



Geoffrey Brooks Oral History Interview, February 18, 2014

Title

“Black Student Activism at Oregon State in the 1970s”

Date

February 18, 2014

Location

Dilg residence, Portland, Oregon.

Summary

In the interview, Brooks discusses his family background and life growing up in Portland. From there he relays details of his early college experience at Pacific University, his conscription into military service during the Vietnam War and his subsequent work at Kaiser Hospital.

The bulk of Brooks' interview focuses on his time as an undergraduate at Oregon State University. He reflects upon the development of his socio-political consciousness and his involvement with student activism, in particular the Black Student Union. He notes his relationship with Lonnie B. Harris, the first director of OSU's Educational Opportunities Program and a former roommate of Brooks'. He also discusses campus life, including his student jobs as radio show host and computer operations technician.

Brooks concludes the interview by discussing his transition from undergraduate to teacher in the Portland Public Schools. He also shares his thoughts on the current direction of OSU and offers advice to college students today.

Interviewee

Geoffrey Brooks

Interviewer

Janice Dilg

Website

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

Transcript

Janice Dilg: We are going.

Geoffrey Brooks: Okay.

JD: So today is February 18th, 2014, this is Janice Dilg, oral historian for the Oregon State University Sesquicentennial oral history project, and today I'm here with Geoffrey Brooks. Welcome Geoffrey.

GB: Thank you.

JD: So let's begin at the beginning a bit and have you start by telling a bit about where you were born and your family and a little bit about growing up.

GB: I was born here in the city of Portland in October, 1947. The man who brought me into this world is a guy by the name of DeNorval Unthank, who was one of the first black doctors in the city of Portland. Fact is, I was born at Providence Hospital and in those days you couldn't go in the front door or the emergency room, so if negro children were to be born, they went in through the kitchen or the freight door. True story, as I now - that may be a little exaggerated by my parents, but that's the way I remember it being told to me.

Let's see, I was...probably when I was about 2 1/2 or 3, I was probably a real sickly child. I don't know why. I had pneumonia two, five times before I was 6. I had projectile vomiting, that's interesting. I don't know if they have that anymore. When I was 7 I had a hernia and I got sewed up. And I think all those things have a part of who you are. And when you get as old as I am at this point, it - some of those memories get blurred. Let's see, my dad came out here probably in 1938 with my uncle Cy, who lived over here on, well lived on 1st and Victoria. Now if you go to 1st and Victoria right now, you'll see a car dealership on that corner. But there used to be a big old Victorian house, which was really a fourplex. There were two families that lived upstairs and two families - or one family that lived downstairs and then another family that actually lived in the basement where the furnace was.

My uncle Cy was actually my father's - I grew up thinking my uncle Cy was my dad's brother. It wasn't until just before, shortly before my mother got sick - your neighbor - that I found out that really they were first cousins. My father's mother was...I don't want to call her a woman of the night...that would be unfair. She was the only woman in the Mississippi delta in Greenville, Mississippi that owned her own house. So if you know anything about the time, black folks couldn't own property but they could own homes. She was the only woman in Greenville that was colored that owned her own house. So my father, when he was born, was very light skinned. I mean they used to call him "Bright." And people in Mississippi said - the white people in Mississippi said "you know, you need to get that boy outta here, he's not bright enough to pass for white," 'cause there were a lot of bright skinned, or mixed raced children at the time that passed for white. My father wasn't one of those. Because he had curly hair, so they could tell. And the colored people said "you need to get that boy outta here because he's going to have a lot of problems 'cause there's a lot of jealous black folks around here of bright skinned kids." So he came out here with my uncle Cy who was his first cousin. The story that I determined was he was supposed to go back to Mississippi but when he got here he said he didn't want to go back. And he stayed here. And eventually changed his name because he had the name Thompson, which was one of his aunt's last name; that he took that name and when he got here he changed his name back to Brooks, which was his real name.

[0:04:58]

Mother and Father met each other, after he came back from the war and got married they had me and -

JD: And tell us their names.

GB: James O. Brooks and Beria Catherine Brooks. And my mother's name is Beria, she would say that it's part of the word Liberia. I think she was being hopeful. You know my mom, so you probably know that. There are three Berias. There was my aunt Beria, who's named Beria Katherine, who was, when I was born, was my mother's great aunt. There was a cousin, first cousin that I had, whose name was Beria Katherine, but we used to call her KK. She died real tragically in a tragic car accident. And then the other Beria was my mom. So that's an interesting name.

Little side story, maybe not about my Oregon State days, but just about my family. When her granddaughter got pregnant, before mom passed away, we had gone by to visit and of course Mom had dementia and she could never remember the name of the child that Chelsea was going to have, and we kept saying Rico. And so she tried to get that straight. And she looked at my daughter Chelsea one day and she said "you know, if you have a daughter, you ought to name her Beria because that name is going to die out," and when you raise your children to think for themselves, they always do. And she put her hand on her hips, my daughter, and she said "Gram, Gran-Gran, I ain't naming no girl child of mine Beria." Oooh, the look my mom gave her, oh my God. You know, you could have dropped an atomic bomb in the house, I mean it was just, it was palatable to feel the way my mom responded to that.

