



Brent Lawrence Oral History Interview, December 28, 2015

Title

“Multiculturalism as a Way of Life”

Date

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Location

Valley Library, Oregon State University.

Summary

In the interview, Lawrence describes his family background and upbringing, noting in particular his Native American lineage, his struggles in school, and the impact that exposure to communities of color made on him as a youth. From there, he discusses his initial college experience at the University of Oregon, the need during that time for him to conceal his sexual orientation, and the difficulties in Eugene that led to his transfer to Oregon State University.

In recalling his years at OSU, Lawrence reflects on his initial impressions of the university, his academic progression within the Business Administration program, and his involvement in Greek life. A major topic of conversation is his leadership of the Minority Affairs program at the Memorial Union, and in this he reflects on the program's activities, his perception of the climate on campus for people of color, and the individuals who were important to him during this time. Lawrence then shares his memories of the environment at OSU for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals during his undergraduate years, stressing in particular the fear of violent conflict that compelled him to suppress his identity.

Lawrence next provides an outline of his graduate studies at Thunderbird University, noting the positive impact that the school's international focus made upon him, while also recounting the atmosphere of hostility that prevailed toward LGBT students. From there, Lawrence shares some of the highlights of his working years in software development, team building, and independent consulting. Throughout these recollections, Lawrence stresses the important role that his multicultural perspective has played in his work and success.

As the interview begins to wind up, Lawrence describes his involvement in the field of psychometrics, recalls his decision to move to New Zealand, and expresses his affection for the people and culture of New Zealand, as evidenced by his obtaining dual citizenship and serving as a donor parent to seven children. The session concludes with a discussion of Lawrence's return to Oregon, his marriage to his longtime partner, his thoughts on the culture and economic well-being of the south coast of Oregon, and his sense of OSU's progression over the years of his association.

Interviewee

Brent Lawrence

Interviewer

Chris Petersen

Website

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

Transcript

Chris Petersen: OK, today is December 28th, 2015, and we are in the Valley Library with Brent Lawrence, who is an alumnus of OSU, class of 1980. And we will talk to him about his OSU experience and some broader themes of his life. But before we get into it too much, I want to mention for the record that this is actually the one-hundredth interview that we've done for our project this year, in 2015. So a nice little milestone as we near the end of the year.

So Brent, let's begin at the beginning and I'll ask you, where were you born?

Brent Lawrence: Born in Portland, Oregon in Emmanuel Hospital.

CP: Is that where you were raised?

BL: I was raised predominantly in Portland. There was a small stint in Eugene, and my initial birth was really in Umatilla. They had me in Portland but they whisked me back to eastern Oregon and I spent a couple years there before coming back to the valley. And I was mostly raised in the Portland and Eugene areas.

CP: What was in Umatilla?

BL: My father and my mother owned a waterskiing sports company that was funded by my grandfather. They had the good life, waterskiing on the Columbia River, and I didn't know anything about it, I was so small. I don't remember any of those days in Umatilla.

CP: Can you tell me a bit about your family background?

BL: My mom's family is from Washington state, from Colfax, and her lineage goes all the way back to Arkansas and pretty much in the south. And my father's family, I was the fifth-generation born Oregonian, and most of our lineage was actually, interestingly enough, in Gold Beach, Oregon, is where my great-great grandparents settled, and then they worked their way up to the Forest Grove. Then the lineages began to be born in the north Willamette Valley area in Beaverton, Portland. And my father's from the coast actually, from Newport, Oregon, is where he's originally from. And that's where he stays now, so he's back home.

CP: And do I understand correctly that you have a Native American piece of your identity?

BL: Yes. This was never really discussed growing up at all. Back then, in the '50s and '60s and '70s, these were topics that would not be discussed. And when I was about ten years of age, I was on the ranch, the wheat ranch, in eastern Washington, and I happened upon a box of archives materials and in there was a photograph of a Native American woman, fully dressed in regalia. And she was beautiful. And I went upstairs with the photo to my grandfather and asked, "Grandpa, who is this?" And it was one of the few times he ever got angry at me, and in no uncertain terms was I ever to go back into that box again and reveal those photographs. Since then, we've never been able to find the box again, sadly.

And through decades of research, I found out that indeed he and his brother had been raised in their youth on the Tahlequah Cherokee Nation, and went to school there. And his brother was also in the school system and so noted. And then my mom revealed, "yes, we are Native, but we don't wish to talk about that. That's something that we don't wish to speak about." Though she would say that often we were removed from any skin cancer because our skin had melanin in it and we would tan extremely dark in the summers, both she and I, and my cousins as well. So from a physiological standpoint, there was great pride in that component. But in terms of lineage, it was not discussed until I've done research really in the last ten years and exposed more and more information about the family lineage, both Cherokee and Choctaw Nations. And I received the information as a point of pride.

The Nations have been incredibly supportive and helpful with information and very heartfelt. I went down and visited Tahlequah and I could not have been received more kindly. The people at Tahlequah were exceptionally friendly; just the average person on the street was very friendly. And it felt like coming home, it was so nice. I went back to the Cherokee Nation in North Carolina and it was more officious, not as heartfelt friendly, but friendly and welcoming. But the lineage was so long, it went way back to the early 1800s and there wasn't the connection like there was in Oklahoma, where we had members that actually went to school [laughs] in the school system, my grandfather included. It's a bittersweet

experience. There's great pride and there's also great sadness that we couldn't talk about these issues and find out much more and have a connection to the tribe much deeper than we have now.

[0:05:11]

CP: Do you have any theories as to why the family was so resistant to talking about this?

BL: May I speak bluntly?

CP: Yeah.

BL: Grandpa always said that – his words were quite harsh – he said, "at least a black person would work, but an Indian would never work on the farm." And then there was resistance to his emotions on that, because he also realized that that was his tribe. So he didn't want to have any affiliation to a group that had less than optimal feelings about Natives, back in those days. I mean, he was born in the late 1800s, so the feelings were pretty harsh in the early 1900s. In the late 1800s – well, all of the 1800s – it was very difficult. So he avoided any connection to that lineage and didn't want his, I guess, children and his grandchildren to ever experience any prejudice, as he had. It's still hard.

CP: So it sounds to me like your upbringing was primarily in Portland.

BL: Yes.

CP: What stands out as far as memories of community life in Portland for you growing up?

BL: Portland was just fairly clearly whitebread, you know? It was the most suburban – I lived in suburban areas like Lake Oswego and southwest Portland, and most everything I had instilled in me was standard whitebread WASP and reformed Jewish environs in Lake Oswego, and we all got along extremely well. We were very social. Status was the most important thing in Lake Oswego – one's status, one's address, one's occupation. So there was a lot of energy placed on right upbringing in that system, for better or worse. [laughs]

CP: So your parents were running the waterskiing operation for a while, but apparently something else – what were they doing at this point?

