



Charlie White Oral History Interview, May 18, 2011

Title

“A Groundbreaking Leader on a Legendary Team”

Date

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Location

Salbasgeon Suites, Corvallis, Oregon.

Summary

In the interview, White describes growing up in Detroit during the 1950s; joining the military and playing basketball overseas; and his journey from junior college in southern California to enrollment at Oregon State University.

The primary focus of the session is White's memories of life as an African American student-athlete at OSU in the mid-1960s. He discusses the constraints faced by African American basketball players during that time period, his interactions with Slats Gill and Paul Valenti, and a summer job that he held working in the forest near Cottage Grove. He likewise notes the make-up of OSU's basketball team during his first year on the squad, living accommodations and social life for black students in Corvallis, and his experiences with local police and fraternities.

White then provides an overview of his career following his graduation from OSU, with particular emphasis placed on his work at the Crown-Zellerbach manufacturing facility in Antioch, California, where he was tasked with helping to integrate the company's workforce.

As the interview nears its end, White discusses his leadership style as a team captain at OSU, and continues his description of jobs that he held in later years. The session concludes with White's reflections on his life-long love of basketball.

Interviewee

Charlie White

Interviewers

Dwaine Plaza, Natalia Fernandez

Website

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

Transcript

***Note: Interview recorded to audio only.**

Dwaine Plaza: We are lucky enough to be here this morning to interview Charlie White and it's May 18, 2011. Mr. White thank you so much for agreeing to do this. I'm going to start off with just asking you to tell us your earliest recollections, where you were born, what year, and where you grew up.

Charlie White: I was born in Detroit, Michigan in April [static]. I was the youngest of nine children. I had four brothers and four sisters, all older of course. There are two of us left – myself and my brother next to me. Typical childhood - we were poor but as Norm said last night, we didn't know we were poor - I never starved, I always had food, always had a roof over our head, winter clothes and the whole thing. And the old saying "cardboard in shoe" – we had a few of those. It was just a typical childhood in those days.

DP: What kinds of things do you remember doing as a child? Playing games? Hanging out?

CW: Playing sports. Playing sports. My brother next to me, I kind of followed in his footsteps, he played basketball and he played in high school. He didn't go to college but he played in high school. But I used to watch his games and we'd hit the playgrounds on the weekends; Saturday morning at the break of dawn. We were out in the alleys and on the playgrounds playing basketball – it was more like a religion. We played all kinds of sports. And contrary to popular belief there were some pretty good hockey players in my neighborhood – being wintertime we played hockey and we played tennis and all that, but basketball just became the sport. Basketball and football and we had some good baseball players. But basketball became the game of choice. I played YMCA, Jewish Community Center, but also one thing I did when I was 10 years old, 9-10 years old, I used to swim for the YMCA, and I wasn't too bad. But I transferred closer to a place near my home, and everybody left the YMCA, the coach left and everybody followed him. And we used to swim against the cross town teams from the country clubs and all that and we did pretty good against those guys – oh yeah. So swimming was big to me, for about three-four years, from about 9-13. I was still playing basketball, but in the summer I did swimming and in the evening I played ball. But that's basically what we did.

DP: What do you recall growing up in Detroit around the racialization of Detroit? You said you swam against the kids in the country club? Did they have any kind of, you know, feeling toward you?

CW: Well they did, but I mean nothing was said. You now they had that superior feeling that they were better because they had the much better facilities. We had decent facilities but they had the country clubs and the whole thing. But that feeling was there and it was always there - that we wanted to win. I loved Detroit but it was polarized. I mean most of the blacks lived in about three of four different areas and the Italians lived here and the Jewish people lived there and the Polish people lived in a little place called Hamtramack and great athletes came out of Hamtramack. But we played against each other throughout the city. But it was mostly black schools against black schools, there was only one, that I can remember, one school at that time that had mixed athletic teams and that was Cass Tech, which was one of the top schools in the city.

DP: Roughly what year are you talking?

CW: I'm talking mid '50s

DP: So your high school, as I'm hearing you say, was not desegregated?