But I went to Grant High School, I went to Irvington. I also went to a grade school before I came to Irvington, I went to Holiday Grade School. Now that's one for the history buffs. Holiday Grade School doesn't exist. It's near what we would now call Lloyd Center or in the Lloyd District. I transferred from Holiday Grade School in the fifth grade and came to...to Irvington. And when I got to Irvington, the difference between - the academic difference between Holiday and Irvington was like day and night. So I had to do the fifth grade over again. A lot of people don't know that. So if you ask all my friends, I'm the oldest one, and the reason is because they were all a year behind me. So now we're all the same age in the same grade, but anyway, I went to Irvington and I think an important part of the history of Irvington, this area, is...this was an area that black folks could buy houses. So the house that we're sitting across the street from as I'm doing this, my parents bought from a guy by the name of Ing Lee: I-N-G Lee. Ing Lee was Chinese. He worked at the post office, but his family is the family that owns Hung Far Low Restaurant. And Ing Lee sold him the house. The realtors wouldn't sell him the house, and the fact of the matter is, there were already black families on the block. There were the Bolses, the Rayfords and the Poes...the Jones, or what you now know as the Browns, because my friend Mike Jones, we grew up next door to each other, when his dad died, his mom remarried. So her name is now Brown. But we bought that - my parents bought that house for \$11,300. 1958, I think. So I was born and raised on this block.

[0:09:40]

The day we moved in, and you could go out on that telephone poll on that parking strip and still see the mark in the door, is it - yeah.

JD: I have heard this story.

GB: Well you could actually go out and see, I mean they haven't changed the telephone poll in sixty years, so it's still there. My dad was driving a '53 or '54 Oldsmobile with the trailer on it up the driveway. The brakes gave out or the car quit and the brakes gave out. My dad has his hand on the door, he was half in the car and half out and the door came down and hit the telephone pole and lopped his fingers off. And that's when my dad - my mom and Mrs. Brown became instant friends, at that point. You know, I think I was 8 years old, maybe. I'm sort of jumping around, where else do you want me to go.

[0:10:46]

JD: It's okay. So you were talking about schooling and that being important.

GB: Yep.

JD: What was your parents' attitude or your expectations about your going to college? It wasn't necessarily something that always happened in that time period?

GB: It wasn't necessarily something that always happened. That's a really good question...I think that for a long time, well I want to be a little more direct, I was always never confident about school. I'd say I probably wasn't a good student. The reality was, I probably just didn't have a lot of confidence. I was really shy, of course you can't tell that now, but I'm sort of a retiring shy child. Not when I play, but when it came to school, because everybody was always better at school than I was. And...my father and my mother were both advocates of getting your education. Of course now we're talking from the time we moved into the house in 1958 through the sixties and the seventies. We're talking Civil Rights Movement. And really, it - the emphasis was on getting an education. So yeah, there was a lot of emphasis in my house about that. And you know I - again I was never very confident. I remember the end of my junior year, my father and I were standing in the

driveway and he said "well next year's your senior year, you need to be thinking about college, and what do you want to do, what college do you want to go to?" and I said to my dad "You know Dad, I don't think I'm really college material." And of course my father - that was the same time that he was finishing his master's degree at University of Portland. And he was working for Donald D. Longhome, what we used to call J.D.H. And he was about ready to become the leader of the Urban League a few years later. So saying that to my father really set him off. And he said "so what do you think you're going to do?" and I said "I want to work for Johnny Glenn's dad."

Now, another side story, but a historical perspective, all of the garbage routes in the city of Portland, and still are, were grandfathered to mostly white folks and Johnny Glenn lived up here on 9th and Siskiyou, just right up by the park, but his father owned Glenn's Sanitation and Refuse. He owned a garbage truck and Johnny Glenn said to all of us negro boys "look, if you want a summer job, you can come work for me in the summer. You can either work in the yard, you could work in the office, you can make good money for college." And I told my dad, I said "I want to work for Johnny Glenn's dad." My father was a man with a deep voice like me, small framed, he actually grabbed me by my throat, damn near lifted me off the ground and said "ain't no negro child of mine gonna work for a white man. You're going to college." Scared the crap out of me.

[0:14:36]

So...education was a huge deal in my house and I just never felt that I could...make the standard, so to speak. Graduated from Grant High School and went to Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon. Got to remember the time now, I graduated in 1966, so still in the middle of the Civil Rights Movement, but a lot of colleges, small private colleges, not necessarily public colleges, but a lot of small private colleges were looking for black kids. Okay? And Pacific University was one of those schools. They actually rented what we would call now a motorhome, drove down to Oakland and then L.A. and Compton, parked in the middle of the street and looked at black kids on the street and said "you want to go to college?" and were signing kids up left and right.

