

The City of Santa Monica  
Beach Stories Initiative  
Interview Transcripts

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Interview: Nat Trives  
Interviewer: Alison Rose Jefferson  
Interview Date: July 10, 2009  
Interview Location: Ken Edwards Center, Santa Monica, California

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Timecode: Reel #1 [00:00:40:24]

AJ:

So today is Wednesday, July 10<sup>th</sup> 2009 and I am interviewing Nat Trives for the Santa Monica Beach Stories program that the City of Santa Monica is sponsoring. I am Alison Jefferson, the interviewer, and Michael Possert is our videographer. And Nat, give us your full name, first off.

NT:

I'm Nathaniel, no middle name, Trives and, uh, st-strange name. Um, uh, I think I chatted with you earlier about my name is spelled T-R-I-V-E-S, last name. Now, people will say, how do you get Travis outta that. And I said, well, I'm a genealogist. I like to know where I came from. And my great-great grandfather, Sidney Travis, T-R-A-V-I-S, [indistinct] born in Carey County, Alabama.

[00:01:54:04] So I'm a proud man, so I carry on the, the oral, uh, uh, pronunciation of my name, even though it's not spelled that way. I get a little humor out of it.

AJ:

And when and where were you born?

NT:

Born in 1934 in Birmingham, Alabama. The red clay streets of Birmingham, Alabama.

AJ:

And how long did you live there?

NT:

I left Birmingham, left with my Mom, a young, young lady, in 1937. And I went to, uh, Richmond, Indiana, where we, we, we had an apartment and then we had a home. And then we had another home. And then we moved from Richmond, Indiana to a little town in Ohio called Glendale, Ohio. Before we got to Glendale, we lived in another place in Ohio called Lincoln, Lincoln – no, Valley, the Valley Homes. [00:02:54:21] In the Valley Homes in the 40s, if you recall, we have a lotta projects in the United States called, uh, community housing. And we lived in one of those projects. It was wonderful, two bedrooms. Uh, they have condominiums like it now. You go to a double level. I can remember having my own bedroom. [indistinct] playgrounds, all that good stuff.

AJ:

Do you feel like you grew up in those places?

NT:

You know, uh, uh, life is a tapestry of events that, that, that you have indelible memories of that. Uh, I can tell you about other things than Alabama that you'd say, three years old, can you, can you guess [indistinct] but I think what adds to that is I, I – every summer, my parents made sure that I was back with grams and go back to grandma and stay with papa, and so on and so forth, for the

summer. So I have longer roots in Alabama than the record would show, because I, I, I was doing that until 1949. [00:04:01:22] But I also in Indiana, I, I lived in, in, in, in a town that was Quaker Town. Irlam College, a very famous, uh, Quaker College, University, is in Richmond. And, um, I learned about Quaker values versus the timing of me being there being an African-American in, in the Midwest, where things were tough. But the Quakers didn't feel the same way and they had Friends House, so on and so forth. When I went to Ohio, as I shared with you, I lived in a, in a planned urban development, uh, Glendale, Ohio, it's on the National Registry. It was the home of Proctor of Proctor & Gamble. A beautiful village. It's still a beautiful village. Had gaslights, the gaslights still work and, uh, I learned there about being in an all-Black elementary school, then going to a very affluent, uh, high school for the town, where [stutters] the people of means and people of modest means all went to school and shared. I played basketball, I played baseball, uh, my most claim to fame in baseball was, uh, uh, a young pitcher, youngest pitcher in the history of the major leagues, uh, went to the Cincinnati Reds. [00:05:25:00] But anyway, he struck out our team and I had a chance to stand there and shaking my [laughs] in my boots while he's throwing the ball. But those are experiences [indistinct] So when I say, where did I, where is my home? Glendale I played basketball, I lettered. Uh, that, that ability took me to Santa Monica, California in 1949.

AJ:

And that's when your family moved here?

NT:

That's right, yes, yes.

AJ:

And they moved to Santa Monica. What was the impetus?

NT:

Well, i-in Glendale, we worked, the, the family worked for the private family, uh.

The War allowed the family--

AJ:

Explain what private family means.

NT:

In terms of domestic work, the peoples worked, uh, butlers, housekeepers, lawn, uh, gardeners, uh, chauffeurs, all those kinda things we called in those days private family work. And my stepdad, uh, was fortunate enough to work for a very, very wealthy family and the primary work was development. And I'm, I'm able to—

[\[00:06:33:05\]](#)

AJ:

Real estate development.

NT:

Yeah, real estate development, thank you. And I'm [indistinct] to say that I came to California on the dream of a man who opened the first mall in this state, the Hawthorne Mall. And that's how my Dad got here. He came out with his boss, and he found a place for us, and he, he, my Dad basically opened his Beverly Hills home. He built a beautiful mansion in Beverly Hills for himself and then

produced this mall. I, I was, I was very fortunate, very fortunate. I had – I left Glendale in a hurry, because I wanted to tell you, I lived in an Antebellum home in Glendale. Three-story brick house. When we moved, we didn't have the thought. We loaded on [indistinct] in a Woodie – this is so funny. We loaded the family up in a Woodie, Ford station wagon, Woodie, and, uh, we left the classic Victorian victrola, you know, the old – you've seen the RCA? We left stuff that, that you look back to be antiques of value. [00:07:40:22] And I – the home itself could've been registered because of it, it's history. We left that because we were coming west to make a new life and we were very, very fortunate.

