



Tim Hall Oral History Interview, June 25, 2014

Title

“African American Student Life in the 1970s”

Date

June 25, 2014

Location

The Portland Building, Portland, Oregon.

Summary

In the interview, Hall recounts his upbringing in Los Angeles, his decision to attend OSU, and the adjustments that he faced in moving to a small town with a very small African American population. A major theme of the session is Hall's recollections of ignorant attitudes and bigotry faced by the black student community during his stint in Corvallis. In this, he discusses police harassment, hostility from local merchants, and uncomfortable interactions with white students who had grown up in racially homogeneous environments.

Hall also reflects on the African American community that emerged during his college years, noting his friendship with several athletes, social life, and hangouts, including the Black Cultural Center, which Hall helped to found. Hall likewise recalls his more personal experience of being an OSU student, discussing the jobs that he held, the locations (including Philomath) where he lived, and his academic progression from Oceanography to Technical Journalism.

The remainder of the session is chiefly devoted to an overview of Hall's career path following OSU. He describes his first employment in public relations at the Occidental Petroleum Corporation and shares his memories of later jobs at Kaiser Permanente and the Portland Water Bureau. Hall also speaks to his continuing involvement with OSU as a member of its Board of Advisors for Minority Affairs, his interactions with three OSU presidents, and his pride in OSU's commitment to upgrading its cultural centers and recruiting a more diverse student body.

Interviewee

Tim Hall

Interviewer

Janice Dilg

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/hall/>

Transcript

Janice Dilg: So today is June 25th, 2014, and this is Janice Dilg with the Oregon State University Oral History Project, and I'm here today with Tim Hall in his office in the Portland Water Bureau, in the Portland Building in downtown Portland, Oregon. Good afternoon.

Tim Hall: Hi!

JD: So people may notice that there are some tantalizing jerseys over your head, and we will get to those shortly, and we will show them in full because they are Oregon State-related. But I think we'll start first with talking a little about just brief family history—kind of where you came from, where you were born, and how you came to Oregon.

TH: I was born in Los Angeles. My father was an employee of Alcoa Aluminum. My mother passed away very young, when I was eight years old, so I was raised by a single dad. And I had three brothers and one sister, so there were five of us. I had an interest in oceanography, which led me to consider Oregon State. And being a student at L.A. High in Los Angeles, everyone thought I was crazy for going to Oregon.

In fact, I was always amazed that people said they never even heard of Oregon State. But because it was an exceptional university for oceanography, which is what I had a really strong interest in—and I was a scuba diver—I was thinking what a great career it would be to be a part of searching for oil. And so I put in an application to OSU. I got accepted. I was kind of surprised how quickly I got accepted. I also got accepted to UCLA, USC and Stanford, and also Cal-Berkeley. So with all of that said, my friends were like, "Wait a minute, you're still going to OSU?" And I said, "Yes, I am."

So in the summer of 1973, the late summer of 1973, I made my way to Corvallis, and I was surprised. I actually got off the freeway well before the current exit that's posted, and I ended up taking the back roads through a number of places like Lebanon, and some other cities that I can't remember the names of. But I was thinking, "Wow, this is like being in the country." And a friend of mine, Kevin, was actually riding with me, and he says, "I'm going to Washington State. I wonder if it's like this."

So we drove into town, and I was amazed to find that there were only two tall buildings, the Kerr Administration Building and the library—anything that was taller than two stories—and then I really realized that, you know, I was not in Oz anymore. So, because, Los Angeles is skyscrapers and smog and traffic, but here is Corvallis, and it was a farming community. We were driving past these little places that were little fruit basket sellers on the side. And Kevin kept saying "Boy, you're really not going to be in a big city."

However, I was welcomed very kindly to OSU, even though there weren't any—there were very few black students that I saw. And in fact, I found out, after I arrived at OSU, that the students had actually—most of the black students had actually boycotted the university and had left, because a football player had refused to shave off his beard under Coach Dee Andros. And so all of the students, African American students that were on campus were all new. So there had been a whole year, apparently, where there were no African American students at OSU. And I kept thinking, "Boy, and the football team is not winning very much, [laughs] so maybe that had something to do with something."

But I did meet a number of students from all over the country who were just like me—finding Corvallis something of interest, more of a curiosity, because again, it was a very small town. I think at that time there might have been 25,000 people there, and the town was only so big. The town—the whole city of Corvallis wasn't half as big as my neighborhood. But, again, it was still—in my mind [0:05:00], OSU was a good place to get an education, and therefore I was impressed by what I saw on the campus once I got there.

I remember that one of the first things I did was park my car, which was a hot rod, and took a walk through the campus. And amazing as it sounds today, kids stared at me. It was kind of—we're talking about 1973, not 1953, and I kept thinking, "Did I go back in time? Is this *Happy Days*, and Fonzie's going to jump out?" But it was still very comfortable and very nice, and I remember that after I got—I remember going to the Gill Coliseum to get my packet for classes, and to stand in line to sign up for classes. Some of the classes I wanted, the line was just considerably long, and it was unlikely that I was going to get into those classes, even though I had it marked down that this is where I wanted to do my first quarter at OSU. I ended up getting half of the classes I wanted.

My major, my official major was geological oceanography. You just couldn't have oceanography; there had to be a subset. So geology was what I was interested in, and I thought about the career that I had heard about as being one of those people that actually searched for oil, and being on a ship as an oceanographer, examining core samples and determining where on our planet we might find more supplies of oil. But that's interesting, because my first job was with Occidental Petroleum Corporation, so I did fulfill that goal in some regard.

JD: So you mentioned that—it sounded like from the way you talked about it, that there really just wasn't any question that you would go to college. Was there discussion in your family? Did you have to convince your father, or was that just an expectation of all of the children, that college was the place to go?