So when I got to Pacific, there were all these people that were from all over the - all over mostly the west coast. And I had my freshman year in college and the end of my first semester I had a 2.75. I never got grades like that in high school. I was like "man, this is fun and this is cool, this is easy." So I discovered that I was college material. The only problem with that was I was so popular that I got to be elected freshman class treasurer, which meant that I went to a lot of meetings and all the parties and of course the second semester I didn't - I got a 1.7. So you know in those days, 1966, '67, that if you didn't get a 2.25, you got drafted. 'Cause we're in the Vietnam era, right? I got drafted. So that was the end of my college days until I got out of the military and came back and then eventually ended up at Oregon State University.

[0:16:51]

JD: And how, how did you end up at Oregon State University? What sent you in that direction?

GB: Well, when I was in the military I discovered that what I had was epilepsy. So it's a long story as to how that happened. But the military really didn't want to keep me, even during Vietnam, they wanted bodies, but I got out in 13 months because they didn't want me to get out and then the Veterans Administration have to pay me for the rest of my life. They said "well, we'll just give you a general discharge, you get out of here." So I got out, I was still having a lot of seizures and during that time I actually spent a lot of time with a woman by the name of Betty Stokes, rest in peace. This woman saved my life, I think, in a lot of ways. Betty Stokes was the director of an organization called the Epilepsy Association of Oregon - EAO. My dad, because he worked for the Urban League - he wasn't director then, but he worked for the Urban League - knew Betty. She was in the same office, the Mark Hatfield office, which is right down on Burnside, and it's an angular building.

[0:18:08]

JD: Yeah, a little flatiron building.

GB: Mhmm, the little flatiron building, right. Betty Stoke's office was in one of those, like up on the third floor, and she had this office that had windows on all sides, it was a really cool place. But Dad took me to meet her. She said "so you have epilepsy?" I said "yeah," she actually went with me up to "the hill," we used to call it then. And my doctor was

James McDonald Watson, who was Scottish, who still had a Scottish accent, but he was director of neurology and he was my doctor. And they studied my brainwave patterns, hooked me up to E... electroencephalographs, EEGs, where they actually had the little needles that they stuck underneath your scalp...So after being out of the military from 1968 through '69, '70...I was working for Kaiser hospitals as an orderly and a nurse or what they call...well they only have registered nurses now, but they used to have LPNs; Licensed Practical Nurses, and then they used to have what they call - what they now call CNs, or Certified Nurses. So I was a certified nurse and an orderly.

I had an opportunity, really, because of the people that I worked with, to be what we now call physician's assistant. But that was kind of because one night I came to work and I used to work the late shift and I came to work and I was two hours late and people called my parents' house and said he's not at work. Well then they discovered that I worked at the old Kaiser hospital, which is now the Adidas headquarters, another piece of history, they found me laying in the parking lot in front of Kaiser hospital. I'd had a seizure and passed out. I was out cold. And they said "well we don't think you'd make a good physician's assistant," and I said "well you know, that's probably okay." And it was my dad, again the relationship that I had with my father, which was you know, just a tug-of-war through all those years, knew his fraternity brother, black fraternity called Kappa Alpha Psi, his fraternity brother was a guy by the name of Lonnie B. Harris. Those of you at Oregon State should know this name. Lonnie and my dad were fraternity brothers, so he got ahold of Lonnie and said "you know what, this guy really needs to go back to school." And it was through my dad and my own effort that I went back to school. So that's how I really ended up at Oregon State. And because I'd been in the military and had some other sort of some life experiences...I was still, when you looked at my transcript, I was still a freshmen. So when I went to financial aid, they said "well, you have to live in a dorm." And I told them, I said "I ain't living in no damn dorm." And they said "well you're still a freshmen," I said "yeah, but a 22 year old freshmen, and I've been in the military. If you put me in a dorm and these white kids get drunk, I'm gonna to kill somebody." And the lady, her chair, she scooted her chair back, she went [gasps]. So they said "well, you know you can't be admitted until you have a place to live." So I ended up rooming with my dad's fraternity brother, Lonnie B. Harris. We were roommates for two years.

[0:22:03]

JD: And -

GB: True story.

JD: Was this on campus or off campus or...

GB: Lonnie lived in a house. He was the director of what we now call the Equal Opportunity Program, or EOP, on campus at Oregon State. So those of you who are listening, you'll know about EOP. It started with Lonnie Harris, who is my dad's fraternity brother and my roommate.

JD: So you arrive on campus in 1970?

GB: January of 1970.

JD: And...did you know what you wanted to major in then or...what you were going to be involved in? How did you make your way?

GB: Honestly Jan, no I didn't. I just wanted to...I really just wanted to go back to school. Again, the influence of my father. And fortunately I was alive long enough to go through all this history with him and really thank him for being my father. 'Cause I don't know where I would have ended up without my mom and my dad, and I think that that's fair to say whether I'm black, white, pink or purple. But my dad was a sociologist. I mean that's what he taught at Marylhurst, that's what he studied, and so I wanted to be a sociologist, so my major was sociology.