BL: My father realized that, at that time, the money to be made was in lumber equipment, the sawmill industry. And he started out as a sweeper in a company in Portland and worked his way up to vice president of sales, and did exceptionally well and worked his tail off. And to his credit, he did right by the family, took care of us. My mom had a standard suburban – she didn't work, she raised my brother and I – and my dad provided for that kind of environment. It's very different from today, where so many mother and fathers are working and raising children as well.

CP: What were you interested in growing up?

BL: I was a lackluster student. I actually was a very gnarly C and D-level student. My parents – my mom, especially – forced me to take on piano lessons, so I was an avid piano player, not beyond in expertise but accomplished enough to fairly well. I'd rather be playing softball in those days. [laughs] I was very athletic and I wanted to be out doing things. We were raised on the lake, Lake Oswego, so a lot of water skiing, water activities were also aplenty in my upbringing.

But I just really didn't do well in school and barely got into the school system at the University of Oregon; I had like a 2.8 grade point average when I graduated. And U of O just, I was back home in Eugene in some ways and I could relate to Eugene. I had a hard time at the U of O, predominantly because I was coming out. I realized that I was "different than," and I had feelings that were towards other folks – that were toward other blokes. [laughs] And that was kind of unusual and was not discussed, so I struggled in school with that before even entering the U of O.

CP: Well, before we get into that, let's step back a little bit as far as – from communications that you and I have had prior to this interview, I know that you had an interest in language growing up. Is that correct?

BL: That is true. My mom spoke French to me as a child because that was the language of diplomacy and history and culture, with Jackie Kennedy being our president's wife. And I took to that language and I took to Latin languages quite well – thank goodness for my mom bringing me up to speed. My uncle then suggested that the language of choice should be Spanish, because the predominance in our hemisphere was the Spanish language, so in junior high school I started Spanish speaking courses, and took those all the way through high school as well. So I could read and write Spanish, but my language skills were not as optimal as I had been in French – I kind of stammered a little bit, I didn't have support systems in the Spanish system. I didn't like how it was taught in high school and that probably kept me back in that area.

[0:10:26]

CP: Was this uncle, Uncle Bud?

BL: Yes it was.

CP: He was influential on you it sounds like.

BL: He is. He was a professor of English at TCU – Texas Christian University – and eventually he got a position at Weatherford College outside Parker County, Texas, next to Forth Worth. And he influenced in the Spanish speaking.

CP: It sounds to me like he also – again, from our previous correspondence – instilled a passion in you for social justice and minority issues. Is that correct?

BL: He did. Knowing that I came from whitebread Portland, he took me around and showed me life in Texas amongst the African American community. We would ride a Greyhound bus to Arkansas, sitting in the back of the bus, so he would teach me what life was like for folks in the minority communities back then. So I got a lot of insights into both African American and Hispanic cultures by being in Texas, and I really greatly relish those years. And almost every summer, my parents would ship me off to Texas [laughs], so I got to know Texas society as well by doing that. So it kind of broadened my horizons during those formative years, junior high school and high school.

CP: You also spent a little time in Norway in high school, is that correct?

BL: I was. There were two of us from Lakeridge High School who were chosen to study abroad under AFS – American Field Service – and I was the one who was chosen to go to Norway. I had actually asked to go to Norway. I'm Swedish background on my grandmother's side – my mother's mother's side. So for some reason I felt akin to Norway and wanted to go, and I got to see Sweden, which was great, I could see the family roots. And then also spent the summer, four months, in Norway, living the culture, learning the culture, learning the language. And that broadened my language base accordingly.

CP: Well you mentioned that school was a struggle for you, but did you always anticipate going to college?

BL: Yes, it was pretty much determined by my parents that I would forge ahead, and they were quite harsh on me through my formative years in high school because my grades were not so great. My first year at U of O was actually quite good; I actually scored a 3.5. And they didn't believe me. They said, "no, you're lying," and I literally had to bring the grades and stick them on the desk. And it completely defeated my energy and, true to form, I went back down to a 2.7, 2.8 grade point average, because that was expected of me, in their eyes. It was the weirdest thing.

And so I struggled and then I transferred to OSU because I had lots of friends that were at the OSU fraternity/sorority system. And I visited and I thought, you know, to get me involved in school work, I should come over to Corvallis. And I did that. It was in spring actually of 1977.

CP: What were you studying?

BL: Mostly Business Administration. Again, my father had a huge influence on me – "you be a businessman because I was a businessman," so I followed that course.

CP: And it sounds to me like this was a period where you were discovering yourself.

BL: Yes. I was closeted at OSU the whole time, for the remainder of my college years. I remained closeted to the community at large until I was twenty-one, so it was after I graduated from college. Most people figured it out, but I didn't act upon anything and I kept to myself, and suffered internally because of that.

At U of O also, they had suggested that I go through electroshock therapy, and now that I'm in the industry of psychometrics and psychology, I found that completely repugnant, when looking back at those horrible conditions that they were intentionally going to put me under. And I refused. And I wouldn't even entertain it at any other time after that. It was pretty rough.

CP: Was this a counselor?

BL: Yeah, it was.

CP: Wow.

BL: And I knew others who had gone through electroshock therapy and they became completely impotent after that process.

CP: Well, so you made the transfer to OSU, it sounds like, in part because you had a social network that was here already. Can you tell me a bit about your initial impressions of OSU or settling in at Oregon State?

[0:15:12]

BL: Because of my rural background – because both sets of grandparents were in rural environs – I felt at home, more at home here. I missed U of O in terms of the jazz; you know, there was an energy there that was quite cosmopolitan at times. But I could relate more to the agro environment at OSU. And with my friends being here, it was more settling for me at that time. Lake Oswego was whitebread and OSU was even so much more whitebread. [laughs] It was not Texas, it was not the South, and even Norway, at least I had different cultures and languages. It was so whitebread, it was unbelievable. But it was safe and I was able to settle.

And I did an exchange program to the University of Alabama in my junior year – I may not have mentioned that – and that had a huge impact. I went from a 2.7 grade point average to a 4.0 grade point average. The professors at Alabama were phenomenal. I really got to see, in depth, African American culture in the South, which is different from the West absolutely. And the Deep South is different from Texas, and I recognized those differences and communicated with a lot of people and got tremendous insights, a wealth of information and experiences and connections. Alabama really put me on the right track for my studies and then I went 4.0 for the most part – superior grades – for my junior and senior year, while at OSU. I did exceptionally.

CP: And you continued in Business Administration?

BL: I did and I graduated with a degree in Business Admin.

CP: Were there any professors at OSU that made an impact upon you?

BL: You know, it's funny, there was one – I fail to remember the name – but it was more in the marketing range, and we did a study on, of all things, soft drink marketing. There were two professors actually, and they were outstanding. They were able to rise above all the rest in terms of their finesse in marketing techniques. And then I focused on marketing after that, when I graduated.