CW: No, well I went to Cass Tech to begin with but I didn't stay there, I ended up back at my neighborhood school. Yeah, the neighborhood school that I played the most basketball at was segregated. And that was pretty much it. I did a lot of odd jobs growing up as a kid to generate income - I learned this from all my brothers and sisters who all worked and went to school and graduated. They all graduated from high school; none went to college; I was the only one. But I worked at, you know, cutting lawns, washing windows, you know, whatever. And then I got a job with a large grocery chain, Kroger's. And I started working in the meat department, just kind of cleaning up and everything, and I ended up getting a permanent job as a stock boy – and, you know, doing okay. Detroit...it was rough in the neighborhoods. I mean you kind of had to establish yourself, but I decided in 1958 that I had seen enough and a friend of mine and I decided to say "let's

go see the world and join the military." We could have gone in for two years and gone to the Far East but I said "no, let's go in for three and go to Europe" so we could see a few more places and that's what happened.

DP: You were about 18? 17-18? 19?

CW: 20, almost 20, 19. And I played a lot of basketball when I was there.

DP: In the military – can you talk a little bit about that for us?

CW: Well, we came in, I went into Fort Knox, a little bit right outside Louisville. They had a camp team and I went out for it, in order to make that team you had to stay in the states and I traveled around and I said "Nah, I don't want to stay here, I want to go to Europe," so I went to Europe and got on the team there. We played – we had like 50 games schedules and we had tournaments .

DP: That's a serious league...I didn't realize that.

CW: And then I played a lot of games and enjoyed myself. We went all over, Berlin, all over Germany.

DP: And at that time that military was desegregated.

CW: Oh Yeah.

DP: So you were actually playing with white teammates.

CW: But there was several racial issues in the military.

DP: Can you talk about those?

[0:07:00]

CW: The majority of MPs, Military Police, were white and from the South, and they harassed us consistently. Wherever we would be out, there was one African guy named Bobby something or other and he had a club, a very nice popular club, and we would go down there, and once or twice a month the MPs would come down there and raid the club – pull everybody out and handcuff you. Our team used to go down there – this was the track team at this time and we had white kids on the track team and they would tell them to go home which they wouldn't do. They would stay with us and they would take us to jail and lock up. But we'd get out the next couple hours because we'd call our colonel and blah, blah, blah. You know, it was just harassment and it just continued.

DP: What else were some of your experiences in Germany? What position did you have in the military then? 'Cause it wasn't just fully athlete – you had a regular job.

CW: I was in the Army, the infantry, but I didn't spend a lot of time doing that, I spent what they call TDY, which is temporary duty and I would play sports. I also was on the track team.

DP: I didn't know they even had that.

CW: I high jumped and triple jumped and broad jumped. But I did that to pretty to much keep from doing my everyday duties – guard duties, kitchen patrol, you know those sorts of things.

DP: So did someone recognize you in the military as being a potential athlete? Or eventually college? Talk to me about how that came about.

CW: It was really funny. We were in the gym one day and I was just shooting around and this white kid from southern California, he was on our team - Jones, Dick Jones - he came to the gym and he asked me "what are you going do?" - it was getting close to my time to come back to the states – and he said "what are you going do when you get out of the military?" I said, "I really hadn't thought much about it." And he said, "You ought to go out to California and go to junior college, junior college is free, and then maybe you can get a scholarship to a four year school." And I thought he was

joking so I threw the ball at him and I told him to "get out of here" and I chased him out of the gym. Well guess what happened? I did just that. I got shipped to California from Germany, got out of the Army, went to junior college, then came up to Oregon State. Now the thing that I noticed when I got here to California, I started seeing names in the paper from some other junior colleges in southern California of guys I knew from Detroit. So there was a lot of young kids who left Detroit and came out to California and went to junior college.

DP: What was that all about do you think because we heard a very similar thing from Norm because he said that a lot of guys from his neighborhood in Washington ended up in California. What was maybe going on back then?

[0:10:02]

CW: Well, for one thing, the junior colleges back there were not free.

DP: Weren't free in the East Coast.

CW: They were free in California, and if you were 21 you could establish residency and you didn't have to pay out of state fees. So you could go to junior college free. And these coaches would help you get an odd job here and there where you could work and then you eventually got a scholarship to a four year school. So a lot of kids came out, and plus, you know, who wouldn't want to come to California from Detroit? You know, it's snow this high, freezing, and there's a lot of different things going on, guys were getting in trouble - friends, relatives, you know, were in that mix that you see every day. When I was about 17, you had to be 18 to go into the pool halls, but everybody forged some kind of paper, and I used to hang around in the pool hall and see a lot of stuff going on. So you wanted to get away from that mainly.