And I did that for two years to the end of 1972 or so and then at that point, me being on campus was...shall I say dangerous? [laughs]. I caused a lot of trouble. I was the chairman of the Black Student Union and the only reason I was chairman of the Black Student Union was I was the oldest - I was one of the oldest males, other -

[0:24:13]

JD: I just realized your microphone came off.

GB: Oh my gosh.

JD: It's okay...

[0:24:26]

JD: So, we had a brief interruption, but you were talking about being chair of the Black Student Union.

GB: Well, I was chairman of the Black Student Union, and you know I don't think that my father James O. Brooks thought that I would go to Oregon State and become radicalized. And here he was in his fifties or his sixties and really a member of "the Civil Rights generation," and here his son is becoming radicalized, talking about black Muslims and black nationalism and you know, so that piece I think, for my dad and I, was really interesting, and really not uncommon for children of our generation, with our parents. I met a guy by the name of Kenny Fisher. We used to call him Booky. He was a student in biology but not a very good student. He was more interested in Black Nationalism than going to school. But we hooked up and I became chairman of the BSU simply because I had the gift of gab, but I also was one of the oldest black students on campus.

It's important to note here that when I arrived in January 1970, the previous year, 1969, was when the Great Pumpkin, Dee Andros, who was the football coach who used to drive around in a bright orange and black Oldsmobile 225 - black folks, we used to call those deuce and a quarters - he was the football coach and had been the football coach for years and years. How many, I don't know. But there was a walkout on campus because he wouldn't allow the black students to wear afros or beards. There were a lot of other issues going on in not only on campus at Oregon State but also in the city of Corvallis. So I come after they've all left, the whole campus, all these new black kids are primed for some leadership and I ended up being their leader, interestingly enough.

[0:27:07]

JD: So talk a little about how the Black Student Union came about and what was going on, what did you do as the chair?

GB: The Black Student Union came about to represent the interests of black students on campus, but not only black students on campus, we really aligned ourselves with what was going on with black students on other college campuses across the country. I mean we met with the black students from Berkeley, we met with the black students from Oklahoma State University - note that the colors are the same, black and orange, orange and black - and we had rallies, we had educational sessions, we did our own programming, we had - we modeled a lot of what we did at Oregon State sort of after the Black Panthers. We had study sessions, 'cause part of being in school was being successful and we wanted our students to be successful, so we did study sessions, we did all kinds of stuff.

One of the incidents was Brigham Young University, and of course Brigham Young University is Mormon, this is a bit of a stretch, but you got to be in that time, you got to be in that context to really understand. There was a Pac 8 - was it Pac 8 or Pac 10 then? I don't know. I can't remember. But there was a wrestling tournament that was at Gill Coliseum and BYU was there and of course they're Mormon and they don't let black people be priests. We got all fired up about this and we walked in and we did this protest and all the white people who were there to see this wrestling match threw eggs at us.

JD: So talk in a little more specific detail about what your protest was.

[0:29:01]

GB: The protest was about not...the fact that Brigham Young and Mormons wouldn't let black people be priests. We felt that they were racists and we wanted to make a statement. And it might have been misplaced but that's what you do, and that's what we did. We protested...you know I love this guy to death, President MacVicar, the president of Oregon State at the time, we did protests that we wanted not only a Black Student Union but we wanted a Black House for the black students or a dorm room or a lounge where we could meet in private. The Chicano students were asking the same thing. Notice I don't use Latina or Latino because again in contexts of the time, they were - the students were Chicano.

[0:30:06]

JD: Was this the Cultural Center Student Committee?

GB: Yep. And then there was a - I would use the word bureaucratic, there was a bureaucratic form of the cultural committee and then there was a radical form of the cultural committee. And we were members of both, but when being nice doesn't get the results that you want, then you act out. And that's what we did. And I remember going into MacVicar's office and his secretary, me and a bunch of other students, and the secretary was mortified. She said "you don't have an appointment," and I told her, I said "you know what, I'm chairman of the BSU, I don't need a damn appointment." What I didn't know was that my dad was keeping tabs on all of this in the background and he knew MacVicar from somewhere. And for years after that my parents used to receive a Christmas card from the MacVicars. I didn't know that at the time, but anyway. But I think we really just wanted to make the point. We wanted things on campus to change; we wanted things in the community to change. If you know anything about Corvallis and Oregon State, they still have issues. Okay? And those issues come because Oregon State, number one - it's important to remember this - is a land grant university. Okay? Land grant universities were established in the 1860s, intended for all children, and we knew that then and we said "you know what, you've got to live up to your mission of a land grant university, which means you have to treat black students, Chicano students well."

Well, Oregon State sits in the middle of an agricultural valley. The majority of students that come to Oregon State to this day come from Eastern Oregon, Southern Oregon, they - a lot of those folks haven't been around people of color - that's the term we use today. So there were always clashes. There were - I remember getting in fights with students, I remember being called "nigger," "go back where you came from," that kind of stuff. And some of that stuff has gone on, on and off, to this day. But really the Black Student Union, the Chicano Student Union, we worked really hard that - so that we could accomplish change, whatever that change was. Some of it was misguided. I think we would all admit that. But I do think that what happened in 1970 after the walkout was people were sensitized to what the issues were and they were at some point willing to listen.

