

**Cohen:** [01:02:35] Okay, so, okay, so so when you're there, I think you said that was already real communications between ground and aircraft. I guess I was wondering, did the radios, what were they using their radios for direction finding like to discover where a signal was broadcast from or--

**Watanabe:** [01:03:02] Well, no, not to my knowledge, but at my level, you know, I didn't know much about what was going on besides what I did, you know, fourteen

hours. And a lot of the time it was just sitting around because the radios were kept in pretty good shape. So we didn't have much to do.

**Cohen:** [01:03:28] If something was broken, was it easy to get spare parts?

**Watanabe:** [01:03:34] Usually, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't ever remember there being any problem with that. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:03:46] So how are you getting your news? Like would you get the *Stars and Stripes* or listen to -- I forget [the name of] -- the Army radio station, *The Armed Forces Radio*?

**Watanabe:** [01:03:58] Yeah, yeah. That's that's a you know, that's about all I remember besides if you wanted to listen to music, you know, German on German Radio stations, or French radio Station. But most of what I remember listening to was either AM/FM or or looking at the *Stars and Stripes*. I mean, you know, I guess some guys would subscribe To U.S. newspapers or somehow get them. But but I you know, Not me, I just listened to radio or or look at the military newspaper.

**Cohen:** [01:04:48] So you were in Europe during, let's say, an interesting time, you know, the establishment of the Warsaw Pact between the Soviet Union and the seven other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. So my question is like, did you feel a little bit concerned when you were based in Germany? You know, not too far from Austria, where they're both Soviet and NATO forces like--? Or no, you felt fine?

**Watanabe:** [01:05:21] All, as best I can remember. I just I was just very comfortable. I don't remember, except maybe very infrequently hearing about some, you know, some precautionary instructions given out by the people in charge. But I would I don't ever remember getting worried about being either in Germany or France while I was there.

**Cohen:** [ 01:05:54] Yeah.

**Watanabe:** [01:05:54] I mean, you know, the biggest battle I can remember worrying about was that Ogara [unclear word at 1:06] the battle of the gast haus, that meant drink the most beer or something like that to--

**Cohen:** [01:06:13] --To win the battle. [laughs].

**Watanabe:** [01:06:16] So it's really pretty easy living. I mean, you know, I thought I had more or less a pretty pretty nice, free...paid vacation for three years.

**Cohen:** [01:06:33] And it sounds like despite some racial problems, was there a sense of camaraderie for the most part or--?

**Watanabe:** [01:06:44] For the most part. There were individual exceptions, but for the most part, we got along. You know, I think we probably realized maybe everyone realized we were all in the same boat. We all volunteered. You know, nobody -- we weren't required to be where we were except that once you sign up, you agree to play by the rules, you know?

**Cohen:** [01:07:09] Yes. Do you remember at what point you were I think you were promoted to first, um, first airman [i.e., rank of Airman First Class]?

**Watanabe:** [01:07:22] How promotions worked?

**Cohen:** [01:07:24] Yeah, yeah.

**Watanabe:** [01:07:27] Well, In the Air Force at the time, you know, you you signed up after you finished basic training, you were given one stripe and called, titled Airman Third Class. I guess it was. Then after, in my case, in ground radio repair, after you finish that training, if you maintained a certain numerical score average during the course of your thirty-six-week training, you got a second stripe and were awarded that you were promoted to an Airman Second Class. And that happened to me. And then after that, it was just like the luck of the draw. You

know, as far as I know, it depended on how many promotions were available, how many were assigned to your unit, as opposed to any other Air Force unit or any other type of unit that you were in, like I guess, Air Force control and warning units or something like that. And in particular the 619th [Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron] as far as I can remember, was overstaffed. And so they, they didn't give much-- and they got the short end of the promotion opportunities. So it took a long time to get our ground radio repairman promotion, the Airman First Class.

