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BASEBALL, RACE AND LOS ANGELES  
AN ORAL HISTORY OF NEGRO LEAGUERS IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Joseph Brown

Interviewed by La'Tonya Rease Miles

Completed under the auspices  
of the  
Center for Oral History Research  
University of California  
Los Angeles

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Joseph Brown is a resident of San Diego, California. He played sports in high school and had an interest in the Negro League. After high school, Brown joined the National Guard and eventually entered the construction industry in San Diego.

## INTERVIEW HISTORY

### INTERVIEWER:

La'Tonya Rease Miles; B.A., English Literature and Literature, University of Maryland, College Park; M.A., English, University of California, Los Angeles; Ph.D., English, University of California, Los Angeles.

### TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

**Place:** Brown's home in San Diego, California

**Total number of recorded hours:** 2 hours

**Persons present during interview:** Brown and Miles

### CONDUCT AND PROCESSING OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is one in a series entitled *Baseball, Race, and Los Angeles: An Oral History of Negro Leaguers of Southern California*. The series documents the lives of Negro League baseball players whose careers spanned the heyday of the league (1920s-1950s) and who currently reside in Southern California. It is hoped that the series will provide a better understanding of the important role Southern California played in the racial politics of baseball and that baseball played for African Americans in Los Angeles.

The interview is organized chronologically beginning with the migration of Brown's family to San Diego and his early education. It continues with the sports he played and interest in the Negro Leagues. Brown discusses his military service; the Japanese internment; his experiences with discrimination and the vocations he undertook.

Patrick Keilty, editorial assistant, compiled the table of contents, biographical summary and interview history. Miles provided the proper names and terms entered in brackets in the text. Brown did not review the transcript and therefore some proper names may remain unverified.

#### SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Library's Center for Oral History Research.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 10, 2004

MILES: Today is December 10<sup>th</sup>, and my name is La'Tonya Rease Miles here interviewing Mr. Joseph [Phillip] Brown in his home in San Diego.

How are you feeling?

BROWN: Fine.

MILES: That's good. All right. Let's begin. Tell me when and where were you born.

BROWN: I was born here in San Diego the first of July 1930. My parents came here after my father, who was a Buffalo Soldier in the old days, and evidently when he came through San Diego on his way to the Philippines during the War of 1898, I believe, after he was discharged after a career in the army, he went to Virginia and married my mother. Instead of farming in Virginia, he came to San Diego and raised a family. I'm the fourth of nine children. There was four boys and five girls, and I'm the second oldest boy. I have five sisters. Right now there are, I believe, six— Let's see. There's five survivors out of the nine children now. I lost the youngest one of the four boys about two years ago.

I attended Logan Elementary School and Memorial Junior High School, which is called Memorial Academy [Charter School] now, and San Diego High School. I attended a year and a half of San Diego City College. I was interested in sports, and I guess ever since I've been about eight or nine years old, I used to hang out at the playgrounds a lot. There was a fellow there by the name of Henry Manley, and he was working with the



YMCA at the time. During the summertime, we used to go walking to different businesses like the bakery, candy shops and etc., and they would give us donuts and candy. There was a fellow that was working with the city at the time, and he asked this fellow what he was going to do when he graduated, and he said he wasn't sure yet. He said, "Well, since you're working so well with children, especially the boys, why don't you get on the with City [San Diego] Parks and Recreation." And he did. So that a way, I had access to a lot of things that they had to offer at the playgrounds; softball, baseball, football. We had what we called a two-hand touch team, and later on we played a ten-inch, I believe it was, but it was almost a little larger than a baseball, and I was the pitcher and a catcher.

When I got into high school, I made the varsity team, and on the off-season during the summertime, we had a sandlot team here. One of them was the PALs, the Police Athletic League, and I happened to know the father of one of the police officers that was in charge of the Police Athletic League, and we played for him for a while.

Then we got a black fellow by the name of Mr. Gibson—

MILES: Okay. Before you jump in there, can we go back some more, way, way back?

BROWN: Okay.

MILES: I want to know about— Where did your father move from?

BROWN: Oh, they're from Virginia.

MILES: But where in Virginia?

BROWN: My mother from Farmsdale, and evidently my father was somewhere close by. Anyway, he knew my mother, and like I said, he came through San Diego on his way to the Philippines during the Spanish-American War, and he was a Buffalo Soldier. He

was stationed at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, which is now an army signal communication base now. I was there once when he was ill. He was staying in Douglas, Arizona, and everybody down there, the soldiers, they still addressed each other by rank. It so happened my father was a sergeant. But anyway, whenever they got ill, they'd send them to what they call Fort Bayard Veterans Hospital, and right next to it was the Veterans Cemetery. [Lieutenant General Andrew T.] McNamara, he happened to close that VA Hospital they had there in Fort Bayard, New Mexico, and after that, I was going to have my father transferred up here, but since he was there with his other Buffalo Soldiers from the old days, I decided I'd let him stay there with them, because that's where he went to be with them. At the same time, we didn't know he had cancer, and that way it was one of his ways of concealing his condition. He would write to us every month, send us money every month.

But after that, like I said, he was discharged after thirty years in the army. He went to Virginia and he married my mother, and they had one daughter, my oldest sister. Well, the oldest one in the family, she was born there, and they brought her out here when she was about five or six months old. Like I said, he came to California or San Diego because evidently he liked the weather here when they were here. Instead of staying in Virginia and farming, he came to San Diego, and instead of farming, he raised a family here.

MILES: Did he ever tell you what his experience was like as a Buffalo Soldier?

BROWN: Yes. It was pretty rough in those days in the military, and a famous general was a lieutenant when they were stationed at Fort Huachuca, General [George S.] Patton, and he was a great follower of Patton during World War II, and he often spoke of Patton,

you know. But he didn't speak too much of his military time there, but he did mention Patton, and he was a follower of Patton during World War II, and of course I did the same.

But he enjoyed us playing sports. My brother was hurt playing football once, and he said to stop playing football. But you know hard-headed kids, we continued to play it. During lunchtime where he worked, they always talked about the Brown brothers and they always said, "Well, too bad they're not your boys."

So they had our pictures in the papers once, and they showed them to him once, and he says, "Well, that's my son," or, "Those are my sons." [mutual laughter] Anyway, he came home and all you could see was teeth, he was so happy. He says, "Well, that was one time I'll excuse you for not minding what I told you not to play." But after that, he was a great— Followed us in sports.

MILES: Now, as far as you know, he moved to San Diego for the weather?

BROWN: Well, I think so, because evidently— I don't know the date they went over there, but evidently it was a sunny day like it is now, and evidently something impressed him. He came back, traveled all the way from Virginia on the train. My sister, I think she was about five or six months old, they wouldn't let her travel when she was small, my mother's mother. But anyway, we settled here in 1924.

MILES: That's when they came?

BROWN: Yes, 1924.

MILES: And you were born in 19—

BROWN: 1930.

MILES: What was San Diego like at that time?

BROWN: Well, let's see. Since we had a lot of white southerners here—

MILES: White southerners?

BROWN: Yes. They settled in San Joaquin Valley in the Central California and in El Centro, and some of them came here to San Diego and their habits. But we didn't have to sit in the back of the bus. We could sit anywhere we wanted to in the theaters. But some of your hotels wouldn't let you stay there. They had black workers at that time.

During the World War II, there are people here that fought discrimination. Mr. and Mrs. Young and Mrs. Behren.

MILES: Who are they?

BROWN: They were people that had—he was a printer, Mr. Young. He had a small black newspaper.

MILES: He was an African American man.

BROWN: African American. Mrs. Behren, she was a politician and also owned a nightclub and also printed a paper. They used to write about the discrimination and so forth in the South at that time in the forties and the fifties. They're all gone now, but we've got new fighters here. But there's been a big difference here, but every now and then you run into something that will make the papers, the local newspapers. We don't have but one or two black papers here. One was *The Voice and Viewpoint* and the other one's *The Monitor*.

MILES: Are they currently—

BROWN: They're currently in business, yes, and the largest one's *The View and Viewpoint*. It comes out on Thursdays, and it's like a regular newspaper once a week. They cover the teenagers real good during football season, also during Little League, Pop

Warner and Little League, yes. They devote almost a whole section to them, and that's one of the better things because the kids get to read about themselves.

MILES: Now, did you ever go back to Virginia when you were a young man?

BROWN: I have never—I went there two years ago. We had a family reunion.

MILES: That was your first time?