TH: Well, my dad had always said, as a factory worker, that it was important that his kids get an education, and he was very adamant that that be something, that be a goal, and that as a goal, that we should start planning early. So I did. Sadly, my dad passed away when I was sixteen; he was killed in car accident. So I lost that parental figure in my family that had been a big part of my life. My brothers and sisters, being at the ages of seventeen on down to nine, we were in a situation where my aunt was our guardian, and we pretty much raised ourselves. She kept an eye on us. Because my father was killed in a car accident, there was a settlement with the oil company that had been involved in the accident.

But as I said, it was important to my dad, and important to me, that I get an education. I was blessed with high grades. I graduated with a 3.9, and if I could have just gotten Spanish, done a little better on Spanish, I'd have got 4.0. But I took that into OSU with the belief that I was prepared for college. And even today when I talk to students at various high schools, I said, "Start now. Start when you're in junior high school about going to college." And I always hear from parents, saying, "Why are you always lobbying people to go to OSU?" And I said, "OSU is one of the top colleges, top universities in the country! It's just getting past Corvallis."

And that's what the toughest part of OSU was for many years, and even to a small extent now, was getting beyond the small town, and understanding that the university was exceptional. And I always thought that it was exceptional. I mean, even when people criticized OSU, I stood up and said, "Wait a minute! Yes, you may have left because of the bigotry in Corvallis, but didn't OSU treat you right?" And folks would say, "Well, yeah, they did." And I said, "Well, don't blame OSU. Let's talk about Corvallis."

And I'm happy to say that President Paul Risser, when he was there, that was one of the top things that he wanted to see done, was that the culture of Corvallis be changed so that when students of color that were recruited to OSU [0:10:02]—once we got here, that they weren't chased away by the police or the business owners in Corvallis. And President Ray has continued that on. He has worked with the mayor, the police chief, and actually, I have attended workshops where Tim Weiss, who's a national speaker, came to Corvallis and basically talked to the police officers to get them to see their biases, and to understand how they made people feel. And I believe those types of programs at OSU, and in Corvallis, help the university today. But my dad was a strong influence, but also my teachers. My next-door neighbor now is a teacher, and I cut her lawn, and she says, "Why?" And I said, "Because I owe teachers so much."

JD: [Laughs] So you start out wanting to be a geological oceanographer. Did you end up getting a degree in that discipline?

TH: No. I had learned that the vision, or the way the job was described as an oceanographer, was that I would be on a ship somewhere, whether the Atlantic or the Pacific, or someplace looking for oil, and that I would be on a ship for six months, and then I'd have six months of free time. And that's appealing, with someone saying, "Oh, yeah, you can spend six months on a ship, and then be out searching, then spend the rest of your time with family and friends and traveling," because I love to travel. But that changed. All of a sudden, the government got involved, and the oceanography jobs changed dramatically, to where you were either on a ship almost an entire year, or every other month, or something like that, and it just did not appeal to me.

And one of my junior high school teachers basically once told me that I had a really—a talent for writing, and I enjoyed writing stories and poems, and even just news articles. And so I took a class in journalism, found that I liked it, changed my major. I did dabble in economics for about a minute, [laughs] but with journalism, I realized that I could put into words what people were saying. And I did a very short tenure at the newspaper in Astoria, doing hospitals. All these things kind of tied back into my career.

But I remember thinking how much I enjoyed being a reporter, but I didn't like the idea of having to do day to day to day stories, or every-other-day stories. So I went into a subset, which was public relations, and I found that you could write and do public relations, but you could also talk to people. And I enjoyed just having conversations with people at OSU, and with my teachers.

I remember I wrote an article for *The Barometer* on Elton John. Elton John had just come out with *Goodbye, Yellow Brick Road*, and I enjoyed the album. One of the people, the critics, on *The Barometer* wrote this horrible—what I thought was a horrible critique of the album. And I wrote back and said, "You don't know what you're talking about, blah-blah-blah, and this is going to be a great album, and everyone will remember Elton John, and they won't remember you." [Laughs] And I heard from friends of mine who said, "Great article, Tim!" And here I am an African-American, and I'm writing about Elton John, and not about Marvin Gaye or some black singing group. My girlfriend thought it was kind of interesting as well, and so did my friends and roommates. They all said, "What's going on with you?" And I said, "Hey, I like the album!" I like all kinds of music. Even today, I like all kinds of music.

So, but yes, it was an interesting time, and as a journalist, my professor—Professor Dowd, I believe—was very supportive. I got a B, and it's only because I was really bad at typos.

JD: [Laughs] So you mentioned this particular professor. Were there other faculty or people on campus who were sort of mentors to you during your years that you were there?

TH: I can't say that there were. [0:15:00] Lonnie B. Harris, who ran the Equal Education Program, he was sort of like a dad to most of the black students there, because there were so few of us. I think at the time, in 1973, there might have been 25 of us. Out of 15,000 students, to have that small number—and most of the students that were black were athletes.

I did remember my chemistry professor, who I liked a lot, and the reason I remember him is because calculators had just come out, and I was terrible with a slide rule, trying to figure this thing out. So I was at the bookstore, and there was Hewlett-Packard 35, and the guys back there showed me how to work it, and he said, "Yeah, slide rule? Forget that! You could do this in seconds." So I bought one, and I remember it was like, at that time, maybe \$150, \$180. And I'm in the classroom, and everybody's got their slide rule, and I'm just going like this! [Laughs] And he looked at me and said, "What have you got there?" And I said, "Calculator." And he said, "Bring it down here." So I brought it down there, and he said, "Well, did I approve this?" And I said, "Well, did you have to? I didn't know! I thought that I was able to use any of the tools that they were selling at the bookstore."

And he actually—as I recall, he banned calculators. So I could do my homework on a calculator, but a slide rule, and anybody—it's funny. Today, you talk about a slide rule, people go, "What is that? A slide rule?" But I was okay, but if you handed me a slide rule, if they actually still have one, I would be hard-pressed to try to figure out how to work it, so—not an engineer.

JD: [Laughs] So you mentioned a Hewlett-Packard calculator, and I believe that one of your jobs that you held during your years at OSU was at HP.