DP: More of a future.

CW: Yeah, just get out of that mix for a while. And that was, you know, guys started coming. And once a couple guys came, a lot of guys started coming and like I said I saw guys names down in L.A. in different places from Detroit. So I said, yeah, it was the best thing for me to do. But anyway that's what I did, and after that I came up to Oregon State.

[0:11:25]

DP: I'm gonna come back to that piece. So you're playing in junior college and someone identifies you and says – who was that?

CW: You know Paul and I were talking about that. I don't recall who it was but I think it was this guy that played with Paul; his name is Doug and I don't remember his last name. As a matter of fact, the last time I heard I think he was in pretty poor health. But he and Paul played together and they were good friends. And I think he might have seen me play in some tournament. He lived in the general area and he called Paul and told him about me. But one thing that happened, the year before I came here, Slats Gill came down to recruit me. As a matter of fact he came to my house in the Seaside/ Monterey area and I talked with him, you know, and I didn't feel good – just didn't feel warm and fuzzy I guess, and then a couple other coaches told me some stories about him – that I probably wouldn't get to play much, sitting on the bench and that sort of thing. And I said well that's not a good sign so I just didn't come here. And then the next year when Paul came down and we sat down and talked, like I said, "I just felt it" you know, how you feel something. Like I said, when we talked about me graduating I told him I needed probably more than two years and, he said, "well I can't give you that in writing but I promise you that you will graduate" – anything over the two that I would need to graduate, I would graduate. And I felt that when I came up here, he focused on education right away as opposed to just basketball, and laid out what I needed to do and that's when I started taking classes and got through it.

[0:13:20]

DP: Can we come back to your situation with Slats Gill? At the time the team was segregated – there was no African Americans on the team at that point. But in southern California there actually were teams that were very mixed.

CW: Oh sure, sure.

DP: I wonder how, in your opinion, how do you think that he sort of rationalized that he wasn't going to allow his team necessarily to have an edge, because at that point, I think it was really recognized that having African American players on the team was really an edge because they brought a different game to the game that – Norm was actually talking to us about the game that he was forced to play. And that is a very kind of contrived.

CW: Sure, controlled.

DP: Controlled, it was a completely different game.

CW: Running plays, setting picks - where on a playground, it was you know one on one.

DP: You just got it done.

CW: Behind the back, through the legs, or whatever, you know we were alley-ooping then before it came into college. You know I really don't know – I try to figure this out, because every year Slats had some good teams.

DP: He did, he went to the Final Four.

CW: But every year, almost every year – with the two years specifically that just broke his heart, I know Bill Russell was at USF and they always played in the regionals on the west coast. And the west coast teams used to beat them every time and all of them always had players of color.

DP: Right.

CW: And I thought to myself, you know, I don't know. And you know the thing that was mentioned – the quota , "you start one black player at home, two on the road." But Bill Russell coined the phrase "but five when you're behind."

[laughter]

CW: You know, Bill Russell started that. Now, but I heard another explanation that "you start one at home and two on the road because you gotta have somebody to room together."

DP: Oh, interesting, interesting.

CW: You see that's just what I was told, at that time.

DP: Yeah, sure.

CW: And also at that time, in some parts of the country, you couldn't find lodging for black players. So, you know, if you had to go play in some areas, it was kind of like the old Jackie Robinson playing baseball – the team stayed here and he found a place to stay in the neighborhood, at someone's home, you know, like that. So I know some coaches had mentioned that and they were aware of that and some felt uncomfortable with it.

[0:16:00]

DP: Right.

CW: But I just don't know; I think he might have wanted to pull the trigger but I don't know, he just didn't. Plus there weren't a lot of kids up here for him to recruit and most of these kids were local if you go back and look. Now I think at that time Washington probably had some black players.

DP: Washington had.

CW: African Americans.

DP: Eastern Europeans.

CW: Yeah.

DP: That's what I've always wondered when I was doing the research, is to see, you now, you saw how California clearly had lots. And you saw Seattle had a few.

CW: University of Oregon - they played them all the time.