CP: As somebody who is in business now, are there pieces of the curriculum from OSU that stick with you? That seem like they were particularly helpful?

BL: You know, definitely statistics. Mathematics, statistics, as well as the marketing programs, were outstanding here at that time. And they really helped me with my career going forward. Statistics, I wasn't the best at it – I did more work in graduate school in that area and did become very good at it, and boy did I use it in my career afterwards. Marketing had a huge impact and when I was – I'll go a little bit ahead of myself – in my business career I could pull upon my

experience at Oregon State University as being really quite profound at my ability to train business professionals in this area; I became a teacher.

CP: Did you live off campus or on?

BL: Always in the fraternity system – I was in the frat system.

CP: Which one?

BL: Chi Phi, which is a southern fraternity. [laughs] It's based in Atlanta, Georgia; it's a confederate fraternity, it was forged, I think, before the Confederate states, and it is very much a southern fraternity. We were the outpost, we were the western outpost at Oregon State. But most of the energy is in the Deep South.

CP: Can you tell me a bit about fraternity life?

BL: There is a camaraderie that I really appreciated. Again, so many people I knew – or I should say, a few people from high school days – were in that fraternity, and that was why I could feel at least as home. I knew them, we would snow ski together, party together. I rarely drank alcohol, again because of my lineage. I saw what alcohol could do to people of Native backgrounds and I refused to be involved in that area. So I didn't drink much and I tended to be the one who would clean up after the party, whether the fraternity brothers were on the floor fully smashed, or whatever nonsense they had spilled on the floor. I was the one who was sober and I would go around cleaning it up and getting them into their hammocks and into the bed and keep them from driving, take their keys if I had to. But I was not the party animal, I was the clean-up animal in those days.

And I was very quiet and I was to myself; I was pretty introverted. Because of my orientation, I wasn't really outgoing as much as some of the other guys were. But it was a good base for what I needed at that time. It was really important to have a structure; very important. And I have fond memories, very fond memories.

[0:19:58]

CP: So we first came into contact through your letting us know about your involvement in Minority Affairs at the Memorial Union. Do you want to tell me the background behind how all of this came along?

BL: A fraternity brother, Ken Stokes, was exceptionally involved in activities regarding the Memorial Union, very involved, and very involved in campus. He was the top of the top of the students in the university at that time – Food Technology was his degree. And because of my background with Norway and foreign languages and such, he found out that they were looking for someone who was neutral to help direct Minority Affairs and the programs within Minority Affairs. Thus, he didn't know about my Native background, so he came to me and said, "would you be interested in heading up, as an Anglo-Saxon white person, would you be ok to head up the first Cultural Awareness Week and also Minority Affairs Program? Would you be the first chairperson in this organization at the Memorial Union?"

And I thought, listening to them and seeing what it was all about, yes, I said I would do that. Because of my background of my uncle and others, and training. I said I felt odd being white and leading such groups. And the groups were a little bit put off, I think, at first, not a lot, but there was a little bit of confusion. But I think they then understood that having a link to a campus overall by being white, they could kind of get it. And all the discussions were cordial, very cordial, and some were exceptionally heartfelt. The Native American community was exceptionally close to me, and they may have recognized something. [laughs] But they were heartfelt beyond belief, as they have been when I currently visited the campus. The Asian community was also very heartfelt. The African American community, rightfully so, was a little bit – hold back a little bit. But eventually we all got along fine. And the programs that I brought to the university were well-received, and I worked with them. I just did the logistics, the guts to make things successful.

And Bernie Pitts was my boss, and he was African American. And that was the first time I had a formative manager who was black. When I became a UPS driver out of college, my first job, Albert Wright was an African American manager at UPS, and he was the greatest manager in the world. And he commented to me, he said, "you're one of the few white guys who have no issue with me being a manager." I said, "what? I don't get it." And he told me in private that he was treated with minor contempt by some of the white employees at UPS from time to time. And those words were absolutely foreign

to me; I didn't understand. And thanks for Bernie Pitts being my first manager, I was able to thrive ok at UPS because of it.

So the events of each of the – there were only four at that time, there's a lot more now. With the Hispanic group, it was very positive. We actually did facilitations of encounters with white students for getting it out on the table about prejudice against Latinos and Hispanics, vis-à-vis Anglos. You know, "where are the problems?" And boy, we had an amazing series of interventions and discussions. There was activity with the Native Americans with the pow wow and events that surrounded Native American culture on campus, in the MU campus area. African Americans, we had a play that was brought to the campus and received highly, very well. And so let's see, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans and Hispanics, yeah, so we were well-represented of the four groups and we all had – I actually got an award, which I didn't expect to get this, but I actually received an award that allowed for me to be chosen as the top program of the year of the award, thanks to the university. So I went from a terrible grade point average to achieving a high level of recognition in the MU. My parents didn't know who they were with anymore. "Who's this son of ours? He went from one end of the scale to the other end of the scale." Grades proved it as well.

CP: Can you provide a sense of the climate on campus at that time for people of color?

BL: I think that there was subtle prejudice, for sure. They would express to me what they experienced and it was never overt horrible conditions, like you would see in some of the other universities in some other parts of the country. We didn't have that at OSU. But there was definitely the wall, or the veil, and there was frustration. And each group in its own right had its own concerns, and wanting to reach out, wanting to be recognized for the culture that they bring to the campus. Clearly we were in a school of education and learning, so there were a lot of professors and a lot of students who were wonderful, and opened their minds and their hearts, very embracing. I would say though that, from time to time, they would experience things that set me back. And I say, "come on, they didn't say that" or "they didn't do that," and they were like, "yeah, we got the cold shoulder."

[0:25:50]

Which shocks me today, it really deeply upsets me, because we're still experiencing it today. That was in 1979 when that was occurring, '79 and '80. Here we are in 2015 and I'm still reading, witnessing on the news, the same issues yet again. I don't know so much on the campus; I've never heard anything. I did hear in the past that there were some folks who were not real keen on having Minority Affairs. They came from the Anglo community, the white community, there were a few members who showed...I almost came to the forefront when I read about those situations. That was ten years, fifteen years ago or so. But in 2015, I'm reading things and I'm like, "come on, can't we all get along? Is there nothing to be learned?" And even in my career, I was a manager at Nintendo, and we had an African American receptionist, she was temporary. And she came up to me and she said, "you're the only one here who has shown heart and respect to me while I've been at this company." And I said, "you've got to be joking." And she said, "no, no one else will talk to me the way that you talk to me." And I said, "well, why?" And she said, "it's because I'm black." And I said, "oh, you've got to be kidding," and I really was upset that my colleagues had an issue – one of whom was Latina – that she would have an issue with a black receptionist. I'm like, "come on, people. Get over it." And many other instances through the years where I've heard or witnessed scenarios where I just roll my eyes, I'm like, "I can't believe this. Still we have to deal with this, in these days."