BROWN: First time back there. My mother went back there during the fifties with my baby sister and visited all her folks. Some years ago, I forget now which one we are, but anyway, we were back in Springfield, Massachusetts. I can't get used to this new tooth I got. [mutual laughter] But anyway, someone found my baby sister's address and phone number, and they told them they were having a family reunion of the Austin family. That's on my mother's side. Nobody was able to go but my wife and I since we were back there at that time. It was a week later. So we changed our airline flight and got a hop to New Jersey, and that was the first time I met some cousins. Boy, I'll tell you, they look almost like my sisters and brothers. But anyway, I met Herman and Gladys Austin and, like I say, we took a hop from Springfield, Massachusetts—that tooth gets in the way—to New Jersey. Anyway, they were coming in the hospitality room, and this fellow came in there with this MCRD [Marine Corps Recruit Depot] jersey on. I said, "Oh, you're retired from— Been in the Marines, huh?"

He says, "Yeah. I made a career of it."

I says, "Really? Where were you stationed?"

He says, "Oh, Camp Pendleton and MCRD."

I said, "Did you ever live off base?"

He says, "Yeah."

I said, "Where'd you stay?"

"National City, what is it, Euclid [Avenue] and Division?"

I said, "Man, you're less than a half a mile from me." And we never knew it.

MILES: Was this a relative of yours?

BROWN: A cousin, yes, and we never knew it. So anyway, he had a couple of kids, and his present wife at that time, she was pregnant. But anyway, that was something. And his oldest daughter, she graduated from [Samuel FB] Morse High School, the same as my two children did.

MILES: That's here in San Diego?

BROWN: In San Diego, yes. But it was really something to find out I had a cousin less than a quarter of a mile and we never knew it. We didn't know each other.

MILES: Yes, to meet over in New Jersey or whatever.

BROWN: New Jersey at a family reunion. But since then, we communicate and everything. We had our first reunion here in San Diego in 2001 or 2002. I guess it was 2001. All right, my memory's going. [mutual laughter]

But anyway, they really got a kick out of San Diego. Some of them had been here to Los Angeles but never came to San Diego. But they really enjoyed San Diego. I rented a bus, a tour bus, and my son was the tour guide, more or less. I told him where to take them because I wanted them to see what I wanted them to see. But anyway, they really enjoyed it, and I had a nice program made out, a pamphlet that they took home. I'll probably let you see it if I can get my hands on it. But anyway, they told about us in our young years when we were kids, you know. I was about, oh, four, five years old, I

guess, and then we had pictures of us as we were adults. I told them about my mother and my father.

MILES: What were your parents' names, by the way, their names?

BROWN: My mother was Louise Brown and my father was Henry R. Brown.

MILES: Did they ever talk to you about Virginia or what it was like?

BROWN: No. My mother passed, I guess, when I was about five years old, I guess, and I remember her going in the backyard. We had a large backyard, and I remember her going back there crying, you know, and she had never been back there until, like I said, in the fifties. It must have been about nineteen—I was working at the police garage then, so it had to be about 1955, '56 that she finally was able to go back to Virginia with my baby sister and she saw some of her brothers. One of them, Herman, who I first met in New Jersey, he was one of the first I met in New Jersey. He was getting ready to go in the army. Let's see. Was that the Korean War or the Vietnam War? Anyway, he was getting ready to go in the army, and he was leaving a day before they left, and he was the first one I met. But they didn't talk too much of Virginia, no.

MILES: You mentioned she was in the backyard crying.

BROWN: Well, her mother had passed, and she couldn't go back there. I remember telegrams coming and everything. But that was one of the times. You know, things were kind of tough then. The depression was still going on. And that's about it.

MILES: So you said you were a young man when your mother passed away?

BROWN: No, her mother; my grandmother. And she was a backer. She used to go to all of our— When we were in high school, she went to all of our football games. Of course, in San Diego at that time, the late forties, we didn't have any big league, major

league team. We had a Pacific Coast League, the [San Diego] Padres. After that, during football season, Friday night everybody'd come to see San Diego High School play. The stadium held, I think, something like, what was that, eighteen thousand. I forget now, but, anyway, we would fill the stadium up.

MILES: Eighteen thousand?

BROWN: Yes, we'd fill the stadium up.

MILES: Wow.

BROWN: Let's see. Because we had a Football Carnival with three teams, six schools played, and they figured they had anywheres from twenty-five to thirty thousand people. They were hanging off of light poles and the fence and everything.

MILES: Tell me about your elementary school. I want to get back to your high school, but where did you go again?

BROWN: Went to Logan Elementary School.

MILES: What was that like?

BROWN: My fifth-grade teacher was a football player at San Diego State [University], and he used to help us out in showing how to hit the ball. Of course we played, what was that, soccer? No, rugby. Was it? Let's see, what was that we played? Rugby, I believe it was. There was about four of us was real good and we'd never get on the same team. But anyway, that kind of got me interested in sports, and he was behind us, too. Like I said, after we were playing different playgrounds, he used to come and help transport us in his Ford, and we'd go and play different teams away from our area, which was called Southwest— Well, not Southeast, but Logan Heights.

MILES: That was the neighborhood?



BROWN: Yes, Logan Heights. And we'd go out to Point Loma and play some of the kids out in that area. They were Portuguese out there. They were fishermen.

MILES: What was Logan Heights like?

BROWN: That was more or less black and Mexican neighborhood at that time before we started branching out. But anyway, with his help, that also helped me get interested in sports, as well as my brother.

MILES: What was your brother's name?

BROWN: John. I'll show you some pictures of him and everything later on.

MILES: Okay. How close were you and John in terms of age?

BROWN: He was a year older than me.

MILES: Real close.

BROWN: In fact, in high school, my sophomore year I played on junior varsity, and he was a lot larger fellow than me, and he played varsity his three varsity years in football and baseball. But when I was a junior, I played varsity football with him, same position, and we would alternate on offense, but we both played defense. We were bad, you know. [mutual laughter] We thought we were. But anyway, we both played. At that time, we played both ways, offense and defense, and the quarterback would come out and either I would come in or my brother would come in for the quarterback, and we played defense together. We had a lot of fun on that. I played middle linebacker on the five/three and, let's see, I played left sideline backer on a six/two. That's all we played in them days. But anyway, we thought we were bad.

MILES: Your elementary school, was it integrated?

BROWN: Oh yes. Oh yes. Here in San Diego everything was integrated. In fact, we had whites, blacks, Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, and anything else you could think of in the area. Now, during the start of the war, I mean after World War II started, well, the Japanese, they took them away from the West Coast and they put them in these so-called— Well, from San Diego, most of them went to Santa Anita Race Track, and they were living in these horse stables or whatever it was, and then they eventually moved to Arizona. We used to write each other.

MILES: Did you know people who—

BROWN: Oh yes. Ajee and Fushitoshi Fushimoto and Elizabeth and Tom Kikuchi and they had a brother named David Kikuchi and Tom Kikuchi. But, anyway, I used to write them. Well, Ajee, he eventually left and went to Chicago, but I used to write Fushitoshi and we used to communicate for about two years and we kind of— I got busy and I didn't like to write anyways.

MILES: How were you and they when they—

BROWN: The war started in December. Well, they declared war on the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> of December, I think, so that meant we were eleven years old and twelve years old.

MILES: So like in middle school or something in there.

BROWN: Grammar school, yes, at Logan. We were still in Logan when they left.

MILES: How did you feel about it at the time?

BROWN: It was sad because we were all friends, and it was sad, but not just me, but the whole class. The sister and the brother were in the same class and everything.

Well, anyway, make a long story short, their father had built a church on 35<sup>th</sup> and Ocean View prior to them leaving, but they all made out good. She was an elementary

school teacher, and she married Joe Yamada. He was a landscape— What do you call it, landscape architecture?

MILES: Yes.

BROWN: Anyway, they all did good, and they went to the University of California [at Berkeley]. Fushitoshi, he was a pharmacist, and for some reason, we never did find out why, he committed suicide. Oh, let's see, I guess about ten years ago, but nobody— I was talking to another druggist who went to school with him in Cal [University of California], and he said he couldn't figure out why he would. But anyway, all of them did good.

MILES: Did they describe what the internment camp at Santa Anita was like?

BROWN: Well, they didn't stay there too long. They transferred them to Arizona. I think it was Prescott, Preston, Arizona, something. It was in Arizona. And that's where Joe Yamada met Elizabeth. He went to Stockton Elementary School and she went to Logan Elementary School, and this is when they met at the camp.

MILES: Oh, they met at the camp?

BROWN: They met at the camp, right, and they both went to University of California at the same time and eventually they married, and I think they have a son and a daughter, I'm not sure. Yes.

MILES: Besides that, what else do you remember about middle school?

BROWN: Well, junior high school, like I said, we had gym. We played different— The seventh graders would play. If we had two different gym period, well, one seventh grader would play another seventh grade team and went through like that. But there

wasn't too much going on then, except for we were playing, like I say, with Henry Manley for the playgrounds.

MILES: He was the coach?