My experience at Oregon State for the two and a half years that I was there was very interesting. I had a radio show called the Sugar Man's Cool Jam Jazz Session, if you can believe that. On campus radio and the radio played in the dorms and in the cafeterias. I probably could have got into TV because I was in communications and radio and television; speech communications. It was one of those electives that I chose to take. The other thing that I did, because of my experience at Kaiser and also Consolidated Freight, which I actually left at earlier, was I had the highest paying job of a student in the Oregon State University system. I was a computer operator. So here I was chairman of the BSU and then I would walk into the computer center and run the computers. It was - you know when I look back on it, it was a very interesting time. I did a lot of different stuff.

[0:34:47]

JD: So, before we get away from both of these jobs that you had on campus, I want to explore each of them in a little bit more detail.

GB: Sure.

JD: So how did you come to have a radio show and expand a little on what kind of music you played and how often you were on and...can you pull up some of your patter that you used to use on air?

[0:35:11]

GB: The radio show was - it was the kind of education that we talk about often now, and that is the demonstration project; demonstrate what it is that you know. Do you know how to run a radio station, can you run the dials, can you do the volume, can you do the mics, can you run the turntables, can you do all of that. And some people worked as producers of that show, some people worked as engineers, some people worked as on-air people, so I became, in our class I was the on-air personality. And it was called the Sugar Man, where that came from I don't know, Cool Jam Jazz Session, and I played a lot of jazz. I played everything from Jimi Hendrix, Buddy Miles, Herbie Mann, Quincy Jones, just on and on. Sort of

a mixture of what we would call now R&B and jazz soul music. And that was actually a class that I took. What was the other question you asked me?

JD: Well, you also talked about computers, which I think technology that students and faculty have access to changes dramatically over time, so students today would recognize computers, but perhaps not the type that you were using.

GB: Right. Well the other part of the two years between the time I got out of the military and worked for Kaiser, the other thing that I did was I worked for Consolidated Freightways at the old consol - over at Northwest Portland. And I worked with the old IBM, some people are going to know what this means. I worked with the old IBM 360s. And there were 360-30s, there were 360-50s and 360-80s. And then variations in-between. These are computers that took up whole rooms; I mean rooms and rooms and rooms. And I started off being what they called...a freight bill clerk. Consolidated Freightways: in order to move product across the country, they had freight bills and so in order to keep track of those you had these freight bills which are these - they used wooden tubs or early plastic tubs full of freight bills and I would carry those into the computer center where they would be processed. Well, I always walked by the keypunch room. Some of you are going to know what that is, some of you who are too young might not know what keypunch - but the old computers used keypunch cards, 80 column cards and you keypunch - you looked at the freight bill and keypunched the information into the card and then they would run the cards in the computer room and then they would create an attain, which contained all of the data and then they added, subtracted and produced all of these reports. Right?

JD: Mhmm.

GB: I kind of just elbowed my way into becoming an assistant operator in the computer room and then that was my job. I did that for maybe nine, ten months. And so because I had that experience when I went to Oregon State and I needed a job, it was Lonnie Harris said "why don't you go over to the computer center and apply" and so I applied and they said "have you ever worked one of these?" and I said "yeah," and they said "well let me see." Of course they were kind of shocked that I knew what I was doing, but yeah. So I became a computer operator for Oregon State University for the computing center, and when graduate students, ocean - primarily hard science students; biology, physiology, oceanography, all of these people had research projects, a lot of people doing their Ph. D, some people doing their masters, their jobs would blow up on the computer and they would need those and I would end up figuring out their jobs and making them run right. So that very same computer that I used to use at Consolidator Freightways and at Oregon State, the phones that we carry around now, the iPhone, that's the iPhone. But yeah, that's where I got that experience. So again my experience at Oregon State was - I don't know if the word eclectic is the right word, but you know I was doing a lot of different things that were all sort of in different categories or different areas all at the same time. I think what I discovered about myself was that I was talented, that I was smart, that I was a great student when I put my mind to it, and that I could lead people.

[0:41:03]

And then in 1973, excuse me, 1972, there was a program called Teacher Corps, which was located at University of Oregon, but Oregon State had a similar program that was structured really in the same way, that was called B2, or the Portland Urban Teacher Training Project, where they took people who were, had at least 80 hours toward graduation and wanted to be teachers. Again, remember the time, we're at the end of the Civil Rights era, you got a lot of black kids in schools, they needed teachers of color, they had to find them somewhere, so they scoured all the universities and they said "if you want to be a teacher we will give you your last 45 hours toward graduation and when you come out we'll give you a teaching certificate, but you will also do student teaching, and you'll still graduate from Oregon State." I needed to get the hell out of Corvallis, 'cause I - I used to follow the cops around, and I remember getting stopped by a cop and he said "well, can I see your license," I said "what you stopping me for, you stopping me 'cause I'm black?" He said "no, I'm stopping you because your tail light is out." I said "that's just an excuse to stop me 'cause I'm black and what are you doing being a cop anyway? Look at you, you got on that servant's cap, you look like a twelve year old." I mean I used to just talk so much smack. And so, I mean I remember getting a ticket and going to court and I told the judge, I said "you know, I'm not paying this ticket, are you going to throw me in jail? What you going to do? What you going to do to me?" I was kind of crazy.