CP: Do I understand correctly that, in your position in Minority Affairs, that you worked as a liaison between the cultural groups and the Greek system as well?

BL: Yes, that's right.

CP: Can you tell me about that?

BL: We were really trying to promote to the Greek system to go attend the events. [laughs] Stop the Greek parties and take some time out and actually attend some of these events that were on the campus. And communicating with the Greek community, the sororities and the fraternities, that there was a lot to be gained from involvement. And that's probably as well why I was chosen, because I was part of the Greek system.

Again, there was mostly people, I would say were open minded and they would attend and they would show up and be there. A few times, "this is rubbish, why would I need to do this? This is ridiculous." Is it the 80/20 rule? Maybe it was more like the 90/10 rule, maybe at times. But the ten percent were there and they would have an attitude, and it was witnessed by me and others as well. They just weren't going to spend any time in anything like that, "I don't have any time for that."

CP: You mentioned your manager, who were some other people who were important to you or to the program during this time period?

BL: Really, Ken Stokes was the number one. Bernie Pitts and Ken Stokes. Ken Stokes was the most amazing mentor, he had the most amazing intellect I've ever seen in my life, and he was quite influential on campus, massively influential. Especially among those of high education, high IQ. And he really prompted me to keep going and striving, and years afterwards he really thanked me for busting barriers as best as I could.

And Bernie Pitts, I miss him terribly. He was a great manager and he was always supportive of me. I'd tell him at times, I'd get a little frustrated because some of the groups may not have always wanted me there, especially initially. And I expressed my frustration. And he goes, "hang in there Brent, you're going to be fine." And he says, "you just keep going with your energy, hold yourself true, you've got my backing – I've got your back." And, you know, Bernie's heartfelt support was so important for so many reasons, as I mentioned before. And to have him as a manager allowed me to flourish in that role and continue to flourish at school and get decent grades as well. I really owe it to Ken Stokes and Bernie Pitts at the top of the top.

[0:30:22]

CP: Did you have any contact with Lonnie Harris?

BL: A little bit, yes. I had a little bit, but I don't have very deep memories of Lonnie's involvement. But yes, I had a little bit of contact with Lonnie.

CP: Do you have any sense of any connection between the activities of this program and perceptions in upper administration? I think MacVicar was the president at that time.

BL: He was the president, yeah. No, I didn't have that. It's funny, I didn't have any feedback from anywhere on the upper echelons. I figured that no negative news was good news. [laughs] I didn't get reprimanded, I didn't get called in on the carpet, I didn't have evil eyes piercing me wherever I would go anywhere in the MU. That was usually a good sign. So no news was good news at that time. So that's where my stance was.

CP: What was your experience of the MU as a place at that particular point? It's been very important to this campus for many years.

BL: Yeah, it's a bastion of civility and an oasis. The MU has an energy – even recently, when I came to visit, it still has that amazing energy. I spoke to people at the front desk and I was quite impressed by the positive energy that I received from people. It's a great organization and I feel that it still is a great organization. Good for Oregon State.

CP: So you served in this position for one school year, is that correct?

BL: Yes, one school year.

CP: And then, after you finished up, did it continue on?

BL: Yes, oh yeah. It kept going after my legacy, it went for many years. I would read from time to time, online, especially when we had online capabilities, I'd read that the events had carried on. More groups came in, as we know, there are more than the original four. So it grew in size and it was good to see that it grew. And there's even a Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bisexual group as well, which is fantastic.

CP: Well that kind of segues into my next question for you, and that is, your sense of the LGBT community on campus at that time. I mean, was there any visible community at all?

BL: No. Not that I was aware of. I knew that my partner after college – not my current partner, who I'm married to – I had a partner after college and he went to OSU at the same time that I did. He told me that there were groups, but they were fairly lax, nothing formalized at that time, and it was a fairly small group. People were just scared of coming out, just terrified. Because there was always the physical violence component; it was a huge issue. You know, if you were the wrong guy at the wrong time on the wrong street at night, and there were a bunch of cowboys going down the pipe, the outcome may not have been optimal. That was always the reality. So we stayed pretty much closeted.

CP: So it was a hostile environment.

BL: I would say that it could potentially be one, yeah. I didn't see it overtly, I never saw anything like graffiti, but comments that are made by students when growing up. You know, you hear from people what they're going to do, what they're going to say. Now that I know what I know, me thinks thou doth protest too much. The ones who protest so much are potentially the same, have the same issues, as they grow up.

But I had to stay low key for safety reasons, especially in the fraternity system. One fraternity – I won't mention their name – one frat had a horrible reputation with activities in their basement at that time. And they were the pariah of the university, they were treated so poorly, and anyone who went to that fraternity or who lived there was treated horribly. There was always whispers around that there were certain activities going on in "the boiler room," was the comment. I had nothing to do with them and I wouldn't go near the fraternity. I wouldn't have anything to do with anyone from the fraternity, because it terrified me. And it was pretty bad language too that I would witness; language from others about what they were going to do to them.

CP: You were obviously very involved in your fraternity, did you have broader campus involvement or a social life outside of that?

BL: Not much, no. I just stayed in the fraternity, the MU, and that was pretty much it. Because of my experience with the psychologists at U of O, that really caused a lot of pain, and I became very leery, especially of professionals. If it was to do with anything that I was dealing with, I would not want to hear from anyone else. I did not trust people after that.

[0:35:27]

CP: Did you have any hangouts?

BL: No. I know a lot of them, and some of them are still around today. No, I was terrible. I would just come back to my room and hang out in my room and study and attend activities. I'd attend sporting activities and things like that, with the frat brothers. We'd go snow skiing, but that's about it. I didn't go to some of the social environs that are down in town especially. I was pleased to see that the MU has the food court the way that it's presented now. My gosh, it's an incredible improvement; it looks great. It was so wonderful. We didn't have that when I was here at that time. That was neat.

CP: So there wasn't much of a connection to Corvallis as a place for you.

BL: Corvallis was depressing to me, because of what I was dealing with internally. I thought of it as dank, dreary, rain-soaked, depressing – I was very depressed at many times, and I found Corvallis to be very depressing. The weather really affected me heavily at that time too. I wasn't suicidal, but I was definitely depressed and withdrawn.

Now I come to Corvallis and its bright and cheery and lively and colorful. I'm so much more alive now when I'm on campus and seeing the students and the energy here. So it's a 180-degree change from when I lived here; much better now.

CP: Was it a feeling of pride when you completed your studies and graduated? Or were you just ready to get out? Or both?

BL: No. I was ready to get on, but it was a point of pride that I had graduated from OSU and I was happy with that. Very few in our extended family have graduated from college and I was one of the few – my uncle and then me. My cousins, I don't think any of my cousins had graduated at that point.

CP: So you finished up at Oregon State and then it sounds like you worked for UPS for a bit?