TH: Yes. When I was a senior, Hewlett-Packard had just come to Corvallis, and a lot of the employees had been transferred from Cupertino. And so I applied for a job that had flexible hours in the Returns/Marketing department, which was kind of odd, and I basically worked in a room with two other people. We processed calculators that had been defective and had been returned for one reason or another. But also the marketing director at that time saw that I was interested in what was going on with marketing and writing, and so she gave me the opportunity to kind of sit in on marketing discussions, in addition to processing the return of calculators.

I recall that when I decided to leave Corvallis after I graduated, I went into tell Sharon Butterfield. I said, "Sharon, I need to go home. I need to go back to Los Angeles; it's raining too much here. I'm sorry." And she looked up at me and she said, "Take me with you!" [Laughs] And that's how a lot of the folks from Cupertino—my understanding is that years later, most of the people who were at Hewlett-Packard from the very early days left. After they had trained people to take their jobs, they took off back to the Bay Area.

But Hewlett-Packard was a great place to work, and I remember I actually bought a calculator—one of the HP 67s, which was even more advanced than the 35. And I kid you not; I still have these calculators. I've been offered money for them from—the Hewlett-Packard Museum has a site, and they say, "We're always looking for working models of these HP 65, HP 67," I mean 67 and HP 01—the watch. Actually tried—I bought a defective watch and had it fixed, so that's the watch that went to the moon. [Laughs]

JD: That's exciting.

TH: Yeah.

JD: So I'm assuming that you're paying for college as you're going along, and using the income from these jobs?

TH: Well, I was kind of surprised. When I applied to OSU, I was surprised that I actually got a letter saying, "If you're coming, we'll give you grants, and you can pay in-state tuition," and it was all these incentives that I couldn't understand until later, when I got to Corvallis, that [0:19:59], "Oh, yeah, they're trying to rebuild the African-American student body." But still, I thought it was nice that they made these offers, and I still had to pay some tuition, and I remember, I think at the time, I ended up owing something like \$8,000. And I feel sorry for kids today, because I paid \$8,000 for four years, and I'm paying my daughter's college off, and it's \$40,000. No, I worked in the library, and I actually made a video on how to use the library, [laughs] which was kind of interesting.

JD: And how did one use the library at that point? What kind of technologies, or what services were available?

TH: Oh, well, you still had to go—my memory's faulty, but you still had to go to the card catalog and look up what the book was, and then go down and look for those numbers. And my job—and the reason I know this—was that I actually put books away. My job was to take this big cart at the end of the—my shift would start with, like, five carts, and I had to put these carts that had three levels of shelves, and all these books, away. So I had to first figure out where each of those books were, so I had to categorize them, and then I had to go find them in the library. And I would start at, like 7 PM, and be done by 11, when the library was closing.

But that was the only job I'd actually had at OSU. I had decided that I needed to focus on my studies, and the little bit of money that I got—I think I was even well below minimum wage at that time. It was interesting. I enjoyed the library. And I'm sure people are saying right now, "Gosh, he enjoyed the library?" But the library was a great place to study. It was quiet. I remember one evening, my roommate—one of my roommates, Don Smith, who was a basketball player, was in the library, and I was working. And I said, "Don, good to see you," and he says—so we were sitting down talking, and another basketball player, George Tucker, walks in, and he says, "What are you guys doing?" And I said, "We're studying." And Don said, "You should try it some time, George." [Laughs] And George laughed, and then he said, "You know what? I should." And he sat down.

And bless his heart, he got into the habit of studying, and he graduated. He didn't graduate at OSU, but he went down to the University of San Francisco after his basketball career at OSU ended, and got his degree. And he said that he had picked up his habits from—or his bad habits from Don and I, you know, going to the library and studying.

JD: And so did you live on campus during those years, or in an apartment, or—?

TH: Well, my first year, I lived in McNary dorm, on the fifth floor. And I can't remember the room number, but my first roommate was a young man from Mount Angel, and that was a very short-lived roommate, because I remember him bringing a group of kids from his hometown into the room to show me off, like I was something in the zoo. [Laughs] And I didn't appreciate that at all, because all these kids were, like, questioning me, like, all these things. "You're from Los Angeles? Isn't there a lot of crime?" And anyway, so I went downstairs and said, "I want a different roommate." And they said, "Well, we can't give you another roommate." And I said, "Well, can I get another room?" "No, you can't." And they says, "Well, what you can do is pay for a single." And I said, "Sign me up."

So at the end of my first year, because of what I started to perceive was just more and more bigotry, I had made a decision to leave. I was going to go back. In fact, I had applied to UCLA to get in, and I went home. And my swim coach was a guy named Robert Kerry, and Robert said, "Tim, I know Corvallis is tough, but as a black man, if you can deal with all of those white people questioning you, being curious, and doing all these things—if you can adjust, if you can understand,

this will serve you better than going to an all-black college where life is not going to be that way." [0:25:03] He said, "You will meet people at OSU that will change your mind" about the bigotry that I was experiencing in Corvallis.

In Corvallis, I will say—I mean, I was a target of the police. I had a hot rod, and they would follow me all the time. And even when I loaned my car to some of my female friends, they would get stopped because the police thought it was me. So it was just unbelievable level of harassment, and I don't know how much money I paid in tickets that I didn't deserve, but the judge was like, "Oh, you're here again? \$100." "You're here again? \$100." Well, after a while, it starts to wear on you. So to combat that, I hired an attorney, Randolph Court, to represent me. And so Randolph would show up in court with me, argue that this is harassment, and they'd: case dismissed. They didn't want that to happen again.