So I think I'd kind of run out my welcome, so when B2 came along it was a perfect opportunity to leave, and so I came up here. I was still enrolled at Oregon State University, and I did my teaching at John Adams High School, some of you will

remember John Adams High School, it doesn't exist anymore. And so in '72 I did that for a whole year, the summer of '72, then the fall of '72 I was assigned to do my student teaching at Whitaker Middle School, which was down at Columbia Boulevard, and I did that for a whole year and then in 1973 I graduated from Oregon State with a BS in elementary ed., and I took that year of '72, '73 to take all my elementary ed. courses, where my background was sociology. Consequently, after becoming a teacher - this was before you had to have a fifth year, 'cause now in order to be a teacher you need a master's degree. Well this is '73, so in '78, '79, '80 they changed Oregon - the state of Oregon said if you had a four year degree and you were a teacher, you needed to get a master's degree or, in order to keep your license, you needed to take 9 hours a year until you got a master's degree. So I did that and I taught for...those years and went to Portland State. My first job was Burnwood Elementary School and it was elementary before it was a middle school. It's now called Beverly Cleary. So I was there for 13 years and then I went to Jeff and taught high school for 14 years, and I finished at Franklin High School.

[0:45:14]

JD: So you've certainly talked about that it was the Civil Rights movement, it was also the Vietnam war era, there was a lot of protest and upheaval and -

GB: Right.

JD: -kind of questioning the social order going on in general. Talk about kind of how that meshed with academics at the school and your learning experience and your experiences with faculty there.

GB: One of my favorite professors was a guy by the name of Stan Shively. He eventually became the chairman of Sociology department. And we were studying the sociology of dissent, was the actual course. So I got a lot of my verve for what was going on on campus and at BSU from that class, and one day Stan said to me, he said "you know, I think you'd make a much more credible leader if you say and do - what you say and do is supported by principle academics and statistics. And I was like oh, okay. So that's what I did.

I think there were a lot of professors on campus who had black students that if they were in fact at all vocal, I don't want to say they were scared, but they knew what was going on on campus and it was almost as if...not that they wanted to appease us or move us along, I don't want to give that impression, because that wasn't the case, I mean I just think that it's almost like they were saying "this too shall pass," and it really didn't. But I think for me the most powerful thing about my experience at Oregon State University was all of this stuff that I did, all of the protests, all of the running around, all of the yelling and the screaming, all of the - you know, whatever else was going on. At some point I realized personally that I needed to be a responsible individual. I kept a job...I kept a job, I lived in a house with four people, three of whom were women, I partied my butt off, but I pulled down 3.2s, 3.6s, 3.8s. I was a great student. I never lost sight of that. So for me, on a personal level, that was the most powerful thing from my experience. More importantly, once I started teaching, because of the B2 project, we talked about this before the interview, the whole idea of immersing teaching professionals in the environment rather than learning the theory and then doing 8 weeks' worth of student teaching, which was the old model, that didn't work. And I came across a lot of my colleagues who had come through that model. I was much more well-prepared, much more deeply prepared than a lot of my colleagues. I attribute that to Oregon State University. So I had got a great education. I don't know if that's an exact answer to your question, but that's what I take away from it.

[0:49:25]

Consequently, I was never embarrassed about Oregon State University. Cause you got Oregon State, you've got U of O and hell, all the members of my family are Ducks. Somebody had to stand up for the black and orange. But I met some very qau - oh, there I did it again. [Microphone noise].

JD: You got it?

GB: Yeah.

JD: Perfect.

GB: The individuals that I met, either as my students or professional folks from Oregon State, I've maintained relationships with those people, with those folks for years. I've served on the Board of Visitors for Multicultural Affairs for the last almost 18 years. I've served on the Board of Advisors to both Paul Risser and Ed Ray, which are mostly business folks. You've got the Board of Trustees and then over here you have the Board of Advisors, so I've served on that and I served on the EOB, which structurally would be somewhere in the midrange in terms of an organizational chart. I was asked to serve as a committee member for the restart of the School of Ed., 'cause the School of Ed., up until the mid-nineties, early nineties, was a part of the liberal - you could still get an education degree and teaching certificate but there was no singular School of Ed., so they restarted the School of Ed. And I sat on that committee to restart the School of Ed. So very proud of the education that I got from Oregon State University, very proud of the work that I do for Oregon State.

[0:51:41]

JD: That's great...So...you've talked a lot about kind of the changing cultures on campus and the times, are there any other perhaps ways that you want to explore what campus was like when you were there, you know? There was certainly a lot of upheaval going on, sort of how did national and international events, even beyond the Civil Rights movement, which was huge, make its way onto campus or become part of your educational experience there?