BL: A couple years to earn up money. While at OSU I was accepted into the Thunderbird graduate school, down in Arizona, and I jumped for joy. It was hard to get in, it was rare to get in, and I barely squeaked by with my GPA. And because of the, I think the background in the MU was phenomenal I think that was one of the key moments that got me into Thunderbird.

So I went to work for UPS and I earned tons of money and saved. And then, in 1982, I attended Thunderbird graduate school.

CP: What was it about Thunderbird that attracted you? Why that location and why pursue an MBA?

BL: It is probably the most international-based campus environments in the country, next to University of South Carolina. It was always rated as the top, as the international business school. I think well over forty, if not fifty, different countries were represented on a campus of a thousand students. It's amazing. Languages of every ilk could be heard in the cafeteria at any given time. I fell in love with the campus, I fell in love with the energy in the student body. I knew that was where I needed to be and I knew that my career was going to be international-minded going forward. And thus, sadly, I left UPS – it was paying well. [laughs] I loved UPS. And I entered my studies at Thunderbird in Fall of 1980.

CP: So this was something that you were seeking out, this international flavor?

BL: That's exactly right. I stand corrected, it was '82.

CP: '82, yeah.

BL: Yes, I sought it out and it was perfect.

CP: And does this coincide with you coming out as well?

BL: I had come out in 1980, carefully. It was very difficult. Family members knew – they kind of had, there were some private conversations with family members, they knew what was going on. But fully out, you know, like, "hey, grandma and grandpa, cousins, aunts, uncles – this is the way that I am." And yeah, things started really opening up in '80.

There was a huge opening up to friends and colleagues in 1990; it was ten years later before I came *out* out. But those family members who mattered, I came out to them. And being in Arizona was probably the most healthy thing for me, because that was away from the Oregon tribe and I was able to throw myself into my studies and my work.

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But yeah, I dated. And I even became the president of the Gay and Lesbian Student Union on campus, which was undercover. And the student body actually searched for the president, they looked for, "who is the president? Let's out the president." And yet again, the language was quite harsh – "we're gonna go beat the hell out of that guy," and "we're gonna show them." They came from a few student members; they were going to seek me out and teach me a lesson.

CP: This is at Thunderbird?

BL: Uh-huh.

CP: Oh my.

BL: I couldn't believe it; I couldn't believe my ears. But it was a witch hunt, and they never did find me. There were probably fifty of us on campus and they kept their mouths shut. Every one of them just zipped it, and I survived the witch

hunt. [laughs] They didn't find me, and we went forward. But that was a huge insight into how harsh human beings can be.

CP: Well, I gather that there were other aspects of the experience at Thunderbird that were more positive.

BL: Massively. The language skills – I still continued my Spanish coursework. The training in Spanish was so much more superior to anywhere I had experienced; they forced me to sit down and speak Spanish every single day to the point where my friends from Colombia said I had reached a level of proficiency where they could barely hear an accent. They said, "we can barely hear that you have an accent, and your command of the language and grammar is superior." I was even correcting, on flights – on Alaska Airlines there was either grammatical or spelling errors on the placards that I was correcting. [laughs] My friends from Colombia were like, "good God, I can't believe this." They even learned some aspects about their language that I had learned, they even asked me, "they said, I didn't know that rule, I didn't know that." And it was fun to hear them say, "you just taught me something about my native language. I learned something in Spanish because of your training at Thunderbird." So that was really wonderful.

I so wanted to learn other languages, had I had the time. I wanted to learn German; I had taken German coursework in the past. I wanted to become more proficient in speaking as well in French. And in later years, Chinese. I would love to have known more about Mandarin Chinese and how to speak it.

CP: Let's talk a little bit about your career as a project manager and as a business consultant. I have a couple of specific questions that I want to ask you about, but maybe you could provide a bit of an overview of life after Thunderbird?

BL: Sure. Just briefly, I pretty much was hired – the high points – I was hired in software services production for the software industry in Seattle. I actually was in quick stint down in South Africa, I was there for about three months, I was in a project helping my father's company export equipment to South Africa, southern Africa. Came back – that didn't work with my family – so I went out on my own and quickly got a job through my network, got a job at Nintendo, a division of Nintendo called Taito. And I was a production manager and worked my tail off like I've never worked before or since. And really enjoyed the environs of a fast-growing Japanese company, working within a Japanese environment. My great aunt, growing up, was Japanese; aunt Toshi. So Japanese culture and language was not unfamiliar to me and I felt very much at home in the Taito corporate environment. And Japanese culture, in terms of business, was fine, I got it. Again, multiculturalism helping with my career.

Eventually it was moved to Chicago and I chose not to move to Chicago. The company was moved to Chicago. And through different courses, I eventually came to be a management consultant helping companies – I was working for a company out of Chicago – and I was able to be positioned with well over 150 companies in seven years, helping companies with procedures, policies, systems, profitability, human resources, production methodologies, because of my background at Nintendo. Just all of my career background was brought forth with the company based out of Chicago. And many times there were tremendous issues pertaining to cultural identity, cultural issues, and I had to really set down the law – especially minority rights – I had to be very clear in a work environment that discriminatory practices were not legal and that this was a federal issue.

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I was also sent to Canada quite a bit because my demeanor rested well with Canadians – being an Oregonian, probably. And I did quite well up there in many provinces of Canada. And yet again, I ran into tremendous prejudice against French Canadians and I had to express and deliver to management, "no, you're not going to speak out or do any discriminatory practices to our French Canadian citizens." I worked in a Native Canadian organization in Manitoba, and they were Assiniboine Cree, and I did share with them – they were one of the few that I did share that I had a Native American grandfather. I was hugely embraced. They were exceptionally heartfelt in their acceptance of me, and we did good work. And the client, who was an attorney, he said, "you're being well-accepted because, both, you're American – which means you're not Canadian," [laughs] because there were issues there that I didn't know and he informed me what the issues were. And, he said, "because you're Cherokee Nation." And he said, "that speaks well to us, so we can accept you, we can hear you, as you're providing this guidance."

So throughout my career in multitudes of companies – I had French Canadian clients, they recognized that I could speak enough French that they were shocked and then they are still some of my dearest friends to this day. We're always in touch with each other, and again I would thank my experiences at Oregon State for having that awareness, that openness, to diverse cultures. My Spanish was pretty good at that point, so I was doing a lot of procedures and policies in Spanish. I was speaking to employees in Spanish and helping them with methodologies, training, systems. On many occasions, I was in Latino/Hispanic environs and did really quite well, again, because of Oregon State's training that I received in Spanish and went on to graduate school. So again, I have to thank my university training for helping me do well in my career as a consultant.

CP: That's really interesting. What is psychometrics?