DP: This guy was kind of holding the line and I was comparing to Rupp when I was trying to understand what was going on – what was this guy trying to do?

CW: Well, that was the feeling pretty much amongst those, you know, athletes in California and different places, that he didn't really want any African American players really. So, I guess nobody wanted to be the first with him because there was not that good feeling about whether or not you'd be...

DP: You could play.

CW: Treated fairly – yeah.

[0:17:02]

DP: And so when Paul Valenti came down, did he ever tell you that "hey, I'm gonna be the coach next, 'cause I know I'm in line."

CW: No, he was actually the coach when he came down – he had already gotten the job.

DP: Oh, I see, okay.

CW: And I had read about it in the paper, but I didn't think much of it really then. He called me, contacted me, and then he came to talk to me.

DP: Right, so let's carry the story on to just talk about you now arriving at campus and what were some of your earliest recollections - for you, arriving on campus, seeing the place, what was that like?

CW: Well, one thing that was really funny, there was this female named "Charlie White."

DP: Named "Charlie White?"

CW: Yes.

DP: Okay, alright.

CW: They put her in one of the men's dorms [laughing] – they assigned her to one of the men's dorms. And I got to meet her later - I met her at a party.

DP: Really? Okay.

CW: Yes, so, but anyway, when I first got here, they had us doing jobs in Cottage Grove – logging.

DP: In the off season?

CW: Yeah but I came at the beginning of summer, so I went right into work. So Cottage Grove is down toward Eugene – I think it's east of Eugene, out in the wilderness.

DP: Okay.

CW: So they took me down there, and I mean, this was not a good situation. The first day I was there, they took me in the evening, I said, "why are you bringing me in at night?" So the next morning I come down and everybody's staring and then the next day someone told me that it'd be better if I didn't come out at night. So I called Paul and said...

DP: This ain't working.

CW: I'm leaving, you know, now. So, they sent somebody and got me and I moved into Eugene – there was some guys in Eugene that – there was four of them, three or four guys in this apartment and it was mixed – a couple of white students. And they were athletes and they brought me down there. And every morning what we would do, we would catch a bus from Eugene to Cottage Grove and work and then we'd come back to Eugene.

DP: So you still kept the job?

CW: Yeah, but I didn't live in Cottage Grove. Yeah, because I told them I wasn't staying - they need to get me out of there now. So I came to Eugene and then I worked that summer in the woods, which was good. We made a lot of money – didn't pay a whole lot, but at that time it was a lot of money. And we didn't have any place to spend it, so all summer long we worked, stuck checks in the bank, so when school started we had a little money.

DP: That was common practice, I think.

CW: Yeah. Oh yeah, we could work. Plus we got a stipend – yeah, a monthly stipend. So then, started the season, and like I said, we had a, we didn't have a very good team, we were 7-7 in the league. But actually it wasn't the Pac-8, everybody says the Pac-8, it was the AAWU, which is the Athletic Association of Western Universities.

DP: Oh, okay, uh-huh.

CW: But it was the original 8 schools, the two in Oregon, two in Washington, two in southern California, two in northern Cal - the name Pac-8 came on later. Anyway, we were 7-7 conference and 14-10 overall or something like that. You know we weren't really thinking anything big the next year, we just wanted to be competitive. And I had played small forward my first year here, but then they put me at guard the next year. The only new guy that came in, really, that really helped us, was Harry, the only new guy, Harry Gunner. He was the only new guy – African American who came in, oh and Loy Peterson. They came in and you know we were like a good seven, eight men deep.

DP: What year was that when they came in 'cause we didn't find them.

CW: In '65, but Loy was not African American – Harry Gunner was.

DP: Harry Gunner was, okay, alright, Natalia did that part of the research. So tell me about that reception that you received, that you feel that you received from the student body in that first year and the next year.

CW: Well, like I said, you know, I'm oblivious to a lot, and I'd been a lot of places.

DP: You were older.