**Cohen:** [01:09:09] Oh, okay...

**Watanabe:** [01:09:11] And more specifically, I think we just you know, you just incrementally went up on the list as others got to the top of the list, got promoted. Eventually I got promoted after I think, close to...close to three years, I think, by then.

**Cohen:** [01:09:39] Okay, so a progression, you know, yeah, yeah.

**Watanabe:** [01:09:41] Yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:09:46] I was reading that there had been a lot of maneuvers at Freising, were you involved with them? Like, did you have to go on vans that had radios or trucks that had radios, as part of maneuvers and practices?

**Watanabe:** [01:10:02] Well, I don't remember going on more than a couple of them. And I can't really tell you what we did because I can't remember--

**Cohen:** [01:10:10] [Laughs] That's okay]

**Watanabe:** [01:10:14] Outside of maybe having to drive trucks with radio equipment and set it up, set them up out in the field somewhere. It wasn't, you know, it wasn't terribly difficult. I don't remember ever having to camp out with the equipment or anything.

**Cohen:** [01:10:35] Yeah, like more, bring it over. So so did you enjoy being in Bavaria? Like you mentioned going out for beer. Like was it, you know, good quality beer, you know? What was it like for you, in terms of--?

**Watanabe:** [01:10:54] Oh you know, it was, it was very easy living all things considered. You got you got a little money; I think. I think while I was in Freising, I think my pay was like \$140.00 a month, something like that. But, you know, you got you didn't have any rent. You didn't have to buy any food if you didn't want to. You know, as as a, you got a place to stay. You got your, you know, meals and so forth and so on. And you got enough money to enjoy yourself with.

**Cohen:** [01:11:38] Yeah. Yeah. And did you did you live in barracks or did you, were you billeted in people's homes?

**Watanabe:** [01:11:46] Yeah, usually it was barracks. I think a couple of times I had short assignments, assignments living in--oh, I don't know-- like once there was a Quonset hut and so forth but nothing, nothing that was any real hardship.

**Cohen:** [01:12:11] That's good. When were you discharged from the Army?

**Watanabe:** [01:12:16] Well, I I was discharged from somewhere in--

**Cohen:** [01:12:24] [interrupts] -- I mean the Air Force, yeah.

**Watanabe:** [01:12:29] Well, I'm having trouble remembering. We came back, we got flown back to New York and somewhere around New York or New Jersey or somewhere. We were we were discharged within a couple days after we got back. I don't even remember where it was. I just remember getting off the airplane, getting on of a military operated bus, taken somewhere and and waiting a couple of days for the paperwork to be finished. And then I came back to Chicago, on my own.

**Cohen:** [01:13:10] Had you been in touch with anybody while you were overseas? Like, did you write letters to anybody?

**Watanabe:** [01:13:18] Oh, yeah. Some of my foster family, I would write very infrequently and my brother, every once while I'd write to him and other friends. But I was pretty much on my own by the time I went into the military, and I didn't have much contact with family...

**Cohen:** [01:13:50] What--sorry, go on.

**Watanabe:** [01:13:51] Well, but when I got back to Chicago, I stayed with some foster siblings off and on and well, I got back in August of '57, I stayed with the foster sister and her husband. You have to understand, I was basically an imposition on any of them because they didn't have extra bedrooms or, you know, extra money just to support anybody staying with them. So I tried to not be impose on them for any longer than I could figure something else to get on my own. So I got discharged in August of '57, I stayed with a foster sister and husband had worked in the neighborhood post U.S. Post Office from September until January of the following year and then I started college.

**Cohen:** [01:14:55] So where where did you go to college?

**Watanabe:** [01:14:58] Well, I started off down Champaign Urbana, again, basically, because, you know, it was easier for me to live on a campus somewhere else and try to find the money for rent and rent independently and all that. So anyway, so that's why I chose [as i did] and Illinois was a state school, of course, and it was the cheapest place I could find to go.