BROWN: Yes, he was the one that went to [San Diego] State [University] and eventually came and worked with the city. We would play. We represented Memorial Playgrounds. We had Stockton Playgrounds. All of the elementary schools almost had playgrounds or recreation centers for young people, and we'd play each other in touch football and softball and that little—I guess how big would that be? Just a ball a little larger than a baseball, but smaller than a softball. We would play each other on that. Later on, as I got into the ninth grade, I was in baseball, and this is when we started with the Gibson Tigers, I believe, and from there went to San Diego High School and I played junior varsity. I made varsity two years. My sophomore year I played junior varsity and then my junior and sophomore year I played varsity baseball.

MILES: Did you have a favorite sport?

BROWN: I think baseball was.

MILES: What was it about baseball [unclear]?

BROWN: I don't know. It's because I guess I used to pitch and catch, and I figured if I could— When a ball was a strike when I was catching, it was a strike when I was a hitter, so I was a pretty good little hitter, and I'll show you some things later on. But I enjoyed baseball, and I guess the reason why I never did go into professional baseball, more or less, when I got out of the army— Well, I went in the army in 1950. We were in the National Guard, California National Guard, and when the Korean War broke out, we were on the rifle range. We went to summer camp that July, that following month, and

we got ready to come home after two weeks of training, and this colonel got up and said, "You men don't have to worry about going to Korea; it'll be over in two months." But we were home for one— The first week, that first week we were home, that weekend we got orders that we were going into the army the 11<sup>th</sup> of September of 1950, so 9/11/50 means something more than 9/11/02. But anyway, when I came out of the army, I still had my baby brother and two sisters were still in school, so I went on and start working. I went to work with the Santa Fe, and then I went to work with the City of San Diego.

MILES: Before you get there, I still want to— What did your father end up doing? Because he left the military.

BROWN: Oh yes. Well, he worked with the WPA [Works Progress Administration] for a while, and after that was unemployed, and then he went to work for Santa Fe Railroad as a baggage man. He would unload mail or whatever off the baggage car, and then he worked in the baggage room.

MILES: What did your mother do?

BROWN: During the war, she worked for about a year at Convair [General Dynamics], which is consolidated aircraft. They built B-24s. After about a year, whatever she was doing, it didn't agree with her, inhaling the fumes or something. She was cleaning things. So she quit that, and then she just was a housekeeper, and then she went to work for different families. One was a lady that was quitting a job, told my mother about it, and so my mother went to work for this one person. She ended up working for three other households during the week. Once a week she'd go to these different houses and clean up, and that's about all.

MILES: If at all, how did they feel about you playing sports?

BROWN: Oh, my mother, like I say, she was a big booster of it. My father, after he found out that we were playing football after he told us not to, well, then he joined the bandwagon.

MILES: Why did he not want you to play?

BROWN: Well, my brother was hurt. Like I say, he was big. In high school, I think he was about pretty close to two hundred pounds.

MILES: In high school?

BROWN: Oh yes. He was huge. We were playing our rival school, Hoover [High School], and they what we called sandwiched him, you know. One hit him high and one hit him low, and it hurt his back somewhat. But anyway, we recovered and that's when my father told him to quit. But after that, everything was fine after he found out who we were and we were playing anyway, you know.

MILES: Did your sisters or your other brothers and sisters, did they play any sports?

BROWN: No. My older sister, she played a little tennis, but just during, what do you call it, gym period. My baby brother, he played a little football when he was a senior, but he didn't do what we, my brother and I, did.

MILES: So you were the athletes of the family, huh?

BROWN: Yes. Right. Yes, I guess, because we were always around people. We had a fellow by the name of Jesse Coffey and he was tall and eventually went to play with the Harlem Globetrotters, one of their farm teams or more or less their second team. We had a quarterback that could pass pretty good, and he would throw a ball. There's three of them defending, two guys defending this guy, and he jumped up in a spiral, you know, a good spiral is a ball that's going, you know— You know what a spiral is. It's a good

pass. He'd jump up between those two defenders and caught that spiral with one hand, one hand. That was the first time I ever saw a football caught with one hand, especially a spiral football. Anyway, he passed about two years ago.

MILES: He was from San Diego?

BROWN: Oh yes, yes, he went to San Diego High School. He played two sports, let's see, football and basketball. But anyway, that was the first time I've seen anyone catch a ball with one hand. Now everybody's doing it now in pro ball.

But anyway, that's what we— Well, I'll get back. When I got out of the army—

MILES: No, I'm not there yet. Hold on. Take your time. Go through high school and stuff.

BROWN: Okay.

MILES: How old were you when you joined the Gibson Tigers?

BROWN: Oh, I was in about the tenth grade, I guess.

MILES: Because you were in high school.

BROWN: Ninth or tenth grade, I forget now.

MILES: What was that like?

BROWN: We were playing different teams in the area. But just before that, we were playing for the Police Athletic League or the police PALS, and Mr. Gibson, who we'd played with off and on, he says, "Well, why don't we make up a team, our own team. If I can get somebody to buy some uniforms for us, we'll form our own team." Nobody—I can't mention nobody's names now. There were only about three or four people who could do it. Post 310, American Legion Post 310, they bought us uniforms. We had "Gibson Tigers" on the front and "Post 310" on the back.

MILES: So were you the very first, the teams?

BROWN: Yes. Right. But anyway, then we went on. There's, let's see, Neale Henderson and I and Ted Ritchie. I can't think of anybody else. Anyway, we broke away from the police PALS at that time. But they had good players, too, because we played high school together. Most of the guys lived in Encanto, which is just another little community about a mile from here, even less than a mile.

MILES: Oh, not far at all. Okay.

BROWN: Because San Diego's small then, you know. But anyway, Post 310 bought us some uniforms and we won the—I guess you'd call it the Little League that they had at that time, you know. It consisted of the police PALS, the Gibson Tigers, and a few—Walter Church and a lot of other little teams. At that time, we had some pretty good players. We had Gene Richardson, who played with the Kansas City Monarchs. We had Ray McCoy, who played pro ball. He played in Canada, for most part. Of course, Neale Henderson, who played with the Kansas City Monarchs. So we had a pretty good team. At least we thought we were and everything.

MILES: Was Mr. Gibson living here in San Diego?

BROWN: He was living here in San Diego. In fact, I met one of his daughters, and she's going to give me some pictures of the old days, and I'll make copies of them. One of his sons is the president of a group I belong to. Let's see, we have a chapter here in San Diego and a chapter in Los Angeles called San Diego African American Alumni Association, and each year we have a New Year's gig in Los Angeles, and the following year in San Diego. In fact, it's supposed to be here in San Diego this New Year's. But anyway, so his son is active, and he lives in—Where does he live? He has to travel quite



a ways. He lives up in Oakland or someplace now, I'm not sure. I forget now, but he comes down for meetings and everything, and then he goes back.

MILES: What's the purpose of that organization?

BROWN: We provide a scholarship for teenagers.

MILES: Oh, how nice.

BROWN: Christmastime, we donate to some group or something, some organization.

But I wasn't the original member of it. I only joined them a couple years after they organized, and I knew several people in the group. So I got active in it myself.

MILES: At the time when you were a young man, were you following the majors at all?

BROWN: Oh yes. We had the San Diego Padres at that time. We had Luke Easter, who went up to the majors. We had Harry "Suitcase" Simpson, who went up to the majors.

This was old Pacific Coast League now. We had Minnie Minoso. Oh, gosh, kind of caught me flatfooted now. But I remember those guys real good. Luke Easter, Harry Simpson, Minnie Minoso, and we sent about five or six people that went up to the majors after [Jack Roosevelt] "Jackie" Robinson broke the thing.

MILES: Did you have a favorite team?

BROWN: No, I didn't, not in the majors. I was a San Diego Padres fan at that time in the Pacific Coast League. They had players that had been up to the majors and somebody beat them out and this here, but they almost considered the Pacific Coast League as a third major league team. Now, there was two Triple-A ball teams. That was— Oh, boy, The International League [of Professional Baseball Clubs, Inc.], I think they called it. They were a Triple-A ball team Back East. But most of your good players were here on

the Pacific Coast that play for San Francisco, Los Angeles, Hollywood, and, of course, San Diego and Oakland. I guess that's about six or seven teams that they had here.

MILES: Did you follow the Negro Leagues at all?

BROWN: Only after I found out about them through Satchel Paige and, of course, after I got in high school I found out more about them. They used to barnstorm through here playing Bob Feller All-Stars, and Satchel Paige would pitch and Bob Feller would pitch about three innings. But then after that, I used to follow the [New York] Yankees because Joe DiMaggio, and I liked Ted Williams, the Boston Red Sox, because he was from San Diego. Those are about the only two teams I really were interested in in those days.

MILES: How did you find out about the Negro leagues if you were already in high school when you found out?