CW: Yeah. And so I mean, sure you got some looks, and you know [laughing], I just kept going. I was here to do what I was here to do. One incident was, one of the players, a freshman player, who I knew, not very well, but I knew who he was. We were on campus and he was with his girlfriend and he stopped and he introduced me and she made a comment, "oh you're the one in my girlfriend's class" And I said, "the one what?" [laughing] And she was totally embarrassed, and couldn't even answer. And so I just said, "I'll see you guys later." But it was kind of funny [laughing]. But like I said, most of the kids up here had never been around any black people, let alone go to school with them, because I had run into that in the Army, I had guys in the Army, who lived, mostly southerners, who had seen, they told me, they'd seen black people from a distance, but you know, didn't know - and that was that. They were from the South – living in those little small towns, Mississippi, and places like that.

DP: Right.

CW: But I didn't, I didn't feel anything in classes.

DP: Professors treat you?

CW: Yeah, professors – I didn't feel anything, teachers or students in the classes. You know, there was an occasional yell out of somebody's car, you know.

DP: And finding accommodation in Corvallis? And recreation in Corvallis? What was that like for you?

[0:23:21]

CW: Well, the main thing is, the house that I moved into when I came out here was already occupied by African Americans, so I didn't have a problem with that.

DP: And, how did you find that? Did the coach find that for you, that accommodation?

CW: I think so. But they were football players and one was a non-athlete, Walter Lothridge, he's a pharmacist. Though when we were in a group we always told everybody he played tennis. He was about 5'4" / 5'5" and he was a little overweight, you know, but he was one of my best friends, he lives near me in California now. They were there, and then we moved to another house, on I think it was 17th, near the coliseum. And we never had a problem, we went over there and the lady was nice, and the rent was seventy bucks a month and there were four of us, so that's \$17.50 a month, plus the oil – they had an oil furnace in there. But you know it was nice. I never had any problem finding a place – those were the only two places. Well, I lived in another apartment but I can't remember the street. But yeah, I never had any problems with that.

DP: Now, in terms of, you mentioned, going to parties, 'cause I remember you said you met up with Charlie Brown, sorry, Charlie White, which is the female at a party. Did you go to parties that were integrated? When you had a social life, what was that like?

CW: Well, all the time that I was here, not one white person ever invited me to a party that I can recall. Now I got invited to people's homes to have a drink, or for dinner, to study, or something like that, but not ever once, teammates or anyone, ever invited me to a party. But, we gave a party every weekend.

DP: Okay, at your place.

CW: Yes, on 9th street - 9th street A-GoGo, that's what we called it. So obviously all of the women at our parties were white, well, with the exception of two or three, because there was – Carol Smith, and there were three or four African American women – one of them lived here in Corvallis and one from L.A. and the other one I forget – Sacramento or somewhere. But the majority of the women were white women. And Loy Peterson, who's white, he came to one or two of my parties early on, and everybody knew him and he didn't any angst. He was from Los Angeles, so he had been around blacks before and played ball, and he didn't have a problem with that. And Charlie White – I guess she found out we were having a party and she came to one of our parties and introduced herself – I thought she was kidding. And we talked – she was from somewhere in Oregon. And that was pretty much how our parties were, and like I said we gave a party every weekend. And we would even host other African American athletes when they came to town, if they were staying overnight and we would say, "hey we're having a party, why don't you guys come over?"

DP: And they would?

CW: They didn't have any place to go either – like Norm said. They came over and we became friendly with all the athletes in the conference up and down the coast. 'Cause when they came up here.

DP: You'd host them?

CW: When we went to Washington, you know, they'd host us. And we had a friend from Seattle, went to school at OSU, and she would always have us over to her place and stuff.

DP: Sure, sure.

CW: And we'd go to Portland every now and then.

DP: What was the relationship like with the police, when you guys had these parties? Was there any kind of...?

CW: I don't remember the police ever coming to our house.

DP: Well, that's good.

CW: I really don't, I don't remember.

DP: And what about fraternities, that's always been a sore point for a lot of students, dealing with fraternities.

CW: I think I got a feel from a couple of fraternities, who they were, I don't recall – but that wasn't anything I wanted to do on any campus. I'd been in the military and I'd lived in the barracks and all that stuff with guys and I didn't want – I had my fill of that – I didn't want to do any more of that.

DP: What I was thinking was more the tension that occurs, because fraternity boys 'cause I was thinking that they were down on athletes in all of the negative ways.

CW: I think I got feeled out by a couple of people - "nah, not interested."

DP: Okay. Can you now talk a little bit about going through school – you said your classes went well – what did you end up as a major and where did you do on from there?