GB: Well, you know I talk about the Civil Rights movement, but you know there was something else going on too, another movement which we sort of called the Women's Rights movement. So that was sort of going on and I think what - one of the other things that happened was - and of course this is late '72 and '73 - in '73 when I was doing the teacher piece, we would come down on Thursday and spend, come down early on Thursday and have a Thursday afternoon and Thursday night class and an all-day Friday class, and sometimes on Saturday. I began to see the black students - I began to see what I would call more matriculation. Maybe that's a bad word or the inappropriate word, but I began to see more students of color and more white students talking about the issues of the time. And one of those was young black women who were students and young white women you were saying "you know what, we have something in common." I thought that that was really interesting, for me. I think the other thing that I saw happening was...and unfortunately I think it's gone back in the other direction, was the athletic department; football, basketball, the large sports, were feeling like they shouldn't be treating their athletes with the strict iron hand that they had had before. Letting students have a little more freedom.

But, and the reason that I say that I think it's gone back in the other direction is now college sports is a money-making endeavor. So when you have programs that you want to start or use for kids of color or other students when it comes to the athletic department, it's almost like you have to have their permission. And I think that that's really unfortunate. I remember, and you'll interview Paul Risser and Leslie Risser, but I remember we were sitting on the Board of Visitors meeting and we wanted to know something about how many students of color were there, and this is again, it's not necessarily a movement, it's just sort of an anecdote that sort of illustrates the nature of the issue. I don't want to say problem. But we wanted to know how many students of color, and they were - the university was giving us the statistics. Well some of the students of color that they were counting weren't black or Hispanic or API, Asian Pacific Islander, they were foreign students. And as a board we say "well, wait a minute, why are you counting foreign students?" And Leslie said "well, because they're students of color." No they're not, no they're not. They're foreign students, and the university's getting big money from these foreign students 'cause their parents are paying this out of state and out of the country tuition. So you can't count them. So I think it's taken the university a while to disaggregate some of the statistics. I think that there are still some issues with retention of students of color. I think that that's always been an issue. And the environment on campus I would say is probably a hundred percent better.

[0:56:39]

But the fact of the matter is, Corvallis is always going to be Corvallis. And a lot of times when students are on campus and they leave campus, they still have - run into issues. I think it's less so but it's because of the work of a lot of people and...There was a lot going on in the late sixties and seventies through the eighties and I think it took the work of a lot of people to make that change. Fact of the matter is, if you look at University of Oregon, they just, I don't want to say they "fired," they just got rid of the major what I will call their multicultural position, dealing with students. They got so - stuff happens in University of Oregon too. But it doesn't get the same kind of publicity or response that whatever happens at Oregon State gets, because it's Oregon State. And I think to a large degree Oregon - that's the way it will always be, because it's Oregon State.

JD: Well, as you were talking about changes that you were seeing kind of in the late - from the mid-seventies into the eighties and you mentioned the Women's Movement, and certainly Title IX came in during that time period, which changed the athletic scene pretty dramatically. Were you aware of any of that, or?

[0:58:26]

GB: I was aware of that, but you know probably from a distance. But I think that...Part of this...Part of what I observed in general, women on campus, a lot of the center of the weight, a lot of the gravity of that came from the women's athletic department. And these women were black and white. And they wanted more money. They wanted separate facilities; they wanted separate funding, so the basketball players, when they'd go to play the California schools, they'd fly in a plane. The volleyball team or the girls' basketball team, when they'd go to California, they'd take a bus. And the women were saying "well what the hell is that? We can fly down with the guys." And a lot of that, I think, happened because of Title IX.

I think people began to change their mind about what black people and Hispanic people and people other than white really were. You know? Because they were more vocal, we were more visible, we were now running for student body offices campus wide. I would have never considered that. If that were open when I went, I probably would have run for ASU president or MU president, because they do have a student director that did, runs the Memorial Union. I would have done one of those things, but that was unheard of at the time. So I just think that as time moved on, things changed. So maybe I'm not being very specific about that.

JD: No, you're fine.

GB: But again, I'm proud to be an Oregon Stater, much to my family's chagrin. They don't, you know, anyway.

I can tell you another story about my lovely daughter who, because I'm on a board and got a chance to go to - in 2000 my daughter graduated from Benson High School and it was University of Washington and Oregon State. Just happened to be, and President Ray said "you know, you want to" - or was it Paul Risser? I can't remember. I think it was Paul Risser, he said "you know, come on down and sit up in the President's box." It's like "oh, okay," so Chelsea and I go down and we have a nice dinner with all these people who were at CH2M, the Alumni Center across from the stadium, and then we go across the street and go up in the elevator and he says to Chelsea, he says "so Chelsea, you graduated from Benson, what school are you going to?" And she says "well, you know I'm thinking about University of Washington and Oregon State and University of Oregon," and I think she said Pepperdine or Santa Clara University, one of the two. And he said "oh." So we were watching the game and the game was over and he says to her, he says "well, you know Ms. Brooks, you can come to Oregon State and very cheaply, because your dad graduated from Oregon State, you automatically get the legacy scholarship, because you have a parent that graduated." He said "that's probably worth \$2,000 a year." She said "no, I'm a Dog." A Husky. I was so embarrassed. She graduated from University of Washington.