BROWN: Well, I found out about Satchel Paige when he used to come here, and then somebody said they had a Negro League and they named all the teams on them, and then I started following them whenever I could read about them. But then when Gene Richardson and Neale and them went up there, then I kind of followed them when I could.

My sister and I went back to Nebraska. We came through Kansas City and we had about a two-hour delay to change trains. I asked a cab driver was the Kansas City Monarchs in town? He said, "I don't know." He said, "Ask so-and-so."

So I asked and the guy said, "Yeah, they're in town."

I says, "Good. Could you take me to their hotel?"

He says, "Yeah." So he took us, my oldest sister, Dorothy, and I, to the hotel, and I got there and I told the manager, "I'm from San Diego and I knew a fellow that played Gene Richardson. Could you contact him and let him know that I'm here?"

So he called, and then about a minute time, Gene come running down off the elevator, you know. Anyway, we talked and he said, "Wait, I've got somebody I want you to meet. Ernie Banks." I think there was somebody else. I can't quite think of the other fellow's name, but I met Ernie Banks through Gene and we talked. Then we had to get back to the train, but that's how I met Ernie Banks, was through Gene Richardson.

MILES: Did Gene or Neale Henderson ever tell you what their experience was like playing in the league?

BROWN: Yes, Neale. I talked to Neale more than I got to talk to Gene, because I used to see Neale more so. Once the league broke up, well, Gene became a mail carrier and different things, and Neale worked at Convair. But anyway, they said it was fun, but they had to ride a bus almost everywhere they went, or something, and it was pretty rough. I guess nobody hardly flew in those days. But they did a lot of traveling by bus, I believe he said, and that's about all I could say about the league itself. In fact, I hated to bus ride, because when I was in City College, of the nine games we played, we only had two at home and the rest of the time it was on the bus, and I used to hate the bus. But anyway, I sometimes wish I'd have went on. But the reason I didn't, like I said, I had to support, or help support, my two sisters and a brother that was still in high school, and I guess that's why I never did play pro ball.

Of course, I had worked with the city prior to that, and I went and applied and I worked at Santa Fe for about a year as a [unclear] car attendant. But then during the

winter months, they cut the train down, you know, and there wasn't too much work. I had to make two roundtrips to Los Angeles, which would amount to almost like two shifts. But anyway, I applied for the city and I went back to work for the city.

MILES: When you were in PALS and when you played for the Gibson Tigers, where did you actually play? Where was the field?

BROWN: We played at the playgrounds. Yes, we played at the playgrounds. Nothing professional about it. It was sandlot ball, and that was about it.

MILES: So what was the experience like at San Diego High?

BROWN: Well, it was an integrated school, and I'll show you some pictures of the team back there. Neale Henderson was the second black quarterback at San Diego High School. Nelson Manual was the first one. That was way back in the forties, early forties.

MILES: Now, is Neale older than you?

BROWN: No. I think I'm a year older than he is.

MILES: So you were there when Neale—

BROWN: Oh yes. Now I'm going to tell you something else. When I was a senior San Diego High School, we had the first all-black starting backfield.

MILES: What happened there?

BROWN: It just so happened like that. Neale was our quarterback. He was the substitute quarterback the year prior to that. Yes, because Jerry Downs was quarterback with them then. So Neale was quarterback, I was fullback, Ted Ritchie was halfback, another fellow name was Doug Hunt, who dropped out of high school and went in the army, but he still had a fellow by the name of— Oh, boy. Anyway, it was an all-black backfield, starting black backfield, at San Diego High School.

MILES: Were there any problems with that?

BROWN: No. No, because everybody knew— They did their jobs. I'll show you the team when I finish here. We had a good time and there was no friction. We went over to a guy's house, a tackle, Gene Edwards, we went over to his house for a, I guess, little get-together, you might say, and he brought this scrapbook out. That was the only thing that irritated Neale and I guess irritated all of us, too.

MILES: Why?

BROWN: They had this picture. This guy was an artist like, you know. It said something about you get past the line and, what was that, "those black backs would pile on you like—" What did he say? I forget now. But anyway, that was the only derogatory thing.

MILES: It was in a newspaper or something?

BROWN: No, no, this artist, this guy's an artist. I don't know if he said it was his uncle or somebody was an artist. Anyway, when he came across that we saw it, he tore it up. [laughs] He tore it up, but still, that left a bad taste in our mouth. In fact, Neale left. I think Neale left the party, because he had a car and he left.

MILES: Because of that?

BROWN: Yes. Anyway, there was about seven or eight of us there. But anyway, we stuck around, we took pictures, and Neale would always say when we brought these pictures out, "I'm not in there, because I left." But anyway, outside of that, everybody got along fine. In fact, right now, a week before Super Bowl, there's a group, we call ourselves the San Diego Jocks, and we have a brunch at one of the restaurants on Shelter

Island, and it's about a hundred and fifty to two hundred come, old athletes from the thirties and forties and—

MILES: Regardless of race?

BROWN: Oh, yes, yes, yes. It's amazing. We reminisce about the past. Now, these are all high school. We're all in high school. There wasn't too many high schools at that time. There was San Diego; Point Loma [High School]; Hoover; and Kearney [High School] later on, when they built Kearney during the war. We get together and reminisce the old times, and it's really interesting. In fact, I'm on the committee for that, and we just met last week to see if everything was working out good. In fact, it was raining. I got out there and we meet at this bar and we meet upstairs and have this tent. There was about a dozen of us there and we talked—

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MILES: When you were in high school, did you have any ideas about what the kind of career or job you wanted to have?

BROWN: Well, at that time, no. I had no idea what I wanted to do until I got about a senior, and then I thought about going to college. But I went to City College to bring my— What do you call it, things that I needed to get into college I took in City College, and I had to drop out of that because I had a job and he wouldn't let me off. So I was going to go back to get my AA degree that September. I stopped in February, and I as going to go back that September to get my AA degree, but 1950, the army called us in, and I didn't go back.

MILES: So you said you were in the National Guard.

BROWN: California National Guard, yes.

MILES: What made you decide to join the National Guard?

BROWN: Well, there was several people who I knew in there. There was some people I knew that was in the National Guard.

[tape interruption]

MILES: Where we left off, you had started to tell me about joining the National Guard, but before we get there, I want to go back to the Football Carnival, which you had mentioned before. Do you remember the carnival?

BROWN: That was a main event of the football season. We'd start to school a week before school started, the football players. We'd practice a week's worth of football before school started, and it would be three schools against three schools. Each of them would play a quarter, not to a full game. We always played against our rival school, Hoover, and everybody in San Diego, it looked like, came to that Football Carnival because their kid's school was playing, so that meant they came, the parents came. When San Diego High School played football, well, a lot of the teams played in the afternoon or right after school. Well, we'd play at night. So the other football teams, they'd come see us play at night on Friday night, that was the big night, and when San Diego and Hoover played, we'd fill the stadium up. Just two schools, San Diego and Hoover, we'd fill the stadium up, and, like I say, that was the event of the year, and it was called a Football Carnival. They have it now, and I don't think they draw even the crowds that we did in those days.

MILES: What do you think changed? What's different?

BROWN: I guess it's different schools now, and I guess they don't have time for a Football Carnival now. They have the playoffs and what have you, and that's about it.

MILES: What time, like what month, it took place, the carnival?

BROWN: Yes, the first week of school. We started practice a week before school started, and school would start that Monday, and that Friday we'd have the Football Carnival. So since a lot of us had played together quite a bit, well, we knew quite a bit of what we were going to go through. Actually, we'd only have about four or five plays, and they worked. We always won. Well, the East against the West, that's what they used to call it, and we were behind seven points when San Diego and Hoover went in,



and we scored two touchdowns in that quarter that we played, which was the last quarter. I forgot how long they lasted, twelve or fifteen minutes. But, anyway, we won that carnival.

A lot of the guys, like Bill McCall, like I said, he played professional football. By the way, when I played high school, we played against Bakersfield High School. There was a guy by the name of Frank Gifford. He had just got his arm out of a cast, so we didn't play against him in high school, but I did play against him in City College and we beat him. Of course, he went on to 'SC [University of Southern California], and then he played for the New York Giants. So I played against quite a few big-time athletes.

MILES: Why do you think football was so popular here?

BROWN: Well, we had what they call the San Diego Bombers, which was a semipro team. We had guys like Sid Luckman

that played here. We were teenagers, young teenagers. We used to have this American Cleaners Club, and we'd go get a ticket and we'd pay five cents or ten cents for this American Kid Club, and I used to go see them play. They were big names then, Sid Luckman and I forgot all the rest of them, "Slingin'" Sammy Ball, and all those guys.

MILES: When you were playing football in high school, were you also playing baseball?