BL: Psychological metrics. There are many disciplines in the testing of psychology – there are behaviorists and there are personality folks; I won't go into depth, I could get really technical. And psychometrics look at the definable, quantitative metrics, when test someone on their psychology or their psychological make-up. And they have to have repeatability, validity, and proven methodologies that are accepted by the industry today. So I worked in New Zealand for seven years almost – off and on, but most of seven years – with a psychological testing company that provided testing for employment, hiring and development, in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. And also South America – because I spoke Spanish, I could interact with clients in Uruguay, Argentina and Chile as well. So I was able to provide background and insight.

CP: So is the idea of using these metrics to try and find people who are going to be a good fit for a company?

BL: Very much so. And there are many many tools out there for providing managers insights as to the propensity of success of an employee being hired for a particular role. Because of my background, again, in consulting, and my multicultural background, they would call upon me to talk to specific managers regarding diversity issues, multicultural issues. And I had to help many, many, many New Zealand companies and Australian companies come to awareness of people's personalities but also their social metrics – there's no such word as sociometrics, but it's my invention. [laughs] And so I would say, "be aware that the metrics of behavior of South Asian employees would be such. From Chinese employees, you might expect this. From Latino and Hispanic employees you might expect that." They used me so much because of my background here at Oregon State and Thunderbird and so forth.

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I was even chosen by Automobile Association of New Zealand to help foreign nationals coming into New Zealand, to be advised on what it means to be a New Zealander. There is a Kiwi culture, there is a New Zealand, and it is specific. And it's been testing and I can even show that it has its own domain that's separate from Australia; a little bit separate from Australia. So I would help most British nationals coming in-bound. And I would say, "in the UK you would be comfortable with this," and they would say, "that's correct." And I'd say, "in New Zealand, they do it this way." And their mouths would hit the floor and they'd go, "you're joking." And I'd say, "no, be aware that these are some of the issues that we, as immigrants, have to deal with. And we have to adapt to the culture, and to honor the culture, as best as we can, as immigrants." So that's how far my career went.

There was even a show called – oh gosh, it was one of those shows that had like the biggest winner or whatever, kind of like a commercial-type show. And they had me actually choose the participants in the show and who would be the successful one for this New Zealand-based show. So who would be the most radical and who would cause the most drama. And I said, "well, here you go. We wouldn't choose them for employment, but for your show, if you want huge ratings, then this is the right person." And they proved out to be exactly what I had said, that these are your high maintenance employees that are going to be hard to manage, and that turned out to be correct.

CP: And I know that you are also, a little more recently, working on a project on passion? Tell me about that.

BL: In all of my experiences, as I come to the end of my career, in all of my experiences through all these decades, I just felt that the missing link in all that pertains to what we do in our personal lives and our careers, it comes down to passion. Are we passionate about what we do in our careers? Are we passionate about what we do in our lives? I can point to how someone is wired in psychometrics, I can point to maybe areas of consideration for a career path, I won't lay heavy on

that. But I would show how they would approach their chosen career path and their chosen joy, and I've been able to come up with two assessments that actually unfold passion. And both were validated by a Ph.D. psychometrician down in California; one was very highly tested and had tremendous results. And so I'm coming to the table with science.

And tomorrow I'm going up to Portland to see the first prototype of the website; I'm super excited. And the programmers are just completely blown away. They keep saying to me, they go, "there's nothing out there like this." "I know, that's why I'm doing it, because there's nothing like this." And even a patent has been filed, because the technology is a utility patent. And again, thanks to OSU and my college training and background, that I can take it to a formalized process to actually get a patent. I mean, I crafted my first utility patent and I'm now having an attorney review it and get it lodged, and I'm going through the process, and I've talked to the Patent Office and they said, "you're fine; you're doing great. We don't get this very often." But it's because of education that I could follow the learned path to get this to the patent office. So the website – thank God I worked at Nintendo, being in a tech environment, so again, it lended to my ability to understand technology and go down that route.

CP: How did the connection with New Zealand come about?

BL: My boss at Nintendo was from New Zealand; he was from Christchurch, Andrew Knobbes. A great guy, he was a great manager. And as a New Zealander, we spoke often about life in New Zealand. And when I left the consulting realm, I was trying to get on path to a new – I was tired of traveling as much as I did, I was living out of my suitcase for years. And I just couldn't find the right path in Portland, I just could not find anything – I really never succeeded in Portland. I always did well in California, I always did well in Seattle, but in Portland I just could never land a job. It's so funny – everyone kept saying, "you're too big, you're too educated, you're too experienced for the Portland market," I was way out of my element.

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So I talked to my friend, Andrew Knobbes, and I said, "I need to go overseas. I'm an overseas guy, I'm a multinational guy." He said, "Brent, go to New Zealand." He said, "we live by international business; we have to live on international business or we die, because there ain't much going on into those two islands...four islands." And I said ok, so I applied in Portland and got a little bit of a tepid response. And then I brought my partner to the second interview and we had a huge response. "Oh my God, ok, you're not escaping the IRS." "No, no, we're fine." They saw that my partner and I were ok. Huge pathway to Wellington, which is the capital. I got a letter of acceptance.

I got on a flight three months later, didn't know a soul. Didn't have any job prospects. I was connected to the Zen Buddhist community in the United States and I reached out to the Zen community in New Zealand. And a woman, she said, "I'm a Zen priest, I'll take you in," and that was my first friend in New Zealand. We're still very very dear friends to this day; Jade is her name, she's a wonderful gal. And I was terrified. I landed. I said, "I'm a Thunderbird," you know, "do it." Five days later I got a job and I'm still employed seven years later with the same company. And my boss in New Zealand is a very dear friend of mine. I can count him as one of my dearest friends as well, Rob McKay. I miss Rob, I miss working with him.

So they used me, with my background, because I had worked with psychometrics before in America, in Canada with my consulting, so I had knowledge about how it would related to consulting environments. They threw me in full-bore, they trained me, and I learned, I learned, I learned. And they used me on consulting engagements in New Zealand and Australia. I brought the missing link of what they were looking for and then I really gained huge insights all those years; a tremendous education. So really it was a well-rounded career at that point.

CP: What sorts of adjustments did you have to make to living in New Zealand?

BL: Oh, New Zealand is its own culture. Thank God I was an Oregonian. Oregon is probably one of the closest states to New Zealand that you can find; Hawaii would be the other one. I tempered it down, I even slowed down that much more and became more quiet. It was most important not to stand out as a "tall poppy," is the concept. They do not like the tall poppy syndrome which, if you come in like a Californian – robust, confident, bigger than life – they will chop you down in ways that you can never imagine. And there's an art form; there are people who are so savvy about how to destroy people's lives.

It got to the point that I met a manager from Hewlett-Packard – she retired there. And she ran the Hewlett-Packard division in – I hope I can say this – at that time, and she said, "of all the country places that we have around the world," at that time, I don't know about any more or currently, but at that time, she says, "only one country required therapy of people coming home to America, and that was New Zealand." No other country required any therapy whatsoever of all of the countries that they had placements of Americans moving overseas to help with procedures, policies, systems, manufacturing. The only country that was the most difficult, where they had therapy coming back, was New Zealand.