CW: Well I majored in Business Administration with a concentration in Personnel – Industrial Relations – I started here in September of '64 and I graduated in December of '67. [coughing]

DP: Have some water, that's what it's there for.

CW: So I left here in '67, so I got a job with a company called Crown-Zellerbach which was one of the largest paper manufacturing firms on the West Coast. And I got that through one of the alumni – a guy who had played here with Paul and he worked for Crown-Zellerbach. Now at that time, affirmative action was big, really big. Any black college graduate could find a job, whether you were qualified or not, and sad to say some were not qualified. And I got a job with Crown-Zellerbach and my specific job was to integrate the workforce.

[0:29:45]

DP: At this company.

CW: This was in Antioch, California which was about as racist as you could get.

DP: Really?

CW: Antioch is right next to Pittsburg, California. Now those two places - 99.9% of all African Americans in that area live in Pittsburg and all the whites live in Antioch.

DP: I didn't know that, okay.

CW: Now when I went down looking for a place to stay, people would open the door and slam it in my face or some wouldn't open the door. So I went into Pittsburg and I found this apartment house over there which was not a very nice place. But anyway, I got hired to integrate the workforce and I did a pretty good job, it was really interesting. They wanted African American and they wanted more women. Now this is a manufacturing facility. Now they had women working already there, but of course the women could only do certain jobs.

DP: Secretaries

CW: Well working in the factory – packing, you know, they couldn't work in shipping. They had one female lift truck driver, maybe two. They couldn't operate the machines, which paid the most money. So they were pretty much the lower level, the packing of boxes and that sort of thing. That's the way it was at that time with them also. So you now I would hire people, I would go out in the neighborhood to Pittsburg where African Americans were and Hispanics, they didn't have a lot of Hispanics working there either - so I'd go out and get about 10 or 12 people to come in. And at that time they had people do all this different testing - MMPI – that took forever. And all of that crap. So anyway, we got rid of that at

some point. So I had 12-15 people in the room taking this test, so I'd help them with it 'cause I was trying to get people in there. And I started doing that and I tell you the people who worked at that facility, they hated every bit of it.

DP: Yeah.

[0:32:00]

CW: Now there were probably 10 or 12 black people working there and they had been working there for quite some time – I mean they weren't new people – I don't think they had a black person hired probably in the last 10 years or so, but I started filling them up with African American, Hispanics, and females. And, oh, they hated it. The established people there, I'd bring the people out to the department, to the supervisor, and the workers would just stare at me. I got some bad mail in my inbox, you know, about affirmative action, and one guy was going to put a George Wallace bumper sticker on my car and I stopped him.

DP: It was bad. I wanna come back though to one part of your story – you actually got elected – you got an award here at OSU – a leadership award? I think it was 65-66? How did that feel?

CW: That felt great.

DP: Tell me what happened?

CW: Well, Paul made me the captain.

DP: What was that like?

CW: It surprised me. And I didn't feel any angst from the team. I wasn't a yeller and a screamer anyway. Not like Paul, Paul was a yeller – but I would tell guys, we would have a dialogue: "I'm gonna do this, why don't you do that?" And they'd come down here "why don't we make sure we do this?" That was it – it wasn't like "I'm this and you're that" – It was, "We need to stop these guys and this is what we need to do." And Paul used to always say, in the huddle, "This, this, and this" but when we broke the huddle he would say, "but you gotta play the situation" 'cause it may not come that way so you gotta be waiting for anything – and that's what I'd say too. They may not go this way, they may come this way, or do this. And yeah, I felt good about that. I really did, yeah, and he felt good about it too – Paul and I had a special relationship.

DP: That was making you the captain, but I am more interested in reflecting on the student leadership award that you won.

[0:34:28]

CW: No, the leadership I think was just with the team.

DP: Let's come back then to the company at Antioch - so was that your job you continued on with?

CW: I did that for a while and then I wanted to learn some more about the business so I took a production job. Well, let me go back a little bit.

DP: Yeah, sure.