BROWN: No, we had seasons for it. Football season started in September and ended in November, with playoffs and what have you. Then we went into baseball, and baseball would start about in February until school was out.

MILES: So you did continue to play both, but obviously not at the same time.

BROWN: Right. Right. People like Charlie [unclear] and those guys, they'd practice baseball, then they'd run and suit up for basketball or vice versa. Then he also played—

They were four-sports people, and they'd always would intermix their games with practice with practice at times.

MILES: Did you play any other sports?

BROWN: That was just about it; baseball and football.

MILES: Tell me about your brother. What was he doing at this time?

BROWN: Okay. He was larger than I was, and after he got out of high school, he and a couple other fellows went and joined the army, and they were stationed at Walter Reed Hospital, and he pitched for their team. They did good. He was their starting pitcher.

Then he got shipped to Hawaii and then he was having some kind of— He got hit in the head with the baseball or something. But anyway, he ended up being a patient at

Sawtelle Veterans Hospital. There's one in Brentwood there, off of Wilshire Boulevard and 405 [Freeway], and he was in and out of the VA Hospital. Eventually, he passed.

MILES: So then how did you get to the National Guard?

BROWN: Okay. Get back with the National Guard. Henry Manley, which I showed that picture there, he worked with the city of San Diego, and he was in the National Guard. Several other people that I knew, Captain Hinton, that guy up on the top there, anyway, they were recruiting to form a company down here, and they were saying,

“Well, you won't get drafted if you're in the National Guard.” They got all of us young guys to join the National Guard. That was in June of '48, '49? It must have been about '48, I guess. Anyway, I joined June 25<sup>th</sup> of 1948, I think.

MILES: You were just out of high school.

BROWN: I was still in high school.

MILES: Still in high school?

BROWN: Yes, because I think I registered for the draft when I was in high school, because you had to register once you turned eighteen. So we joined the National Guard. A lot of us kids did, you know. It was money. Once a month you go to a drill, and then you went to a camp for two weeks and you got money.

MILES: Where was the camp?

BROWN: San Luis Obispo. Camp San Luis Obispo. Anyway, a lot of us young guys went in, and, of course, we had a pretty good outfit, the 1402 Engineer Combat Battalion, and a Los Angeles group. In fact, our battalion commander, he was on the Los Angeles police force, and a lot of the officers in the National Guard, they were police officers in Los Angeles. Anyway, we had a good outfit. We had a sharp outfit. That's when they called us during the Korean War, the start of the Korean War. It started in the 25<sup>th</sup> of June. We were on the rifle range at Camp Elliott [Naval Retraining Command], which was a marine training base in the old days, and we went from the National Guard to the army on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, 1950.

MILES: The National Guard unit, was it integrated or was it segregated?

BROWN: Eventually they became integrated, but we had a Japanese guy join us, who was with that Japanese 442 Regimental Combat Team, all Japanese. We had one of their officers, I think, joined. The Pasadena company had a number of Mexican fellows that joined. But we didn't get any white folks until we got in the army. They were calling reserves in, and, of course, [President Harry S.] Truman had passed that law of integration, and guys were coming out of the reserves and they were calling them in and they'd come in and join our company. In fact, we had about two white officers that came and joined us.

We went to Camp Roberts, which was an old army base camp, and it had two garrisons. One on the east side, which we opened up, was the East Garrison. Then there was one on the west side called the West Garrison. They had grass there about a foot high all over. We were the first ones in there, and when we finished cleaning it up, you could almost eat off the ground. We had to combat snakes. There was a lot of snakes there because it was summertime. But anyway, it looked like every time they would move us, they'd move us closer to the gate.

Eventually they transferred us from Camp Roberts to Fort Lewis, Washington, and I was up there at Fort Lewis, Washington, and I was transferred then from the California National Guard outfit to a National Guard outfit that was going to Germany, the 1279<sup>th</sup>. They were a National Guard outfit from Detroit, and they were going to Germany. They had guys that came from Korea that gave them an option; they could either stay stateside or go to Germany. Some of the guys selected to stay stateside. Anyway, I was transferred into their outfit to bring them back up to their strength, and I went over to Germany with them. About four months later, our 1402 Engineer Combat Battalion, they came over to Germany. I was stationed right out of Frankfurt, and they went to Karlsruhe, Germany. Of course after I got out, I said I went to work for Santa Fe for about ten or eleven months, and then I went back with the city.

MILES: How did you feel about being drafted?

BROWN: Oh, it was exciting, because you see all these war pictures of World War II, and you knew everybody and you felt like it was— You know, there was just that camaraderie that we had, and I didn't mind it. In fact, I was glad. In fact, I have a curved spine, and they probably would have rejected me. At the time, I had kind of a high blood

pressure. But they told me to go lay down for a while and then came back and said, “Well, do you want to go?”

I says, “Yeah!” So I got in. But later on, with that curved spine, it kept me from being a police officer and a fireman.

MILES: Did you try out to be either of those?

BROWN: When I went back to work for the city after I left Santa Fe, I quit there, and I was called for an interview for a city job. I worked in the police garage for about six years, and I said, “I think I’ll be a policeman.” I wanted to be a fireman, but I missed two exams; I didn’t pass two exams. Another time for the fire department, they had what they call the agility tests, you know, you jump a six-foot wall, run a circle and then go hand-over-hand and touch a rafter and come back down hand-over-hand. Then after they had the agility tests, then they had the physical. Well, that’s when I found out that I couldn’t make either one of them because they said 90 percent of their problems were back problems, and so he said forget it.

So that’s when I transferred out of the police garage and went into construction. I went in the utilities, and I stayed there for a while. Then I made— What was that? Equipment operator. Made equipment operator, then when my knee started bothering me, I went on and took a supervisor’s job, and that was what I retired as of a utility supervisor.

MILES: I know from some of the teams that you’re on, and obviously being in the military allowed you to travel outside of San Diego, what were your impressions of some of those cities, like of Los Angeles or—

BROWN: Well, you know, being here, we used to go to Los Angeles to the Boys Club, and we stayed in Pasadena. We stayed in the gym of high schools. We competed in track. I was a high jumper.

MILES: See, you did have another sport.

BROWN: That was the only one I was good in, was high jumping. Anyway, Pasadena, I liked Pasadena because I guess it was quiet and you see the snow on the mountains and everything. But anyway, it was good traveling to different places and, of course, when we played American Legion baseball that went to the playoffs in Hollywood after going to— We won the state championship.

MILES: You were, what, in high school already?

BROWN: High school, yes. We won the state championship, went to Phoenix, Arizona, or Tucson. I guess it was Tucson. Okay, now that was a little prejudiced.

MILES: Tucson?

BROWN: Tucson.

MILES: What happened?

BROWN: Was it Tucson or Phoenix? Phoenix. We could not stay in the hotels, so we stayed over at a preacher's house. That was even in high school. And in high school— Let me go back to high school.

MILES: Sure.

BROWN: We played Phoenix, and we couldn't stay with the team in the hotel there. What was the name of that hotel there? I used to remember all those places. But we had to stay at a preacher's house.

MILES: So the white boys [unclear]?

BROWN: They stayed in the hotel, and we would eat lunch there, but we couldn't live there. They used to give us money to buy food with, but the preachers fed us, Neale, Ray, and [unclear]. There was four of us. But anyway, that's when you was going to a different place now. That was an experience.

MILES: What was your reaction?

BROWN: Well, I had heard and knew about the South, because everybody, a lot of the blacks, moved from the South out here to San Diego and would tell us how it was. But that was the first time I'd been refused to be able to stay at a hotel. Of course, it was the same thing here in San Diego, like the Grant, El Cortez, Hotel San Diego, and those places, at that time you couldn't stay, especially The Pickwick Hotel, which is still here. The Greyhound bus station is still there, I think, yes.

But anyway, after we won the state, went to Phoenix or Tucson— I think it was Phoenix. I forget now. But anyway, we played what they called a sectional or regional playoffs and we stayed at the preacher's house again. From there, we won there, we played teams from Hawaii and immediate states. From there we took a train and went up to— Let's see now. Boise, Idaho?

MILES: From Arizona?

BROWN: From Arizona we took a train and went through Dalhart, Texas. We was supposed to switch trains there. Oh, about a half mile or so, we saw these guys standing outside, you know, so we was going to go see what it was, a little old town. So we was going, we went down, it was about five of us. Got there, it was a bunch of guys with six-shooters and rifles, and, "Where you boys goin'?"

"Oh, we's just looking to see what was up here."

“Where you goin’?” We told them we were going to Billings, Montana. Yes, Billings, Montana. “Well, go on back there.” Now, there was about four of us blacks, about three whites guys, and a Mexican guy. So we turned around and we made it back there.