**Cohen:** [01:15:29] Were you able to use the GI Bill for--

**Watanabe:** [01:15:32] Oh, sure. That that's the only reason I got to go to college was, you know, at the time they paid \$110.00 a month. And that was enough for me to pay the tuition and room and board and whatever. And then in the meantime,

I'd get a part time campus job or something. Yeah. So I you know, I stayed there and changed schools every once in a while. I mean I went to nine different colleges.

**Cohen:** [01:16:11] Oh. How come?

**Watanabe:** [01:16:14] Well, I kept changing my mind about what I wanted to major in and so forth. So for the first three, the first three semesters, I stayed in school, Champagne Urbana, and would work in summers in Chicago and stay with a Boston relative and try to save a little money and go back to school and then after the first three semesters, I moved back to Chicago and went to junior college, City College, for a year to take pre—general course requirements, and then after that, I went to dental school at University of Illinois in Chicago for a semester and found out that I didn't like that and then I went back to college at what we then called Navy Pier before UIC was open. And then after that, I went there a semester. And then after that I went back to Champaign Urbana, and for three more semesters and finished college.

**Cohen:** [01:17:36] So what did you graduate in?

**Watanabe:** [01:17:40] I graduated with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and of course, there were no jobs for people in the Chicago Tribune with bachelor's degrees in philosophy. So I took a job in social work, which I thought I might like. And I did work for the Illinois Department of Mental Health for a year and a half. And then they paid my way to go to social work school for two years and I went to: first year at Loyola in Chicago, second year at the University of Chicago, and then I owed the state two years of employment for sending me to school. So I worked for a mental health department for two years after that.

**Cohen:** [01:18:35] Oh, so did you find you liked social work?

**Watanabe:** [01:18:39] Yeah, I did. In looking back at it, I figured, well, the social programs that kept me alive for, you know, if you count foster care and the military... Or

foster care, my foster parents got welfare payments for me as a kid when I was a kid. And then in the military, you know, they they fed and clothed and paid me a salary and then college, they got me the GI Bill... I figured, you know, the government had helped me out all my life. So maybe I, I would try to help other people take advantage and the opportunities they need that were offered to them.

**Cohen:** [01:19:31] It's almost like you're giving back.

**Watanabe:** [01:19:33] Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Yeah, right. Yeah, you're right. So, you know, that's where I landed and and did social work until I retired twenty years ago.

**Cohen:** [01:19:51] Did you marry or have children or--

**Watanabe:** [01:19:55] Oh, yeah, yeah, I got married to a woman I met in social work school first year and we had two kids. We got married in 1960s, December of 1966 and we had a daughter in 1968 and a son in 1970. Our daughter died in 2018.

**Cohen:** [01:20:20] Oh.

**Watanabe:** [01:20:23] We're still married. And our son is still by in Chicago. And, you know, life turned out very nice, nicely.

**Cohen:** [01:20:35] Very nicely.

**Watanabe:** [01:20:36] Yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:20:38] Um, do you think that your service in the military helped prepare you for civilian life in any way?

**Watanabe:** [01:20:50] Yeah, well, it helped me, it helped me figure out that I didn't want to stay in the military the rest of my life and it offered me the educational opportunities on the GI Bill. And and it was a I guess, a way to just figure out

what to do next. Because, you know, when I finished high school, I didn't have a clue. All I knew was, you know, I needed a place to stay and a job. Well, the Air Force s gave me both.

**Cohen:** [01:21:42] Is there anything else you'd like to mention about your career in social work?

**Watanabe:** [01:21:50] Well, I guess overall, in retrospect, it was it was it was satisfying and gratifying and I ended up thinking, you know, I did what I could do to, as I said, to find find people who who needed opportunities to take advantage of all public programs, including military, like I did.

**Cohen:** [01:22:24] Yes.

**Watanabe:** [01:22:27] So I'm very grateful for all that help.

**Cohen:** [01:22:31] Did you ever join any veteran organizations?

**Watanabe:** [01:22:36] Well, no. You know, I the only thing I joined was when I started college in Urbana, I was living in the dormitory that was run by the Catholic Church. And in that dormitory, they had a veteran's group. And it was the only place where you could get [alcohol], you know, Champaign Urbana was dry from alcohol on Sundays. So it was the only place where we could give beer on Sundays [both laugh] and it was a social group. So it was fun, too but that's the that's the only veterans group I ever joined.