CW: When I was bringing these people in to go to work, they had what they called a probationary period, for the new employees, which was only thirty days, which was not a long time. But they were terminating these people almost as fast as I was hiring them – after two or three weeks – almost thirty days up and they'd just say "well, they just can't do the job" Now I said, "well, wait a minute, something's wrong" So, a Hispanic gentleman named Leo Mijares – he and I used to talk and he came to me and said "they're not giving these guys a chance – they're not training them right. After thirty days these people can't do the job, they are kicking them out, so we gotta do something" Well he was a union steward also. So I said, "I'll tell you what we're gonna do" - we sat down and we made up a form that had to be filled out every week, by the supervisor, what was taught – and this person, male or female whatever, had to agree. So at the end of the

week we would sit down with the union steward, myself, and the department supervisor, not the guy who trained them, the department supervisor, and go over that. And if that guy said, "nobody told me this, nobody told me that," then we could extend his probationary period and then we made sure that they got the correct training. We did that on a weekly basis – took a long time, but you know we did it. Then we kept starting to be able to retain people, 'cause you know hiring people costs money and it's a lot of work and you send them for physicals and then they kick them out. So we did that. But then I wanted to expand and I went out in production – worked production for a while, shift work, production payroll, more money, you know I was learning a little more about the business. And then the safety manager left and I decided I had enough of shift work, so I decided to go back in the personnel office, since I got my pay scale up and I went back in as a safety manager. I worked there for eight years during all this time. Then I had an opportunity to go with a large construction firm called LoneStar Industries which covered five states: California, Washington, Oregon, Utah, and Hawaii. And I was regional safety manager which was a big job – they give you a car and you get to travel a lot, so I took that job.

[0:37:50]

DP: Did you have a family at that point?

CW: Yeah, I had one son. I had a son in 1970.

DP: Did you ever have any aspirations of becoming a coach? Because, I mean, after you leave basketball, a lot of guys kind of may have that aspiration, saying "Hey, you know, I can probably do some of this stuff."

CW: Well you know, I helped coach the freshman here a little bit, you know, right after I stopped playing – and I guess the reason I didn't stay in coaching, I wanted to get back to California. So I thought the quickest way for me to get back was to pursue my degree. But otherwise, I thought about it afterwards, but not right afterwards, but maybe ten years afterwards. But I was very disappointed when Paul quit.

DP: 1970?

CW: Yeah, he only had the head coaching job for six or seven years – he just gave it up and I was really disappointed.

DP: Did you ever talk to him about why that was? 'Cause we didn't.

CW: Well, I don't know that he'd want that.

DP: Yeah, sure. Now, in terms of your connection back to Detroit, it sounds like that got severed a long time ago and that you never really had the aspiration to go back.

CW: Not to live, no.

DP: You kept your family back there.

CW: But what happened is, five or six of my nieces and nephews came to California, but only one stayed. They all came and went to Los Angeles and stayed a while, but one stayed and still is in California, but the rest of them all went back to Detroit. Other than my nephew here, they're all in Detroit.

DP: So do you have any regular visits?

CW: Yeah, I do. I went back last year twice. This year, just recently, when I was in Las Vegas, my nephew graduated. So a bunch of them came out, so we had a nice little family reunion. I'm going back in August, one of my nieces is getting married, so I'm gonna go back for that. But I'm gonna be out of there before winter [laughing]. Yeah, I went back last September and stayed two weeks.

[0:40:00]

DP: Carry on the story a little bit further: you finished working eight years or so you said in Antioch, then you went on to the supervisor position, personnel.

CW: Regional Safety Manager.

DP: What else did you do after that?

CW: Well I worked at that for a while and then that company got bought up and they began to downsize so I went to work for a shopping mall, I was the safety director up near San Francisco. And I worked there for quite a few years and then I got into contract security – ran a contract security firm in Oakland. I was the branch manager there for twelve years. And then just before I was thinking about retiring, I went to work for Bayer.

DP: Bayer, the aspirin company?

CW: Yes. And I worked for them in Berkeley for two years and then I finally retired in 2004.

DP: Okay, nice.

CW: But then I got bored. So 2006 rolls around and I'm at home and I look across the street and I see these kids playing basketball. It was a school for mentally challenged youth. So I went over there, you know playing basketball, seeing what they were doing. The people there were nice, they talked me into driving the school bus, because these guys were pretty hard and they had a lot of female drivers – these guys they were tough on the women. So I did that for 3 ½ years and I enjoyed it. Then finally I just gave it up.