We got to Billings, Montana, and there were three teams there. We went to a hotel. The lady says, “These colored boys can’t—.” I think she called us colored boys. Or, “These boys can’t stay here.”

Coach Marrow [phonetic], he’d been through all that before. “Well, we’re going to pack up and go back to San Diego.” But this was American Legion. We had American Legion guys with us and Ford Motor Company guys with us.

“No, you can’t do that.” So somebody came up with a bright idea, try one of the hotels where the other team was staying. So they called them and they said, yes, they would accept us, so we changed hotels. And that was the first team that got eliminated from the playoffs. I understand, we were told they tore that hotel up. Now, these were all white people, white ball players. We heard they tore that place apart. You know, anger, after they lost they were angry, they made a mess of their rooms and things.

We won there, and I met Babe Ruth. I didn’t meet him personally, but he was our guest speaker, Babe Ruth. Neale had a picture with him shaking Babe Ruth’s hand. He probably showed it to you. But anyway, Babe Ruth gave us an autographed baseball and he was our guest speaker. His voice was real graveled because he was having throat cancer or something. His throat was real gravel-like, you know.

But anyway, we went up there and we beat— Who was it? Vernon Law. Vernon Law, who pitched for the Pittsburgh Pirates. We beat him, and anyway, we won the



tournament there and come all the way down to Hollywood and there was three teams there, and we lost two straight. But anyway—

MILES: That's what you were telling me about that you had that long winning streak and then you lost to—

BROWN: Yes, because we didn't think— We got there that morning, and nobody said anything about practice. So we'd run around looking for people we knew, this Ted Ritchie and I, who was on the picture in there, and we got back that evening, they said, "Hey, what happened to you guys?"

We said, "Well, we went out to visit some friends." Well, we had to miss practice, and the next day we played and lost 2-1 and 3-2, and we got eliminated, took the milk train back home. We was so angry we didn't want to stay the rest of the— You know, up there, so we paid our own way and came home, a couple of us did. I think Neale was with us, and we came on home.

This is that milk train, if you're familiar with it, makes all these stops coming to San Diego. We call them milk stops. But that was my extent of visiting other cities. That was an experience because, boy, she come out there and saw us. She looked wide-eyed, this lady. "Well, these boys can't stay here. These colored boys can't stay in this hotel," and that was first experience then, or second experience.

But outside of that, El Centro, we were going to Arizona during baseball in high school, and we stopped at this place to eat. There was about seven of us went into this here one place, and the lady came out and took the orders of the two white guys and this Mexican guy, but she didn't take our order. So she said, "No, we don't serve colored folks here," or whatever she—

MILES: Where was this at?

BROWN: El Centro. In El Centro.

MILES: Where was that?

BROWN: El Centro, California, just before you go to Arizona. Anyway, so the guys says, "Well, we'll wait a while and then when we think they're going to serve our food, we'll all walk out." So they did.

MILES: They did?

BROWN: Yes, that's how close we were.

Now, that's about all my experience I had. I went to a couple of the Negro League reunions. I have pictures of them from Kansas City, and then I went back to Atlanta, Georgia. They had another one, was it last year, year before last? I have pictures I'll show you.

MILES: Was it around that time, too, when you were playing in high school, Jackie Robinson joined the Dodgers?

BROWN: Yes.

MILES: Do you remember that time?

BROWN: Yes, in fact, we were in— Where were we? In Arizona? Jackie Robinson had signed his contract and was playing with the Montreal team, the farm team. Yes, Jackie Robinson signed with the Brooklyn Dodgers, but he played for Montreal. We got that news. We were out of town. I don't know whether we were in Arizona or where.

MILES: So you were traveling with your team?

BROWN: Yes, high school, our American Legion baseball. Anyway, that—

MILES: What was your reaction?

BROWN: Good. Anyway, of course, others followed him after that. But I had no idea of playing pro ball, really, because I had my younger sister and brother to see through school, and I didn't think I would be making enough money to. In fact, when I signed the contract for a guy that played in the Negro League, Gene Richardson—

MILES: You signed it for him?

BROWN: As a witness that he signed his contract, I was a witness. Anyway, we were making about the same amount of money.

MILES: Did you think it would be better for you to—

BROWN: At the time, I wasn't sure, because I was at my top pay then, I think, when I signed his contract. I was at the top pay of my classification at that time, but it was roughly about the same amount of money, so it didn't impress me that much. So I think that kind of put me off on baseball. Of course at that time, even the white players weren't making that much money. But now they're making millions and they tell the managers what to do. But that's about my extent of baseball, unless you have some questions.

MILES: [unclear] because— I lost my train of thought here. I'm sorry.

BROWN: It'll come back. That's all right.

MILES: I've gone completely blank, though. I know what I was going to ask you. You mentioned that there was a bit of discrimination among the hotels in San Diego. Did you yourself ever experience any discrimination or anything?

BROWN: No, because I was a teenager and it didn't bother me. But people who would come here and service personnel, I know the black paper during the World War II, these three WAVES they called the navy women, they registered at The Pickwick Hotel and they turned them down. Of course, that was big news for the black paper, *The Voice and*

*Lighthouse*. I forget this other lady's— Behren's paper, but they really blew it up and, of course, they had a little article in the regular paper, you know.

But, again, yes, there was hotel discrimination at that time, how bad it was, but that was an example. But they still had black bartenders and worked in the kitchen area [unclear] now. I don't what to put that in there. But that was about my extent.

MILES: When you returned to San Diego from being in the military, where did you move to?

BROWN: I stayed here. I was staying at my mother's house until I got married, and that was May 17<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup>, I think May 17<sup>th</sup>, of 1957. I finally moved out of the house, and we stayed in a duplex-like and we stayed in a hotel— A hotel. We stayed in an apartment, one-bedroom apartment, and applied for a Cal[ifornia] Vet[erans] loan, and they gave me a loan for \$12,000, so I'm out scouting around the neighborhood, and I bought this here for sixteen.

MILES: This house right here?

BROWN: Yes.

MILES: And this is where you've been the whole time?

BROWN: That's it. Like I say, it was everything what you see back there, but there was a big window here, had a beautiful view.

MILES: You took it out.

BROWN: Oh yes. We had a beautiful view, because the trees weren't tall and I could see the entrance of the bay. I had some navy friends, and whenever they would ship out or ship in, if they're coming in, all I had to do was get my binoculars and I'd see them coming in the bay. Then when Tammy and Phillip, when they got in junior high school,

it was bad enough when they were in grammar school, but we had more control over them then, but we needed other bathroom, so I had this here put in. Wife said she wanted a fireplace, we did that, and, of course, we added the bathroom. Then later on, the sundeck became a room, a game room.

MILES: What was the neighborhood like when you moved here?

BROWN: It was predominantly white at that time. Floyd Robinson, who played with the Chicago White Sox, his parents and a few other people were among the first to move out here in Valencia Park.

MILES: That's this neighborhood?

BROWN: Yes, this is Valencia Park. Then there was Emerald Hills, and they didn't allow us blacks to move out here at that time when it was— What do you call it when it was first put up? But through different actions and things, they finally started letting blacks move in. Well, as blacks were moving in, well, whites were moving out. The people we bought our house from, their sister lived on the end of the block, and they stayed there about two years after we moved in here, and then they moved. There was a black couple that lived next door here, and then there was a Filipino group that lived there, and there was a white group that had kids about Tammy and Phillip's age. He was a truck driver and he used to race cars. Anyway, they eventually moved, and then, like I say, the people that we bought our house from, her sister and them, they moved about two years after we moved out. Then across the street or over here, an older Caucasian lady, she was warming up by a wall heater like this one here, and her clothes caught fire and eventually she passed.

MILES: Did you experience any problems when you first came here?

BROWN: No. The people that moved out in this area before we moved in here, their son said he had problems at Valencia Park Elementary School. He was kind of small then, but by the time he got into junior high school and high school, he was huge and they didn't mess with him.

MILES: What kind of problems did he experience?

BROWN: Well, you know, guys would like to pick on him because he was kind of small, and they used to pick on him, but he held his own.

You probably saw Lincoln [High School] under construction.

MILES: Yes, I did.

BROWN: That was a high school, and it was predominantly white until we started moving in, and anyway, they're going to make a four-campus thing out of it. It will open, I think they said in September of 2006.

MILES: Is it not predominantly white anymore? [laughs]

BROWN: No, it's mostly blacks and Mexicans, but they were busing whites in. After I retired from the city, I drove a school bus for about six years until I got sixty-two, and I said bye. I was eligible for Social Security then, too. But anyway, I used to bus about four white kids to Lincoln and then two to Morris High School out Skyline. It's about a mile from here.

That's about my history.

MILES: No, no, there's more to your history. I've got more questions.

BROWN: Go ahead, yes, you can shoot the questions at me. I've been running off.