Yeah, but I lived in Philomath. In fact, I actually thought I was the first black person to ever live in Philomath, because when I returned to OSU after my swim coach told me to go back, I couldn't find any place to stay in town. So I drove out to Philomath, and I got an apartment behind the Dairy Queen, which is still there. And the people there in Philomath were very nice. I mean, I'll never forget a deputy sheriff actually coming to my door to warn me about places not to go, where I would get into trouble, or people would want to get into trouble. And the people who pumped gas were very nice, and the girls at the Dairy Queen. I always loved chocolate shakes and strawberry shakes, and I'd walk in—"Chocolate shake, Tim?" [Laughs] So it was very comfortable in that regards.

And I actually went to the church. I was invited to go to the church, and I'll never forget that they held a potluck for me at the church. There was a Sunday potluck, and I said, "Yes, I will come. I will definitely come." And so I go to the church, and here's this pot luck after the service was over, and it was for me! And I kept thinking, "Boy, this is a great place to live! This is wonderful!" And I wanted to stay there, but the drive—what was it, seven-mile drive to Corvallis, back and forth during the course of the day, as I started my years, my studies started to change, and my schedules started to change, I couldn't drive back to Philomath back and forth.

So I ended up with Lonnie Jordon and Don at an apartment on I think it was Kings Boulevard. And that was a nice place. We had a lot of fun. In fact, the fun part about it was we would have parties that would start at 11 o'clock at night. And folks would say, "Why are you having a party at 11?" And we said, "Because all the people who are boring and dull will have gone to sleep, and all the people who are really cool will come to the party." And so our apartment would be just jam-packed with people. And we invited the other apartment residents, the kids in the other apartments. Say, "Look, we're going to throw a party. You guys can come." So there was nobody who could complain about the noise.

So the party would be going on till 4 o'clock in the morning. And sadly, we used to say, "Nobody goes home alone," which is horrible to think about now. But then we would go out to breakfast, to the Big O. I'm really upset to see that the Big O went away, because that was a great place to hang out, and for an early-morning breakfast. But my favorite place was the apartment on Kings Boulevard.

JD: And so you were living with all these athletes and, aside from swimming and scuba diving, you weren't participating in any formal athletic programs, but you guys all found common ground anyway?

TH: Yeah, we did, and it was—I'll never forget. I always saw Lonnie Shelton and George Tuckerman, Don Smith, and Ricky Lee, and a number of other guys, football and basketball players, and we just—everybody would just kind of look and say, "Oh, he's from Los Angeles." [0:30:00] Well, George is from Pasadena, and Don was Bakersfield, Lonnie was from Bakersfield, so these were all Californians. So that was the common denominator, that we were from California. Ricky Lee was from Oregon, so he was an outcast.

But we all just kind of got together, and we played dominoes. We would say, "Hey, you want to come over and play dominoes?" "Yeah, sure." Drink beer—underage, but still drank beer. And we'd break up tables playing dominoes. "Ten! Twenty-five!" Yeah. And so later on, right before Lonnie had signed a pro contract, we were all going to be roommates, and Lonnie had, during the off-season, during the summer, had signed a pro contract with the Spirits of St. Louis, an ABA, American Basketball Association, team. And these agents that represented him—basically, he signed under duress. They had him out till 3 o'clock in the morning, trying to get him to sign a contract that benefitted them financially.

So I'll never forget; Lonnie gave me a call and said—my friends all called me "Taz," which was short for "Tasmanian Devil." We'll just let that go. But he said, "I think I made a mistake." And he told me what he had done, and I said, "Here's

what I recommend you do. I think you call Ralph. Call Ralph Miller. Tell him what you did; tell him how they did this." They were shuttling—they actually shuttled him to another state, where under the age of 18, he could—I mean, at the age of 18, he could sign a pro contract. Otherwise, he couldn't. So he did talk to Ralph, and the university took the NCAA to court, to allow Lonnie to continue to play.

And it was a very tough time for all of the guys, George and Don, and Rocky Smith, and here's these guys that really had a great team, and they were the first team to beat UCLA. UCLA had been number one, national championship, year after year after year. And then one day, Lonnie just put on a show, and we blew out UCLA on national television. And so all of these coaches, whether it was Washington State, or Washington, or the University of Oregon, they says, "It's not fair that a pro basketball player is allowed to play college ball." That was the criticism of Lonnie.

Ultimately, the courts decided not to allow Lonnie to play. He lost, and he ended up going in the first round to the New York Knicks. I actually own his jersey, his Knicks jersey. He's still my friend. In fact, on my phone is a phone message from Lonnie, where he called me on Father's Day to say, "Hey, it's another great dad, and I'm just calling to say, 'Happy Father's Day.'" So George Tucker—we're still in contact. I was the godfather to his daughter, and he was the godfather to one of my daughters. Don Smith? I'm trying to track down. [Laughs] He just kind of disappeared. I don't know where. Ricky Lee, I talk to all the time. So many of the guys that played basketball at OSU—Steve Smith and several others, Steve Johnson—I run into them. Mark Radford. I see them from time to time.

So we just got to know each other, even though it's not about hype. It's not about athleticism. Yes, I was the swimmer; I played a tiny bit of football. I actually went out for JV football at OSU, but realized that it was not something I could do without getting hurt badly. [Laughs] There's no pretense. At five-foot six, and 160 pounds, I break easy, at that time. But it was interesting. We treated each other like family. Because of the small number of African American students, we were like a family, and you could be anywhere on campus, and there'd be another black student; if they saw you, they would make sure you saw them. And just come up and talk. And that was great. That was a good feeling.

JD: And so you mentioned the Big O and your apartment, but were there other places on campus or around town that you would regularly hang out? [0:35:04]

TH: Well, there was a record store. I can't remember the name of it. It's got two letters, like A & C, or E & C Records, or something. We hung out there a lot. I can't remember the name of that record store. But that was the one place. The Safeway—one of the few stores you could actually go in where they didn't follow you. [Laughs] That was a problem—really! You went shopping in Corvallis, and you were a person of color? As soon as you walked in the door, somebody was behind you, making sure you weren't going to shoplift. And that was just downright crazy, downright crazy.