I didn't need therapy coming back, I adjusted and I became a New Zealander. So much so that I'm a citizen of New Zealand, and I say with pride that I'm a dual citizen. I'm a citizen of *Aotearoa*. I even sing the national anthem in Maori. I even took Maori *Tahi* level one language classes, because that was who I was. My partner and I actually twice took Maori language classes so we can actually pronounce the given names correctly in Maori.

And when we went to Tahiti, my French wasn't so great, but when we met people of Polynesian background, we could communicate in Maori. We could communicate in Polynesian language. And people came up to us and shook our hands and hugged us, because we could at least speak in Polynesian. And that was hugely heartfelt to have that kind of welcome in the country, or location, of Tahiti. And my travels through Polynesia, I could understand the words. "I know that word, I know what that means." So again, multiculturalism was hugely important.

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Multiculturalism is incredibly important in New Zealand because Maori represent sixteen percent of the population; much akin to African American numbers here in America. And there's a tremendous interaction with the Polynesians, Maori, in New Zealand, and its best to understand the culture to, again, do well. And they are my people and I am there's – we are all New Zealanders.

CP: You made the decision to come back to the United States.

BL: Yes. A very hard decision. I'm loyal to parents, my parents are getting older, and I hold two feet across the ocean. So while this foot is now in America, my left foot is still in New Zealand. But yes, I'm here and I'm glad I'm here, and I've been helping out taking care of my father and seeing my mother and my stepfather. And it's good to see family members as well.

My cousin, same age as I, he passed away a couple months ago. We were raised together and it was unexpected – it was a shock to everyone – and I was glad I was here to see him in his last days, last months, I was with my cousin as well. I'm super glad I was here to be with him and I miss him terribly. It was a very tragic situation.

CP: On the topic of family, I'm interested in knowing more about – you refer to him as your partner, but he's actually your husband.

BL: Yeah, we married in America. We married in Gold Beach, Oregon, provided the Supreme Court ruling. We always felt marriage was really between a man and a woman, we wish there were another terminology for us that was different. We understand the laws, we understand Social Security, we understand federal law, so if you keep it marriage we understand it keeps it clean, easy and simple. Assets being passed on and so forth, all that stuff. So for many reasons, he asked me. And I always wanted to, but he said, "it's time. It's time we get hitched." And we did in January.

And we also said that we will probably get married in New Zealand when we go home. When we go back to New Zealand, we will formally be married with all of our friends and family who we have down there, which I'll tell you in a little bit. [laughs] And we have connections to New Zealand that are blood connections and our heartfelt friends. We'll probably get married in New Zealand as well. It's the only country in Asia now that allows same-sex marriage.

CP: That was my next question. Did it precede the U.S.?

BL: It did precede the U.S. You know, if you go on YouTube and if you look at "New Zealand marriage song," there is the most heartfelt Maori passion song that's expressed in that video. And it was done when Parliament approved of the marriage, from the stands up above the members of Parliament. It came from the citizens. And it's a love song, it's a Maori love song. And it's the most heartfelt song. It was crafted by a warrior, a soldier, in World War I, expressing his love

and his compassion and how much he missed New Zealand when he was overseas. And that song is sung by the whole audience. And that, to me, more than anything, expresses my love for my country of New Zealand. And I miss it so much, and I miss my friends terribly.

But there's heart in New Zealand, and that's the part of the culture that I see in New Zealand that I think, in some ways, is missing from us. We don't speak Chinook language here, we don't sing Chinook language. That was our language. When white people came here, we did not adapt Chinook language with the Native folks, and we did not adapt the songs. In New Zealand, they did – they adapted and adopted the language and the songs. And it's so hugely rich down there, to have that opportunity to learn it and to sing it and to sing it.

When Scott and I took our language classes, the best part of the language class was at the end, thirty minutes, we would sing traditional songs in Maori, Polynesian. And we both love to sing. We took in the heart of the songs so much, and that's culture. That made us New Zealanders. And with my fellow New Zealanders I can say, we are one, *ka pai*.

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And so, we miss that in Oregon. A friend of mine asked me, "what does it mean to be an Oregonian?" And I go, "I know what it is. I know that we're different." Legally, I think we pass laws that are quite unique, because we are from Oregon. But we don't have that language and we don't have that heartfelt exchange with Native people here, that would have identified that "this is us, this is who we are." And the same thing with Seattle with the Nisqually and the Native folks in the Puget Sound area, they have their language and they would have their traditions as well. And that's not up there as well. And I'm a Washingtonian – my mother is a Washingtonian, so I can say that. [laughs] I have Oregonian and Washingtonian parents. But that was the deepest insight that I had, of what we're missing here in Oregon, that they do have in New Zealand.

CP: Scott is an OSU grad as well, is that correct?

BL: He is.

CP: Can you share some details of his OSU experience?

BL: He was a superior student. He was also, for two years, he was in ROTC – he got in with ROTC, he's from Colorado originally and he came in on an ROTC scholarship. And two years later, he realized he was not meant to be military, even though he did pretty well, he's pretty good at it. So he left ROTC and put himself through college. His background was moreso in education and he became an educator, and he did teach school in Oregon. He stayed fairly closeted with his parents really until he was thirty. So in the community where he was at, he was fairly closeted and didn't come out – when he was teaching school, he didn't say anything.

But he did very well and, to this day, he now came back into OSU, he is employed by Oregon State University as a Master Gardener in Curry County location. And he teaches gardening skills and plant materials under the umbrella of Oregon State University Master Gardeners Program. So full circle. He came back and now employed by OSU.

CP: And do I assume that his experience of campus climate was probably very similar to yours?

BL: Yeah, it was. [laughs] We both talk, we spoke about how fairly quiet we were. He was kind of a radical, more than I was, he was more out there. He's a big guy and he hit the weights pretty early and he's kind of a big guy now. And he said, "no one's going to mess with me," so he has a physical presence that commands respect. And a confidence. I'm more reserved. But it's good, we're a good balance for each other.

CP: You reference your New Zealand family, what does that mean?

BL: We decided, for better or worse, we decided to be donor parents. Both of us. I was asked to be a donor parent because when they found out that I had a Native American background, and that I had melanin in my skin, we don't have a legacy of skin cancer – my mother and I, nor my aunt or cousins. And because of New Zealand's sun is so harsh – they have a problem with ozone down there – the highest rates of skin cancer are in Australia and New Zealand.

So they asked me if I would be a donor father, and I thought about this and I thought, "ok, since having children is quite difficult as it is, being same gender parents in this country, I agree. Sure." I would give a little bit of myself to the greater cause. And to my shock, seven children have been born so far. Four have actually – their parents have actually reached out to me and they wanted me to be part of their family. Contact – not included as a member – but the children would know that I was the biological father. And the communication has been beyond heartfelt. And the same with Scott. He has seven kids and has four children he's in touch with on a regular basis.