MILES: No, no, I've got more questions. What did you do in terms of sports or athletics either while you were in the military or after you came back [unclear]?

BROWN: Okay. In the sixties, after I got discharged, I mostly worked. Then I got into Pop Warner football and I coached Pop Warner football for about three years. We were the first team from this area to play in the Mother Goose Bowl, they called it.

MILES: What's that?

BROWN: They had a Mother Goose parade before Thanksgiving. They had a parade at El Cajon, which is a little another city in San Diego County. We were the first team from this area to play in the Mother Goose Bowl. Well, we knew some of the coaches or guys that coached those teams, and they let us use their uniforms, so we had some hand-me-down uniforms, and they loaned us their uniforms to play in the Mother Goose Bowl.

MILES: Where did you get the players from?

BROWN: This general area here, yes.

MILES: Just sign up.

BROWN: Just like my son, he's coaching Pop Warner now, and their season was just over and they had the playoffs, last week, I think. But I coached Pop Warner from '60 to about '63.

MILES: What led you to coaching, do you think?

BROWN: There's a friend of mine who was a police officer, and he was coaching and he asked me to help him. So I got into coaching, but I coached on a different team. There was a fellow in the navy circuit, I coached Bantams with him. That's the bigger team I coached. I was the defensive coach for his team. Then later on, I coached with Chester Taylor, who was a police officer, and then he resigned being a police officer because he didn't want to cut his mustache off. Anyway, I had a couple of his sons playing for me, and Louis King was my quarterback. There was another fellow that was on my team

later on. His father was in the air force, and he was killed in Vietnam. His last name was King. But anyway, when I was back there in Washington, D.C., a year ago, I guess it was a year ago, I went to the Vietnam [Veterans] Memorial, and also the Korean [War Veterans] Memorial, and I went to the Korean Memorial first. They had this huge wall, and I thought, "Boy, how am I going to find his name on it?"

About that time, a Park ranger was passing, and he says, "Go on back up to the thing, there's a dictionary," or directory. I guess it was a dictionary. He says, "Look his name up. It will tell you where he's located on this wall." He was, I think, like 15E, and his name was the thirtieth name down, or something like that. I went right to it. They tell you the section. It was huge. You find that section and I counted down and there was his name. I went right to it. They tell you the section. It was huge. You find that section and I counted down, and there his name was. So I had a picture of me pointing to it and then a lady took a picture. Bonnie's sister took a picture of it, and then I had a picture separate.

Anyway, I went to the Korean Memorial, where they have these statues, and I saw many pictures of those statues and things, but it's nothing like the real thing. Around the edges of it, they have all the history of it, the number of dead, wounded, missing, and all that history, and then have these statues there that—I took a lot of pictures there. That was quite a thing. It was really impressive. I went back there when I was in the National Guard. We had a regular army instructor. His wife called me about three-thirty in the morning and said he passed, so I went back there for his military funeral in Arlington [National] Cemetery, and that's when I was able to—I stayed with Bonnie's sister. She stayed in Maryland. All you do is twenty minutes and you're in D.C. or in Washington.



So she drove me to his services. Then I went to take pictures at the Vietnam Wall and the Korean Monument place there.

MILES: Going back to the football, did you have any other coaching experience or you did the Pop Warner?

BROWN: That was about it, yes, and I was working with the city, like I said, at the police garage and because of my schedule every eight weeks I used to change work schedule. Then when I transferred out of that after I couldn't get on the police for fire department, I transferred into construction utilities and they put— When you have standby, they took my Saturdays off, and then I got on what they call a rotting machine and I had to work weekends, so that cut out all my coaching activities.

MILES: But did you continue to play anything after that?

BROWN: No, no, no. Age was catching up with me.

MILES: How were you spending your leisure time then?

BROWN: Well, right now, I'm especially with the Alumni Association of the William \_\_\_\_\_ Boys Club, was the first Boys Club in San Diego County. We honored a coach there, August Chamelia, and somebody said, "Well, let's form an association because this club is run down." So we got about a dozen guys that used to belong to the Boys Club and we formed the association of the Alumni Association of the Williams \_\_\_\_\_ Boys Club. We went in there, we painted the exterior, renewed the outside lights. The swimming pool wasn't fixed until last year. No, this year, this year is the first summer that the swimming pool had been in operation, because we put pressure on the— They call it the [San Diego] County Boys and Girls Club now, and we put pressure on and they finally got the pool ready this past summer.

Anyway, we painted that place and try to keep the upkeep of it. Now, we're supposed to be putting in a ramp for handicap. Now, they were going to make them people do it, because this is one of the laws. Handicap have to have a way to get in. So we're going to jump on them because that's something if they've been breaking the law about for about as long as that law has been existing now. You have to have a handicap entranceway. We enlarged the restroom for a wheelchair. A group came in and repaired, did a lot of work in the kitchen. This past Thanksgiving they had a— Well, we did a pizza party. Then we had a thing for Thanksgiving. I was out of town. But this Christmas we'll be handing out toys and things. Last year, we went to different areas and handed toys out, and we had a police expert. He'd come in and he'd park. He'd run his siren because people hear a siren, they come outside. Anyway, Santa Claus, we got a Santa Claus and he'd [unclear] the kids and we got the kids together.

MILES: So you've been San Diego for over seventy years. How has the city—

BROWN: Seventy-four years and nine months, because the first of July I'll be seventy-five.

MILES: Okay, then, exactly seventy-five years. How do you think the city has changed in that time?

BROWN: Tremendously. I've seen this city grow from like I've seen my kids grow, from just a little small city and it just expanded. I was able to grow with it. Every time there's a new area open up, I'd go visit it. Every time there's a new freeway, I'd jump on it. I went in a lot of places that I'd been for the first time when I was driving the school bus, and I got to know the areas. University City, which is a new area. Of course I knew about San Carlos.

MILES: What's San Carlos?

BROWN: It's just a section like Valencia Park. It's just different names of the area. San Carlos, when I was working with the city, I was familiar with that because I was going out there once in a while. But University City, I didn't know too much about that until I started driving the school bus and I had pickups there and drop-offs there. What else am I into? Boys Club, and I'm a volunteer driver for the Olympic Training Center.

MILES: Oh yes. How did you get involved in that?

BROWN: Henry Manley, he was a track and field man. In fact, when the Olympics was up in Los Angeles, he was one of the three officials from San Diego County that was an official up there for the Olympics. When they opened the Olympic Training Center down here, he was a volunteer. I went down there for the opening and kind of looked around. About six months later, he says, "Do you still have a license to drive a bus?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Well, they need a bus driver down here."

So I went down there and filled out all the necessary papers and etc., and so I've been driving with them ever since then. In fact, I go down there Sunday in the morning, Saturday, tomorrow. I have to pick some people up— No, a delivery, have a delivery, because I wasn't going to take no pickup because planes are late and my day is filled for Saturday.

I have a San Diego African Alumni Association, we have a meeting at eleven o'clock. Then my 1402 army outfit, we have our party that Saturday night. So I'm pretty well filled up for Saturday.

MILES: It sounds like you're still involved in a lot of community [unclear].

BROWN: I am. My wife, she's— I'm involved in some church things, but she's really active in it, a lot of different auxiliaries and things. Then she belongs to things outside of church, but it's church-connected.

MILES: You said she used to teach, right?

BROWN: Yes. She taught— Well, after the children, Tammy and Phillip, started school, then she decided to— Well, she worked for General Dynamics Astronautics when we were married, then she quit that when the kids were born. The kids were born and so when they started going to school, she says, "I think I'll—." Somebody said, "Why don't you go and be a teacher's aide or teacher's assistant, just to get in the system again," and she did. She had to ride the bus because I had one car then. She'd ride a bus, transfer downtown, and then ride about a mile and a half from here.

Anyway, they were hiring black teachers in the La Mesa-Spring Valley area, which is another little community east of us, and a lady says, "Why don't you go work, apply for a job out there." So she did, and while she was getting her California credentials, she had to go to State, she went to night school out at San Diego State and she got her credentials.

In the meanwhile, she was teaching in a church school that was connected with the district. So when she got her credentials, the superintendent says, "We've got openings, Mrs. Brown. Where do you want to go? What grade or whatever?" I think there was a kindergarten, first grade, eighth grade and then high school. Well, she had taught in Oklahoma, and she didn't want to do no more big kids. So she said, "I'll teach kindergarten." So she taught kindergarten, then she taught combination kindergarten-first grade. She stayed out there for over twenty years, I guess.

MILES: Wow, doing that grade level the whole time?

BROWN: Yes, but she transferred schools once. She was in Bancroft [Elementary School] and then she went to La Presa [Elementary School]. Then in the meanwhile before that, she was substituting. She was substituting out there, and that's when they gave her a choice of what she wanted to or what class she wanted to teach. So when I retired, she said she was going to—

MILES: We have to switch tapes real quick.