JD: And you also mentioned a couple of minutes ago about writing a review that was published in *The Barometer*. As a journalism student, did you work regularly on the newspaper, or for the yearbook?

TH: I'd like to say I wanted to. I very much wanted to. But I remember listening to someone—Kerry Eggers, who still writes today—and I remember not being a part of the conversation, but listening to him talk about the amount of work that was involved, and I know—I'm not shy when it comes to hard work. I will dedicate myself. But I did not see myself at that time as being very much welcomed into the *Barometer* family, or on the yearbook. And in fact, one my complaints about OSU at the time was, outside of the pages on the basketball and football team, you hardly saw any black students in the yearbooks. And I have all my yearbooks to prove it.

So, but I probably should have, and gotten in, and kind of changed the culture, but sometimes if you don't have the ability to stay with it for a number of years to help that culture change, it won't change. And as a junior, and focusing more on my junior and senior year, my classes were the primary thing that I had to think about, and those extra activities can take up a lot of time. But I would say to students today, if you are interested in writing, consider *The Barometer*. I don't know if the yearbook's—by the time kids get around, everything will be electronic or digital, and it's like, "A paper yearbook? What the hell is that?" [Laughs]

JD: And you also mentioned Lonnie B. Harris a bit. Was the Black Cultural Center kind of coming to being during the time that you were on campus?

TH: It came into being, and I actually got involved in helping to get it established. It's one of the things about OSU I was proud of. I would have to walk to campus from my apartment. Even though I owned a car, I still would prefer just to go ahead and walk the distance from my apartment all the way down to campus, usually chemistry. I did enjoy watching *Perry Mason*. *Perry Mason* came on at 12 noon every day, and I would actually—people probably think I'm crazy, but *Perry Mason*? You learn a lot from *Perry Mason*. *Perry Mason* was the expert on logic, and how to win an argument, and how to uncover the facts and the details. And I kept thinking, "Everybody should be watching *Perry Mason*," because then when they go into court, and there's a cop that you know he's lying, you know how to say, "Wait a minute, officer. How about this point?" And I've used that.

But the Black Cultural Center, the Lonnie B.—which is now the Lonnie B. Harris Center—was basically an old caretaker's house that was run down. It had this ugly green shag carpeting. And a group of us basically approached the university and said, "This building isn't being used. Do you think we could have it for a little while, just as a stopover?" Because the MU, the Memorial Union at the time, was like going to the zoo. You'd sit at a table, and everybody'd walk by and say, "Oh, look, there's Lonnie Shelton! Oh, there's George Tucker!" So these guys felt uncomfortable going to the Memorial Union. [0:40:00]

So we started at that little run-down building, and saw it as a place not only where we could go to study, but we could play dominoes, we could just kind of hang out before class, watch TV, *Perry Mason*. [Laughs]

JD: Extracurricular education.

TH: Oh, yeah, I'm sure folks are breaking out laughing right now. But this little run-down building. And I'm really—I'm happy to say that the university at that time recognized that it made sense, that the building is getting no use, and that a group of students were willing to come inside and occupy it, and not change anything. The shag carpet stayed for many years. And it was a place where we had domino tournaments, and we would do small events there that were culturally related.

And it was a place where white students could go. We were—it was very welcoming. It was a place where white students could actually go and get a kind of interaction with black students, and see images of black culture. There were pictures on the walls, posters, books that students could read. All of us who had books about slavery and you name it; we just kind of donated them to that building. And many of those books are still there. Just so kids could come in, check them out, and read about stuff that they would not find in the library in Corvallis, or in the library at the university.

So, but it was a great place, and I'm proud of President Ray and President Risser, who recognized the value of the cultural centers. And I mean, the university at one point was using them as recruiting tool, but I'm saying—I remember telling Paul Risser, I said, "Wait a minute. You're using this building as a recruitment tool, but it's a run-down old building! Aren't you guys going to put a little money into it?" And they did. They actually looked at what they were doing, and said, "Hey, guess what? You're right! It is kind of run-down." And here it is on the brochure, that cultural center!

So, but Ed Ray was able to get money to actually rebuild the cultural centers. They rebuilt the Native American Longhouse. I was at OSU a few weeks ago. They rebuilt—they moved and built the Cesar Chavez Cultural Center, and they are on track to do the Lonnie B. Harris Cultural Center. I don't know where that project is right now, but there's also going to be the Asian/Pacific Islander Cultural Center, as well, so very thumbs-up for OSU for doing that.

JD: And can you recall what any of the kind of cultural events were that you helped present there?

TH: We would have just kind of Black History Month things that we would do. Nothing very exciting, because one, we were all students and we were all busy. I think we had Christmas dinner, and some things like that. Nothing really. Back in that day, Kwanzaa was not really something we were actually involved in or doing. Today, it's something that they do have at the cultural center, but back in the '70s, in the early, mid-to-late '70s, it was not something that was very popular for African American students.

JD: And as you've been talking and relating sort of local issues on the campus that affected students or black students, were there sort of bigger national events, or international events, that you remember that played a role on campus, within

your group? Speakers that maybe came to campus? I mean, certainly the Vietnam War was still going on, and ended during that time period. But any—?

TH: And I came close to going. [Laughs] Yeah. Civil rights was very big. We were in the shadow of the Watts riots, and being from Los Angeles, I got a very close view of the Watts riots. I grew up near South Central Los Angeles, and watched them as they marched down Central Boulevard burning and looting, which was very sad to watch. [0:45:00] But I remember in a black history class, there was a teacher who talked about the Watts riots, and he basically said, "Oh, yes, it was an economic issue." And I told him—I stood up and said, "No, it's not." And he said, "Excuse me?" And I said, "No, it was not. It was about police oppression." I said, "The police got out. They beat this woman—pulled this woman out of her car and beat her in front of a bunch of black people, and they had had enough." That's what sparked the Watts riot.