So to culminate all of this wonderful outreach, we're going home next year, to New Zealand for a visit. We're going to head back and we suggested that maybe we could all come together with one big group and have a photo. And they said yes! Every one of them said, "yes, absolutely." So we're going to have eight children and parents and then one of our dearest dearest friends, Margaret – she's ninety-five years old, she's the *grand dame* of New Zealand – she would be there as the grandmother or the great-grandmother to our pack. And we come full circle. We come full circle.

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CP: Another topic I want to ask you about is the south coast of Oregon. I'm pretty sure you're the first person that we've spoken to for this project that lives there, and I'm interested in knowing what life is like at Gold Beach and Curry County, the issues that are facing that area right now.

BL: Yes, the county of my great great grandparents on my father's side. The region is known as the state of Jefferson. At one point it was almost going to forge the fifty-first state or, I should say, the forty-ninth state, I think, at that time. They were looking to create three counties of northwestern California and southwestern Oregon into Jefferson. So we even have Jefferson Public Radio – it's not Oregon Public Radio, its Jefferson Public Radio. So we're in the state of Jefferson and there's a mindset that is really unique saying, "hey, we are our own."

It's very conservative. It's rural – fishermen, agriculture, depressed economies, horrible economic situations, environmentalist destruction of timber regions. There was quite a nasty legacy there and I don't know how it should have been dealt with, but industries were stripped to destruction. Tourism is kind of taking hold, sort of. Retirement is the biggest industry, probably. I think Curry County is the third highest population base in the country – highest age bracket in the country. Medford is a going concern, Crescent City.

We, shockingly, have had no overt experiences whatsoever. We're out in the county, but not demonstrably, not broadcasting, we don't demonstrate or anything. But we're known. And in Del Norte County as well, which is in California. We just get around so much, we're talking to so many people, and it's just not an issue. Everyone just kind of goes, "whatever." All the regular folks just go, we're just part of the community. And because it's kind of an alternative "live and let live" type of environment, yeah, we do.

And Scott's done exceptionally well. He was a landscaping professional for a long time and then now with OSU. With me being a management consultant, flying out all the time, people knew I was flying out all the time, and the comment that was made by the business community was, "those are the two hard-working boys." That's what mattered – you had to be hard working and then you were accepted. Everything else, we just kept to ourselves and did our thing. We had a farm there for a while – we've sold it since – and being in the farm, we never had one ounce of any destruction at all. Nothing on the farm or to our cars or anything while we've been living there.

I'd say if you come in with radical ideas and you want to dress radical and be radical, it just probably wouldn't go well. But if you just want to come and go with the flow, just be who you are. If you want to be alternative, we know many other gay and lesbian folks – partners and singles – that live in the area and they don't have any problems. There's a large California ex-pat community that lives there; they're very progressive usually in their mindset, so that kind of tempers things down. But it just doesn't seem to be an issue, just be yourself and kind of join in and get along.

CP: Maybe more of a libertarian ideal.

BL: I think so, you said it right. Much more libertarian, absolutely.

CP: What drew you to Gold Beach? Was it your family connection to the place?

BL: No. When we were looking for a place to live, after living in Portland, when we had moved from Seattle down to Portland, we decided to live in a rural environment, we both wanted to live in rural environs. We researched for two years. We drove western Oregon – eighteen months – and we just fell for Gold Beach. And so I told my grandmother, I said, "well, we're going to move to Gold Beach, I'll be a management consultant and I'll travel from there to places around the country. Scott would be a landscaper." She bursted out laughing and she said, "well, welcome home!" And I said, "welcome home?" And she said, "your great great grandparents are from there, Brent. That's where they settled. They came out from West Virginia all those years ago, and that's where they settled." And I said, "I didn't know that."

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Sure enough, that's where the family had been, so there's a blood lineage there. Purden was the name and we even met wife of my grandfather's cousin who lived down there. He had passed since, but we actually met Ruby Purden and she was well-known in the community. She was ninety-something when we met her and she was wearing red cowboy boots and as spry as can be. And yeah, she was married to Ruby Purden and Ruby was my grandfather's first cousin. And that was another thing that, I think it rested really well with the community down there is that there were blood lineages there. We weren't just tourists coming in, we were blood-linked to the county, and there was acceptance on that level as well.

CP: Is there any problem of isolation?

BL: Socially?

CP: Well, just physically.

BL: Physically. Yes, you said it right. There are times with the storms that all roads are shut down and there's no way to get out, and you're stuck. There is a feeling of, you've got to make do with what you've got. And we are under threat of a massive tsunami; we have been informed that the coast is ready for the big one. And we have taken steps, we have taken huge steps, to pack our vehicles with evacuation supplies. If we are so fortunate to be around when the big one comes in. [laughs] So if we are hit with a tsunami, we would drive our rigs to higher ground, and we have backpacks, and we would pack ourselves out, making sure our friends would be ok. We would not leave anyone – anyone who is a friend, if they are not ok, we would stay with them and then we would share our supplies if need be.

CP: My last question for you is just the observations that you've been able to make on OSU from afar over the years; how things have changed as you've come back to campus now. What is it like for you to be here?

BL: The one thing that I see so positively, it just feels like there's more of a gung-ho creative exploration energy here, with the student body and professors. And that's probably my perception, it's probably more of my state of mind as I'm more open-minded to what I'm seeing. It's more diverse. It's open to diverse concepts and ideas. I was really impressed with the structures, the buildings, of the various organizations that are under Minority Affairs. I think it's wonderful. The new longhouse, the Asian Center, the African American Center, the Hispanic/Latino Center – I just love it and I love the new buildings. That really perks me up, that was good to see those. I was so jazzed. And many of the other organizations that are out there as well, I haven't had a chance to stop and say hello.

So I'd say the big thing is that, at least on campus, there's a click in the step and people are smiling, I've noticed that too. And that's usually a good sign. If I see that a student body is smiling and alert and interactive, that tells me there's something going on that's positive. I don't see people sweeping the street with their eyes, I don't see that happening. They're looking straight ahead and looking straight ahead is good. I was looking at the ground when I was here, and I knew many others who were too. I wasn't the only one. But I'd say it's a better environment overall. Like I mentioned before, we still have issues where I roll my eyes, but I'd say overall, I think people are more aware, more upbeat, more open to new ideas than in the late '70s. At least that, I think, has changed for the positive. It's good.

And this is home too. This is home base, this is my university. And it's good to be back.

CP: Well, we're glad to have you.

BL: Thank you. Thank you for everything.

CP: Thank you, Brent. This has been really great, I appreciate it.

BL: Thank you, take care.

[1:19:29]