**Cohen:** [01:23:34] Oh...I'm trying to think, is there a moment that you're most proud of from the time of your service?

**Watanabe:** [01:23:49] Most proud of. While I was in the service?

**Cohen:** [01:23:51] Yeah.

**Watanabe:** [01:23:59] I think the only thing that comes to mind is when I was in Freising with the 619th, we used to work shiftwork to ground radio mechanics. And so we so we rotated, sometimes you did eight hour day shift, eight hour, you know, like five to five at night to five in the morning shift, something like that. And each we took we took turns, rotating shifts, and we were all working in sub groups of four radio mechanics, and one was what one person was in charge of each shift. And for a while at the end, I was in charge of one shift. And one night I, I said I took off the ship. It was my birthday, and I wanted to go in town and party and I left one of the other three guys in charge and the lieutenant over the unit found out that I didn't work that night and he called me and asked me why and I don't. I said, well, you know, it was my birthday. So others I had been doing it. I didn't say that. But so I said, "We don't have much work to do. The equipment's in good shape, you know that." And and I said," We didn't do any harm, you know that."

**Cohen:** [01:25:45] Yes.

**Watanabe:** [01:25:46] Well, the person I left in charge was a Black guy. And and so then he went after the Black guy and said, "You took part in this, you're not going to get promoted." Well, it was obvious to me, it was a racist thing for the lieutenant to do...And so I told them I told them what I thought, "I think, you know, I think you're being unfair, you're being racist. You know, if you should punish someone, you should punish me. You didn't punish me. So why should you punish him?" Well, that was the end of it. That was an [unclear word]. Well, but that's the only thing I can be proud of, I guess. I didn't save any war from starting or whatever. [both laugh]

**Cohen:** [01:26:41] But I think it's all part of the puzzle...Like it's all necessary. You know, if, you know what I mean, like things aren't going to go far off if the radios aren't working. Do you know what I mean - it's all necessary.

**Watanabe:** [01:26:56] Right, right. Yeah. Yeah.

**Cohen:** [01:27:01] Up at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library is dedicated to collecting stories and artifacts of, so to speak, the Citizen Soldier. What does this term mean to you?

**Watanabe:** [01:27:20] Well, I guess what it brings to mind is that, you know, with each individual lives in a country of choice. And if you choose to live here, you should go along with what the expectations and requirements of your being a citizen. And if one of those turns out to be either voluntarily or involuntarily serving in the military, then you serve in the military and you do it, do what you're told, and you do it to the best of your ability. I don't know that I'd always did things to the best of my ability because I thought part of the time what was, what was expected of me was was kind of busy work and silly, you know, like digging ditches, and something like just so we had something to do. But but anyway, you know, I didn't break through and didn't try to start a revolutionary coup against the military.

**Cohen:** [01:28:31] And it sounds like you did your repair work, you know, you gave it your your all...

**Watanabe:** [01:28:39] Sure, sure. And it wasn't, you know, and the expectations weren't all that difficult. To me as far as I was concerned, because there was no war going on. You know, we were just keeping things running, that's all.

**Cohen:** [01:28:57] Well, here's maybe -- I don't know if it's really relevant -- but maybe I'm curious, I'm wondering like what was the motivation of your foster parents to have a foster child? Like, did they like having a lot of children at home? You know, what was their reasoning?

**Watanabe:** [01:29:19] As far as I can recall, they were poor. The father didn't work. He made the first two oldest when he made his own two kids quit high school and get a job because he didn't work. He didn't want to work.