And I told him, I said, "You know what? I'm going to bring something to the next class, and let you read it, and let you show the pictures." And it was the *Ebony* magazine that I still have to this day that showed images of the Watts riots, and told the story from the perspective of African Americans, about the police oppression in Los Angeles at the time. It was really bad. My father, he had always warned me and my brothers. He said, "Look, as young—when you start to drive, you get pulled over by a cop, put both your hands on the steering wheel, because if they're in your lap, you'll get shot. They will shoot you if your hands are in your lap, or if you reach to the glove compartment to get your driver's license—I mean, your registration and insurance, that will get you shot." And I was like, "Whoa!"

And in Corvallis I took that to heart, because there were students who said they had done exactly that, and had the cops draw down on them, so. Yeah, but civil rights—I think the civil rights and the riots, the riots not only in Los Angeles, but in, I think, Detroit—these things were happening. I think black people had kind of—had basically lost their patience. Black Panthers were a big thing back then. But as students, we were pretty much focused on our education. And I say that with all honesty, because I should have been more involved, but I kept thinking, "If I get my education, and I focus on that, then I will be able to make a difference someday." And yes, I could march about this, and yes, I could write letters, but I'm in Corvallis, and it's going to fall on deaf ears.

If it had been—and even, I had friends at the University of Oregon that said, "Oh, gosh, it was even worse there. They could care less about civil rights." And I'm thinking, "That's the U of O!" And it's like, "No, believe me, Corvallis has more of an appreciation for people of color than the U of O does." Which turned out to be very true. I never could believe that, but yes; I would have thought quite the opposite.

JD: So you get this great education, and you're involved in journalism, and just talk a little about your education at OSU, kind of where that led you, what career path you've been down.

TH: Well, after I graduated and I left Hewlett-Packard, I would have loved to have worked in the marketing department, but again, the weather got to me. I arrived in Los Angeles, and after I unpacked my bags, I realized I had to get a job. And so I applied for one job, and that was a publications assistant at Occidental Petroleum. I just saw an ad in the newspaper, "Publications assistant—no experience necessary." And I had actually worked on some things. I had done a brochure for the American Heart Association. I actually put together their brochure. I did an alumni newsletter. I worked on one issue of that, and still have that, and in fact it was one of their popular issues, and that's when I knew, "Hey, I can do this!"

So I showed up at Occidental, and I applied for this job, and I went in and I interviewed with this woman, and I could see right away she was not going to hire me. I just kind of knew that she was not going to hire me. But part of the hiring, the interview process, was meeting with the vice president of public relations at Occidental. And so I went in, and the gentleman's name was Carl Blumet. Very nice man. And he sat me down, and he says, "Okay," and I could feel, again, I was probably the third or fourth person he had talked to. And so Carl says, "Okay, what's your background?" And I told him a few things I had done. And he says, "Well, what did you do in high school and college?" And I said, "Well, I was a lifeguard at the beach." [0:50:01] And Carl looked at me, and he said, "Where?" And I said, "Well, over in Playa Del Rey, near Santa Monica." I said, "Avenue 67." And he just looked at me, and he got up and closed the door, and he said, "I was at Avenue 66." And he said, "How many people did you save?" And I said, "Well, I got credit for two, grabbing two out of riptide."

And for the next two hours we talked about lifeguards. His lifeguard experience, and how he enjoyed it, and it was a great time. And I had been a pool guard, as well, at a swimming pool at my high school. And Carl went on and on and on, and

we just sat there talking and talking. Finally, I went, "Mr. Blumet, we've been talking for well over an hour, and I'm sure you're busy," and he looks, and he says, "Tim, you're right." And he gets up, and we walk out the door, and he walks me to the elevator, and he said, "What job are you here for?" And I said, "The publication assistant." And he said, "Oh, you don't want that crappy job." And he said, "Come back on Wednesday." And I said, "Yes." He says, "How would you like to be my associate?"

And he made me a public relations associate. And it was basically reading the newspapers early in the morning so that when Carl and the lawyers, and all these Occidental executives came in, I had this summary of what was going on on the East Coast, in New York, on the stock market. And I was the assistant editor of *Oxy Today* newsletter—news magazine. And Carl was just wonderful. Carl and a guy named Phil Wallach, who at the time ran one of the biggest PR agencies in New York—these two gentlemen were my mentors.

And they taught me—Carl once told me, "Forget about what you learned in college. Here's what PR's all about. It's about relationships. It's about the people you know." One of the things that I have—actually, today I have a collection of the three monkeys: "See no Evil." And Carl was like, "When you work for some companies, you're going to hear people say all these horrible things about it. They're going to show you pictures that might upset you." And he said, "In public relations, what you're there to do is to represent the company, and if there is evil, don't close a blind eye to it, but recognize it. Don't speak poorly about the company unless you're absolutely certain about it having done something wrong."

And at that time, Occidental Petroleum was involved in Libya, which was the only American company at the time that actually had operations in Libya, under Muammar Gaddafi. And also, we had operations in Peru, and we had operations in Russia. Armand Hammer, who was the chairman of Occidental Petroleum, was the only American allowed to fly into Russia without any kind of permit or any allowances. Armand Hammer's history of giving pencils, and hospitals, and set up—that's interesting reading to anybody who wants to read about a corporate person who, many years later, was allegedly turned out to be a Russian spy. [Laughs] It's like, "Oh, gosh." But that was a great place to work.

Later, I went from there to Ty Corp. I was only at Ty Corp. a short time, only because it was not a good environment to work in. My boss was a great guy, but the staff people that I had weren't very nice. They had their biases, and this one woman, she had actually once told me the only contact she ever had was with football players at USC, because her dad had to greet them. And I was like, "Okay, that's your only contact? Okay."