DP: Now coming back to playing ball though, or not just playing ball, but after you left Oregon State, did you ever sort of just play or keep working or any of those kinds of things with ball?

CW: I played for, not AAU, but I played for different teams all over northern California - it was quite a network of teams. Sacramento used to have the March of Dimes tournament, Lake Tahoe had a tournament, they had a little tournament down below Monterey in a little town called Gonzalez, which was a 'burb but it was a real popular tournament, lot of ex-college players, used see them all the time down there. You know, somebody would call me in the middle of the week and say "hey, we got a game up in Sacramento" and I'd jump in my car after work, and Sacramento is a 1 ½ away and I'd play a whole lot. I don't remember when I stopped playing organized, but I played a lot.

DP: Must be hard not to play.

CW: Yeah, it was just something I did. So, you know, wherever I went, one of the first things I did was find out where the guys played ball and I went over there. When I got out of college, we had a company team down at Crown-Zellerbach. There were a lot of large companies out there, DuPont, Dow, US Steel, something like that, they all had teams. And we had a good league. We played in the league and it was good; we had a lot of fun doing that. Now, we were in Antioch and those teams were mostly integrated and we never had any incidents playing ball but, you know, trying to do something in town initially took a lot before they loosened up. And I got to meet several policemen down there and I used to hang out at the cop bar so everything was cool you know. 'Cause I had hired some of these policemen's kids where I worked for the summers.

DP: And they appreciated it - those were good jobs.

CW: Oh yeah - they worked and so, you know, it was pretty good.

[0:44:04]

DP: Now looking back on leaving Oregon State, did you ever have any aspirations of going on to play professional ball?

CW: Well, I did, I wanted to play, but I didn't get drafted, and I didn't want to go take a chance and not make it when I hadn't finished school yet. Now had they had the teams that they have now all over the world in Europe and where else you want – they have teams everywhere.

DP: They sure do.

CW: I probably could have gotten a job somewhere because my nephew went down and played in Argentina for thirteen years, so I could have probably, but that wasn't available to us at the time I came out. And I probably would have jumped at that if I knew that I could go play for a couple of years in Europe or somewhere – make a little money and I could come back and finish.

DP: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but you really put school as a priority, which is a great thing.

[0:45:00]

DP: Natalia, are there any other questions you want to ask at this point, 'cause I think we're sort of at the end of what I had to ask. Anything that you can think of from the archives perspective that you wanted to ask?

Natalia Fernández: Well you mentioned Harry Gunner, so when he came on the team, was that the '65-66 season? Did that change the dynamic at all? Was that nice to have another?

CW: Oh yeah it was nice, plus he helped us a lot, we needed his size and strength, and you know, he didn't start, but he played a lot. He was our sixth man and he was the first guy off the bench, usually. And now, it's really funny, Harry and I didn't always room together – Loy and I used to room together most of the time, but you'd always find the three of us in one of our bedrooms because we were close. Loy used to hang with us. Loy hated this place; he hated every bit of it, coming from Los Angeles. And he was one of those players that was a playground player 'cause he'd been playing with black kids all his life. He had more moves, I'm telling you, then a can of worms as they say and he could play. But he and Paul, they never got together for his three years here. Now, he went on to play professional – he played in Chicago. And he married a girl from Madras, Oregon, but he hated Oregon when he came up here. And he and Paul – they just never got along - never. I mean they would glare at each other in practice and on the bench. And Loy was a hell of a player.

DP: Now in the movie *Glory Road* there was actually eventually some tension that occurred between the players, just about black and white issues – they saw the black players as taking their spots. Did you ever get any kind of feeling like that?

CW: No.

DP: Just so few of you anyway.

CW: Well, first there was just me, no I never did. I've never felt that anywhere and nobody definitely never said it to me.

DP: Anything else? Well I want to thank you very, very much – it was a great interview and it lasted exactly, almost forty-five minutes of great stuff, so we really appreciate that.

[0:47:35]

CW: I gotta go pick up Paul; he's probably chopping at the bit.

DP: Well, I'm really sorry about the other one going a little bit long.

CW: Yeah, okay.

DP: Are you gonna be seeing Paul? Can I give you his plaque?

CW: Sure.

[0:48:07]