JD: Well, you know we just can't control our children, as much as we might try.

GB: That's right, that's absolutely right. When you raised them to think for themselves, and you raised them right, they're going to do exactly as we taught them, which is make their own decision, even if it's not one that you agree with. Or in front of the president of a university: "I'm going to be a Dog" [laughs], oh lord.

[1:03:35]

JD: So, what advice would you offer to current OSU students, having lived a life that went from college to a successful career and you're still engaged in this OSU community?

GB: The advice I would give to them is take advantage of your education. More so now than even in my time, because we live in a tertiary age, even - and maybe, I don't want to say post-technological age, but technology's changing so fast, so take advantage of your education, one. Two, use your education whatever you chose to do, to make the world around you better. Choose humanity, not dumbsanity. That's my word. That's my advice. And I think that that's really smart advice. I mean, I'd consider myself to be very lucky. I became a teacher quite by accident. And I didn't say that directly, I'll say it now. But it - I didn't know that I had that capacity or that talent. I didn't know. But the minute I walked in the classroom and was around kids and my master teacher at the time himself said "you're going to be a good one." So all of

those opportunities that presented themselves to me, and maybe this is more advice; opportunities present themselves, but you have to be prepared to take advantage of those opportunities. And even though a lot of times I was flying, walking, running blind, I had enough good sense to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that were presented to me. I have a lot of friends; personal friends, family friends, who came after me, who weren't as successful in life, because they didn't either take advantage of the opportunities or they weren't prepared to take advantage of those opportunities.

And I would say serve humanity, serve mankind, serve Oregon State, serve your country if you need to. There's nothing wrong with that. That's what makes this country great. And again, as I look around me and I look around at my friends at this stage in my life, I feel really lucky. I was so lucky to have Beria and James as my parents. Even though I think my dad and I, for those years that we talked about, 1966 through, I'll say probably all the way up to '76, even though I was teaching, because I was wild as a teacher. I used to have an afro like this and these white folks at Fernwood, they didn't know what to think when I showed up. But I eventually became a professional individual, and I think I learned that from my colleagues and I learned that from my parents. And fortunately, with both of my parents, I was able to, before they left this planet, was able to sit down with both of them and clear the table. And I think that I have friends whose parents have died, or loved ones have died, and they haven't been able to sort of have, not the last word, but to clear the decks, so that there are no issues left. My dad and I did that and mom and I did that, although I think emotionally, for both of us, it was really difficult because of her situation, having to be cared for. So if there's another piece of advice, take advantage, really, of the family and the loved ones you have, 'cause you don't know when they're going to be gone. They could be gone and you may not have a chance to sit down and clean the table or clear the table, that's my grandmother's word, that's why I use that word. So I think that I was very fortunate in that regard.

[1:08:38]

JD: So you have remained in touch with the OSU community and been active. Any thoughts about the current direction of the university or any advice you'd like to offer to the powers that be and the direction that the university is going or should go?

GB: You know, I...I would obviously want the university to stay true to its mission. Which is a land grant university. Look at the numbers and the metrics for yourselves. Look at the number of research scholars that come into Oregon State University. Look at the emerging technologies. A new form of a nuclear reactor, small nuclear reactor, nano technology, what's going on in veterinary science, you got forestry, you got biochemistry, you have - bring the ethnic studies department back as a single department, please. What I really want to say is this: the current president, Ed Ray, number one is one of the smartest people that I've ever met, and you know I'm just a peon, so to speak, but I've met a lot of smart people and a lot of people from bottom to top. Ed is top-class smart. From 2004 through 2008, 2009, when the economy was tanking, Oregon State as a university had reserved monies. You look at University of Oregon and the other Oregon universities; they wish they had Ed Ray. He's an economist, he's smart; he knew how to save money. It was a struggle, because some departments and schools got folded on top of each other, people were concerned about their tenure. Some professors that I know, I think people were concerned about their ability to offer quality services or education to kids. But the fact of the matter, fiscally, Oregon State University is very solid. I think that that's directly a result of Ed Ray's leadership. So my advice to you is keep this man as long as he is willing to stay.

What do I want to see the university do in the future? Produce emerging world leaders. I think that's really the most important thing. And you can do that through technology, but you can also do that through the Department of Ed., the School of Human Health and Services, I guess that's it. I mean I could go on and on, but...

[1:12:02]

JD: Well, I will give you this opportunity to give any final thoughts you have. I have no more questions for you.

GB: Go Beavs! And if you are a parent, whether you're a parent of color or not, send your child to Oregon State University. It's a land grant university, it's one of the best schools in the state of Oregon. So if you were to do that, and take - if I were to give any advice, that would be the advice that I would give. Send your kid to OSU. Not those other schools. Particularly the one that's down the road. Okay? There's no quacks around here, sorry [laughs].

[1:12:53]