So I went from there to Kaiser Permanente, in Southern California, and I enjoyed that very much. I was named the regional director of communications very quickly, and I loved it. I thought it was great. And in fact, the best advice I ever got working was from a woman at Kaiser. Her name was Bonnie Martin. And on my first day, she said, "Tim"—after I'd spent the day studying about Kaiser, she said, "Tim, I want you to do one thing while you're here, and it's the only thing I want you to do, because when it stops, I want you to quit and go to work someplace else." And I was like, "Okay, what else do I need to know?" [0:55:00] And she said, "I want you to have fun. If you're having fun, you want to come to work every day. You won't be hesitant at getting out of bed. You won't be complaining to your friends about how horrible your boss is, or the work you do. You will just be so excited to come to work, and be happy, because you're getting something accomplished every day."

And that stuck with me. And it's the advice I give to young people, and anybody, even the people that work for me. It's like, "When this is no longer fun, when you don't want to come to work, find someplace that does make you happy, because life is too short to say, 'I worked 20 years someplace, and I couldn't stand my boss, and the company was horrible for doing all these—whatever it was.'"

JD: And I guess it was through Kaiser Permanente that you ended up migrating back to the Northwest?

TH: Yes, I did. I had two kids and one on the way, and I always thought that Los Angeles was not a great place to raise kids in. But the Northwest, Pacific Northwest, was. And so a good friend of mine, Mike Catcher, had just been reassigned from Kaiser California, southern California, to Kaiser Oregon. And so Mike and I had this conversation while he was visiting Los Angeles. He said, "Tim, you can come up to Oregon." I wrote the strategic plan for Kaiser Permanente, and I wrote—I'm credited as a co-writer of the vision for the company. And so Mike said, "You could come up here and make a difference at Kaiser Oregon," which was Kaiser Portland, really.

And I got up here, and I'll you, 1,800 exempt staff—Kaiser in Portland—I was the only African American man. Eighteen hundred staff! Five African American women that were exempt staff, salaried staff. Everybody else worked as janitors or housekeepers—I mean, housekeepers, janitors and some other jobs. And that was really disappointing when I got here. Very small workforce, and unfortunately some very small minds. And I couldn't take it long. So, but I helped—one of the jobs I did was I helped close the best Kaiser hospital, which was in a predominantly minority neighborhood, so you can imagine how that went over.

But I took a year off. I had done well. I took a year off, and went to—joined the PTA, and worked as a volunteer at my kids' elementary school, and just got into community service. I ran a political campaign, a guy running for city council against one of the incumbents, and we kind of ran a really good campaign. But I ultimately ended up here, first working for the Bureau of Environmental Services, the sewer folks and watershed. And then I was recruited to join the Portland Water Bureau. And I've enjoyed the twelve years I've been here, so.

JD: And you touched on doing some community and volunteer service, with the PTA and your kids' school, and I know you've done some other volunteer work. Maybe you could talk a little about why you think doing volunteer work is important, and perhaps how you picked a couple of those projects.

TH: Well, I think it's important for every one of us to in some way give something back. We're given a lot of gifts through our contacts with people over the years, and I always get choked up on this, because it's something that I learned from my parents, and something I learned from my teachers—that when you see a young person, you're a role model, no matter what you're doing. If you're a criminal, and that's all they see, that's all they know. But if you're out there doing things in the neighborhood, helping with things—I serve, I'm the board chair for a group called Groundworks Portland that's involved in brownfield restoration. I'm happy to work on President Ray's advisory committee.

I do a number of other little things, like a community event that was this past Saturday for Juneteenth. It's a very small event, but it's something that brought in over 600 people in the community to learn about African American history. My wife says—my wife bought me a T-shirt, and it says, "Stop Me Before I Volunteer Again." [1:00:00] [Laughs] She says, "Tim, you're a sucker when it comes to somebody coming up and saying, 'I've got this thing that we're working on, and we just need some help. Well, can you raise some money?'"

But when you do volunteer work and public service, you find that it's not about the accolades that we get, and I get them. But it's more about how I feel when I look at my kids, when I see other kids, and I see other adults who are out there, helping seniors. I mean, seniors—when they retire and they go back to volunteer, many of them will say that is the best part of their life, is having the time, finally, to do something.

With Groundworks Portland, we have something called Emerson Gardens, and Emerson Gardens is a place where seniors and young kids get together, and they do gardening. And the seniors learn from the kids, and the kids learn from the seniors. And there's this relationship; there's this bonding between the generations that happens. So, I don't know. I love it. I love it, and even though Deena says I do it too much!

JD: [Laughs] And you did mention briefly that you sit on the President's Board of Advisors for Minority Affairs at OSU.

TH: Yes.

JD: Talk a little about how you've been involved with that, and it's been a number of years.

TH: Yeah, it has. In fact, how I got to be on the board was I was a critic of OSU. And I went down there by happenstance once, just to take a look and show somebody where I went to college, and the conditions had not changed. And I was appalled that years later, that there were only something like 500 African American students, or some very low number, and that there was no real effort to change the culture of Corvallis. And the campus was still welcoming, but it still did not embrace students of color—and that was any color. At the time, African American students were seen more about the money that they generated than them actually being welcomed on campus.

And so I basically just lit into the university. I can't remember. I was at some forum or something, and I just—the next thing I know I get a phone call from Paul Risser, saying, "I have this board, and they need somebody like you on it, to kind of remind them that things have not changed." And Geoff Brooks, who's another member of the board, he was a few

years ahead of me. When I first went to my very first meeting, here he is speaking up just as loud as I was, and I was like, "Hey, we're on the same page!" But Paul Risser, he came in and he was dedicated to changing the university. And I saw that, and that would have been 1996, I believe. And he was just—he was a leader. I hated to see him go off to, what was it, Oklahoma or something? [Laughs]

Yeah, but he was a leader, and he was getting the town turned around. And I think Ed Ray, when he came on board, he finished up. He said, "Yes, I agree," and he took what he had learned at Ohio State, and applied it to what was going on in Corvallis, by meeting with the city officials, meeting with the business chamber of commerce, and saying, "You guys are chasing kids out of here! We go through all this trouble to get them to come to Corvallis, and to go to OSU, and their first experience is being followed in a store, or being harassed by the police. And they go home and they tell kids, 'Don't come.'" "Oh, yeah, OSU said I can get a full scholarship." "No, don't take it. Go someplace else, because the scholarship isn't worth it."