BROWN: Okay.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 10, 2004

BROWN: So after I retired, I retired at fifty-five, and I couldn't decide on what I was going to do for the next two years while she was still working. But I'd been looking around, and I was working in Mission Hills, which is an area in San Diego, and I saw these private school bus drivers. I thought that's something I ought to do. A friend of mine worked for San Diego Unified School District, and it just so happened I was by myself once in an area. I was checking with a metal detector. They had covered a street with asphalt, and I was out locating the manholes and marking them. I saw this here bus driver, and he had his feet propped up, reading a newspaper and drinking coffee. I said, "That's my job and meets my criteria." [mutual laughter] It meets my criteria, they got holiday off, like I had with the city, plus I got three, two and a half, months off in the summertime. That's mine.

So I had my friend that was working with the San Diego Unified School District to get me an application, and I put in for the school bus driver. They said, "Oh, they just finished a class, but they're going to have another one after the first of the year. You want us to contact you?"

I said, "Yes." So they contacted me and I went to the bus drivers' school that they have, and then I took the [California] Highway Patrol. They test us. You have to know the Vehicle Code, plus they have things, special things, about school bus driving and first aid. So that's what we went to school for. Then San Diego Unified School

District requires you to have twenty-four hours behind-the-wheel driving. The state has twenty, but San Diego Unified, they require you to have twenty-four.

So it was Easter vacation when I went for my twenty-four hours behind-the-wheel driving, and I just drove all over, went up to Solana Beach to Coronado and just drove around, put the hours in. So I did all that and then they said okay. I got my license. They said, "Before school starts," this lady calls me, she says, "there's a contract driver or bus company that needed drivers, and so go see if you could hook up with them." So I did and I drove a week for them, and that's when I learned about this left, right. You know, left turn here, because there's certain locations you have to pick them up, northeast corner, etc., etc., and you always make it where you could make your next run.

Anyway, everything was worked out from around this here, but when I went that September just before school started, San Diego Unified called me up and said they were going to have the introduction for their drivers, and I went to that. There's a lot of things you go through. It'd be surprising. They gave you—I had a Thomas Bros. [maps], they say they recommend you get a Thomas Bros.

MILES: The guide?

BROWN: Yes. So they gave me a schedule, and I did my little left rights, right turn here and right turn there and blah, blah. Of course, knowing the city, that helped out a lot. But when I got in, say, Allied Gardens and San Carlos and University City, I didn't know those, but I knew my how to get around. So I didn't have no problem with it.

But I did that and I was going to quit after my wife retired. We were going to move around this country or something. But anyway, I enjoyed it. So I stayed there from '55 to '62, and my wife said, "Oh, you're not going to like it. Them kids are going to

drive you nuts.” Well, I was a little short-tempered somewhat, you know, but I’ve been around kids, I knew how to control myself. She says, “Them kids going to drive you nuts. You’re going to quit after a week.” Heck, I had them under control.

MILES: Did you?

BROWN: Yes, because I knew as an adult— There was a lot of us retired people that was driving these buses, but they treated them college kids and younger few, they gave them a fit. But as I learned the ropes there and everything, I found out when I got a new route I’d tell them that I enforce all the rules and regulations on operating this bus and I am in charge. As long as you’re on this bus, I’m in charge. We have these deferments, we write, you know, people that give us trouble. I wrote a lot of them, but then I only had to do it once. But it depends on.

But the worst kids of all was the kids that I found out in areas where there were military families like in Sierra Mesa, they’d bus them kids down here. Looked like they picked the worse of their kids to be bused down here in our area, and we took the worse of our kids and bused them out in their area. I found that out on that, after about the second year, that’s funny. They’re trying to integrate and everything, not necessary integrate really but mix the kids up. But, like I said, it seemed like they would bring their bad kids here and we’d send our bad kids out there.

MILES: Was that a predominantly white area, Sierra Mesa?

BROWN: It’s navy family, they’re mixed out there. Yes, they’re mixed. In fact, all the areas are mixed. But then, again, there’s a school we have on First and University, and they lived in East San Diego, which is out in not our area, but northeast of here. I mean at that time they had that, what do you call, hippie movement?



MILES: Yes.

BROWN: A lot of them kids were hyped up, too. But I enjoyed it. I really enjoyed the driving the school bus because you learned about kids more so than when I was working Pop Warner. You could tell kids that came out of a family that had no control over them and you found out there was those that had control, because you could tell that there was as different in night and day in these kids.

MILES: Right, just from driving on the bus.

BROWN: Yes. But, like I said, as an adult, I guess I had more discipline on my bus, and they found that out the first time, the first day they road with me. They don't be rolling my windows up and down at their convenience. They're supposed to stay seated at all times. This is things that they found out the first time I drove it, you don't be jumping up and rolling your window up and rolling your window down. Summer months, I cracked the windows halfway.

This is funny. I'd bring these kids from an area, University City, and I'd bring them here. They mixed, but mostly blacks. Just as soon as I'd turn off of 805 [Freeway] on Imperial, they were hog-wild. Well, they only did that about three days, and I calmed down. I'd get out here on Skyline and there was some girl on that bus. She called me old gray-haired everything in the books. So I said, "Uh-huh." I never could find out who she was because we got this mirror and all I got to do is lift my eyes up and I can see. So anyway, she called me a gray-haired something, and so I picked my mic up and said, "I don't appreciate you calling me your family name." And everybody on the bus got on her. You know how they, "Woooo," and all that. After that, she hadn't said a word. But

that really got her, that got her. "I don't appreciate you calling me your family name."

And the kids [unclear], I guess she probably got down under her seat then.

MILES: [unclear].

BROWN: Yes. But I never had heard a peep out—I think I knew who she was, but I can't go by what I think. I have to know what I know. But that really cooled her heels.

MILES: How long did you drive the bus?

BROWN: From fifty-five till sixty-two.

MILES: You were retired by fifty-five?

BROWN: I retired at fifty-five and when I was eligible for— In fact, when I went to drive the school bus, it helped a lot because I was paying state retirement and Social Security. The city got out of Social Security and so when I applied, when I went to apply for Social Security at sixty-two.

MILES: Wait a minute. Oh, I'm sorry, you were age fifty-five. I was thinking it was 1955. I got it.

BROWN: I retired in, well, I was fifty-five.

MILES: But that would have been in the 1980s, though.

BROWN: Thank you.

MILES: Wow, you're a hundred years old. [mutual laughter]

BROWN: Thank you for correcting me. Yes, I retired when I was fifty-five, and I drove the school bus until I was sixty-two. I told them I'm going to drive and draw my Social Security, and that's it. Anyway, they said—well, I was fifty-five in February. My supervisor says, "Mr. Brown, why don't you stay a few more months and drive them until June and then leave." So I said okay, so I did.

So when I applied for Social Security and after everything was coming through, they said, "You made too much money," at that time. There was a limit that I could draw. So they said, "You could either pay it back in a lump sum or increments."

So I said I'd pay it all off in a lump sum, because whatever it was when I worked from February to June, it was about— Let's see, February, March, April, May, June, that was five months. In those five months, I drew all my things from driving the school bus, too, so that's when I had to pay the Social Security some money back.

MILES: You had to pay it back?

BROWN: Yes, some money. For every three dollars I made over, I had to pay back one dollar or something like that. Right now I'm seventy-five and I can work and earn a million and wouldn't have to do it, because after, I think, there's a certain age limit, then there's no limit to what you can do after, what you can earn after that.

MILES: What are you currently doing? Taking it easy?

BROWN: All I do now is my volunteer work, the training center, Boys Club, and the Alumni Association and, of course, church activities, and that's about it.

MILES: That's a quite a lot, though.

BROWN: Because I've got a lot of yard and things that I have to do, too, and so that's my exercise and everything. I go walking in the mornings when I— Like I say, my knees run bad with this cold weather, and I've been in the last week and a half. In fact, I'm going to try to start next week. But I have a large backyard, and, of course, you saw out in the front. I didn't do any of it. My son did that, and then I had another friend trim the hedges. But I've got to renew that carpet. I go and I'll pull that old carpet out that you saw it's wearing out.

MILES: You're going to do it yourself?

BROWN: Oh yes. Yes, pull it all out, and I get so many feet of it that I know I need and take that old pattern that I have. This is the third time I think I'm going to renew that. Lay it out there and mark it off on the back and cut it out and then lay it out. You have to glue it down.

So that is the history of Joseph Philip Brown from 1930 to 2004.

MILES: Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview with me.

BROWN: But I enjoy it and I hope I didn't run my mouth too much.

MILES: That's the point of the interview. Thank you again, Mr. Brown.

BROWN: Thank you.

[End of interview]

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