**Cohen:** [01:29:38] Oh.

**Watanabe:** [01:29:40] So they needed money. They the doctor I mentioned earlier in This conversation, he's on that opportunity with the understanding that my [biological] mother would pay room and board if they kept me. Well. So they agreed on that basis. Then she disappeared by the time I was three or four years old and never...She disappeared having left a record of not paying what she had promised to pay them all the time and they couldn't find her. So it came down to, they found out that if they made took me legally as a foster child, they could get child welfare payments for me. And that's probably the only way they could have could have afforded to keep me.

**Watanabe:** [01:30:43] Yeah. Yeah. Because they were hand-to-mouth economically living hand-to-mouth economically as family. So, you know, that's how it happened. But in addition to that, they they as I said before, again, they treated me as one of their own like I was one of their kids.

**Cohen:** [01:31:07] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Watanabe:** [01:31:11] They were never abusive or neglectful or anything like that. So I--

**Cohen:** [01:31:19] Yeah. I know what you mean - they took care of you, you know. Yeah.

**Watanabe:** [01:31:22] Yeah, yeah. Between them and economic and service provided through the public sector, it worked out.

**Cohen:** [01:31:36] Well is there something that you would like to add that we did not discuss today?

**Watanabe:** [01:31:45] Well I was just wondering what's in the future for the information you collect?

**Cohen:** [01:31:52] Oh, okay. So what we do is our next step would be to prepare a transcript of the interview and we would also do a short write up and send them

back to you for your for your review. We would get it ready for the website and the production team would edit the interview and, and there would ultimately be a web page so that people could access it, you know, the both the the write-up and the recording. The other thing is, like, if you have some copies of of photos of yourself while in the service, you know, could even be just like three or four, you know, that that would be great, too, because just to give a picture of what you were like or what the environment was like, you know, when when you were in the Air Force.

**Watanabe:** [01:32:58] Well, I'm sorry. I look, I looked, I don't have a single picture.

**Cohen:** [01:33:03] Well, that's okay. That's okay. They they often would just use pictures, like, of the Air Force itself or-- That's that's fine.

**Watanabe:** [01:33:12] Yeah, okay. So this is all made as public information - will...end up being public information?

**Cohen:** [01:33:23] Yes. Because it'll be part of the the website, it means that anybody could could access it.

**Watanabe:** [01:33:32] Okay, now the information on individuals identifies them by name?

**Cohen:** [01:33:41] It does, it does. Is that is that, is that okay?

**Watanabe:** [01:33:47] Yeah, I got nothing.

**Cohen:** [01:33:49] Okay. Yeah, because, like, that's sort of like the effect [when] one since the standard release form because, you know, you know, it is saying that it will be made public. Sometimes, let's say the museum will use excerpts of oral histories too like, for example, where we had the D-Day exhibit, we had a few excerpts of or oral histories of veterans who are part of the D-Day, you know, itself. So, so so those are the kinds of uses as well as anybody could could could look at it and read it. The other thing is that that you are welcome to have two

copies of of DVD, if you wish, or if you'd like me to send you the the audio recording, the MP3, you know, you're you're welcome to that, as well. If we say to people if they'd like more than two DVDs, then if they could please make a five-dollar donation for each additional copy.

**Watanabe:** [01:34:56] Yeah, okay. Well, we'll see what happens after I look at the transcript.

**Cohen:** [01:35:05] Sure, sure. Sure. Absolutely. Can decide later. That's right. And please be patient with us to, to, to get it done.

**Watanabe:** [01:35:12] Okay. No problem. Yeah. Well, it's, it's been a pleasure talking with you.

**Cohen:** [01:35:19] It was it was a pleasure talking with you too. And thank you so much for your service. And on behalf of -- even though it was a comfortable service nonetheless--on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library, we will be sending you a challenge coin as a token of our thanks. I'll either send in the mail or give it to [COL] Ken [Yoshitani], who'll be here next week with another veteran and ask him to pass it on to you.

**Watanabe:** [01:35:50] Okay, great.

**Cohen:** [01:35:52] Okay, thanks. Thanks again.

**Watanabe:** [01:35:55] Okay, good luck.

**Cohen:** [01:35:56] Good luck. Bye now.