And Ed and Paul Risser took that to heart, and said, "We have to change the culture of Corvallis. Corvallis cannot be this mean-spirited place where, at a football game on national television, some kid has a blackface." [1:05:02] Here's this kid, and the TV cameras could not help but focus on this one kid dressed with a big natural, and the lips and the thing. And they showed that. And I mean, I got phone calls from people, saying, "I thought you said things were changing there?" Well, Ed Ray, when they were doing the blackout, this year, he said he would not tolerate. He said, "Any kid that shows up dressed like that won't be allowed in the stadium." And I'm like, "Thank you, Ed." That's the kind of leadership OSU has needed. And Ed Ray and Paul Risser should be congratulated for that.

Also, I have to say Tim White, who was the provost at the time, he also was a strong endorser of changing the culture at Corvallis. And many people didn't know that he was Venezuelan, and actually considered himself Hispanic, even though he did not look that way. Yeah. He was a great guy. Big guy, tall guy. [Laughs] He was a lot of fun.

JD: So we started this interview by sort of teasing people about the two historic jerseys that are hanging over your head. So perhaps this would be a good point where I'm going to sort of pan back, so we can really see those jerseys, and I'll let you tell the story of how you came to acquire those.

TH: Well, many years ago, when I was at OSU, my roommates were actually at a basketball practice, and I saw this guy with this big bin, hauling out all this—what I thought was trash, and I looked inside and I saw a jersey. And I went, "What are you doing with those?" And he says, "I'm throwing them away." And I went, "Can I have one?" And he said, "Oh, sure, take it." So I took the jersey, and I just kind of wrapped it up and put it away, because I thought, "Gosh, look how small these guys were." [Laughs]

And years later, I was celebrating with two of my roommates, George Tucker and Don Smith, at the time, and I had talked to Jimmy Anderson. And I said, "Jimmy, can you give me something to recognize George and Donny?" And he says, "Oh, sure. Just go down there and get some jerseys. We're not using those jerseys anymore." And this jersey right here actually was part of the team back in 1992, and I'm going to have to refer to my notes here.

JD: That's fine.

TH: And that was the year that there was a teammate, Earnest Killum, who had a stroke and died. And so it was very hard on that team that year. And following the funeral for Earnest, the team had a game against the University of Washington, and Washington was the heavy favorite to win. Well, the OSU team went in, and they blew out Washington. I mean, the halftime score—the final score was 82 to 58. They won by 24 points. But it was an emotional game for the team.

And I thought that was so cool that I got this jersey—got one of the jerseys. There were three or four of them that they gave me, and I gave George the one with his number, and Donny didn't want to have anything to do with OSU at the time. But I think I gave the other ones back to Jimmy and to the Athletic Department. But this one means a lot, because if you look at the two jerseys, these were varsity teams. [Laughs] And what does that say about the men that played basketball? These aren't shrunk! [Laughs]

JD: And did you say if any idea what era that number 18 is?

TH: I was told that they were from the late 1930s or early 1940s. I have no way to substantiate that.

JD: Sure.

TH: But that's sort of what I was told about them. So a bunch of skinny kids, I guess.

JD: [Laughs] Great mementos.

TH: Yeah. In fact, one thing about the Portland Water Bureau is we have a lot of civil engineers, and many of them have graduated from OSU. [1:10:05] So I'm always handing out Beaver stuff. In fact, when the Beaver switched over to the new logo, I brought a whole bunch of stickers back, and I was handing them out to people, saying, "They got rid of Benny, and they got rid of the other guy." I said, "What will be the next Beaver? Who knows what it'll be?" Yeah, but I still think Benny Beaver was cool. [Laughs]

JD: [Laughs] So I'd like to end on—if you want to offer any advice or thoughts to current OSU students, things they might ponder, from someone who was there a number of years ago?

TH: Well, listen to your teachers. In today's age, there's a tendency to kind of tune out older people, and I would ask them to consider the voice of experience, to consider the voice of knowledge, and the voice of wisdom, because that's what comes with age. At least that's what my dad and some of the people I know have said. "When you're 59 years old, you'll remember this!" And they're right; I do.

Take time to have a good time. The times of my life, and my friends that I made at OSU have been lifetime friends. And I can go to my Facebook page right now and not only see Lonnie Shelton's picture on Facebook, but also his kids' pictures. And I'm happy to say that Lonnie named one of his sons Timothy, Timothy Shelton, who I went to see play basketball when he was with the university—well, he was with San Diego State University's basketball team. And I went to watch him play in Boise. And he was like, "Yeah, my dad always said he named me after some guy, but I thought it was a basketball player." [Laughs] And I thought, "Take me as I am."

OSU is a good place to go to school. I'm very happy to see all the construction that's going on there. Seems like every time I turn around, there's a new building going up. When you do graduate, and you look back on OSU, support the Alumni Association, because it's important to do so. Be proud of being a Beaver. And when you see other people, whether you're in Chicago, or Des Moines, or Boise, and you see somebody with the Beaver hat or a Beaver shirt on, go up and say, "Hey, go Beavers!"

So I have a friend of mine who's actually a dentist in Boise, Scott Kegoe, and he was one of the kids I knew when I first got to OSU. And when we first saw each other, that was how greeted each other. And I showed up just by chance at his office, because I'd finally found out where—I'd heard that he was practicing there. And I stop in and I said, "Yeah, tell Scott it's Tim, and 'Go Beavers.'" And Scott, five minutes later he's out, "Go Beavers!" [Laughs] So, but OSU is a good place. It's a good school.

JD: Great.

TH: And may students always remember: you will make it better. So do what you can to support the university, support the faculty, support the staff, and support the president. Thank you.

JD: Great. Thanks so much, Tim. [1:14:10]