AJ:

Where did you get your education, after you got to Santa Monica?

NT:

I landed in Santa Monica and I, I started in the Santa Monica public school system and I went to Lincoln Junior High School. There are two junior high schools in Santa Monica. One is on, uh, is Lincoln Junior High, and the other is, is John Adams Junior High. They're now called middle schools. Back in the forties, they were junior highs. And in Santa Monica, Lincoln was the premier junior high, because it was the high, it was the side of town where the wealth was. If I can explain wealth here in this town, north, you look north. If you were in the Palisades, you had more money than the people down in, and, and that's the way it worked. 90049, Bel Air, up a little higher, then we come down, down, down. And so I was lucky. I went to school with people who lived in, in, and earned and received the wealth. [00:08:50:15] They were prominent people.

And that, those, those of, those contacts made in the forties and fifties have, um, stayed with me all my adult life.

AJ:

Where did your family settle when you first came here?

NT:

That's a good story. We, we landed at 2008-1/4 Broadway, which is, is, is diagonally across from where my Church of Lordship is right now, Calvary Baptist Church at 20<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. Um, that actually was a, was a, the border for the school district. I lived on the Lincoln side and the people on the other side lived on the, uh, on the John Adams side. And, uh, it was a very nice, nice little place. We stayed there while we built a home. This is the, this is the culture of my family. We built a brand new house at 2028 21<sup>st</sup>. Street, Santa Monica, which is the corner of Pico and, and s-, and 21<sup>st</sup> Street in Santa Monica. And, and also, it's interesting how things change. There was a, a library at the corner of 21<sup>st</sup> and Pico called the Fairview Library. Today – I was at council last night – and that item was up to put a library in that neighborhood, because they moved that two-, the Fairview Library south to Ocean Park Boulevard. So things come around [indistinct]

[\[00:10:16:28\]](#)

AJ:

Is the house still there?

NT:

The house is still there, of course, of course. It is.

AJ:

But you don't live in that house.

NT:

No, no, no, no, no, no. We, uh, my parents were always thinking of the future. We had, I had six sisters and brothers – or five sisters and brothers. And Mom and Dad would, were hardworking people who invested money and, and were able to – I, I frankly was born and lived a middle-class life. Uh, even though I've always had my own – I had my own bicycle, I had my own, my own – I was an individual. But when you have a lotta kids, that's, that's pretty nice to be able to say that, during the period of time that I came up.

AJ:

And so you graduated from Santa Monica High School in what year?

NT:

1952, class of '52.

AJ:

And then you went on to—

[00:11:15:18]

NT:

I went to Santa Monica College, and I was blessed. Santa Monica College when I was in high school, was located right across the street from Santa Monica High School. At the time that I was grad-, ge-getting ready to go, they were building a brand new college on Pico Boulevard, called Santa Monica College. The college on, across the street from the high school, was called Swinterdale (sp?), because

of all temporary buildings, bungalows, [indistinct] college. Back in those days, the, the school system was a K through 14. The community colleges were part and superintendent of schools, and he was over the president – or he or she – was over the president of the, of the community colleges. And then uh, actually I was involved in, in, in, in government later in life, that changed that. It made community colleges independent of the K through 12 [indistinct]. But anyway, I went to Santa Monica College and the first class, they had a, uh, uh, alpha beta gamma delta class. [00:12:21:24] Alphas first. I was first president of that class at the new campus. And it was fun, and it's fun, because I've always been active, outgoing and, and, uh, so on and so forth, so. I've watched that college – we, we, uh, and our student government, I was associated with the student government, vice president, lost the presidency by one vote. Guess what? And that's a true story. And I was home with the flu. I would've voted for myself. [laughs] But the most significant thing is that at Santa Monica College, or one of the more significant things, they put the clock tower on that campus, which was the logo for many, many, many years. The students did that. We paid for it, we commissioned the ar-, the architect. The choices were a statue of Abraham Lincoln, and the clock tower. The community at that time was a very strong, uh, Republican community. [00:13:18:19] And we had a Republican congressman, Republican se-senators, everybody. And so the – we didn't think it was political, our decision. We thought our decision was futuristic. Time and then we honored the, the war dead with a plaque. So it's cal-, was called the memorial clock,



clock tower. And I was involved in putting that marker on the campus. You know, in some ways have changed, but it's still standing.

AJ:

Then did you continue on with your education, or did you go to work?

NT:

What I did, I met a wonderful lady at Santa Monica College. Her name was Ida. And I couldn't wait to get married. And I in fact did get married. And in, as an adult, as a married person, I went on to school, I went to Cal State LA, got a Bachelor's degree from Cal State LA, um--

AJ:

In?

NT:

Criminal justice. And, um, then went to UCLA, got a Master's degree in public administration. [00:14:23:18] I was always interested in government from a little kid. I, I cried when Franklin Roosevelt died, as a little kid, in 1945. Everybody – you walked down the street and the radios, they're like the televisions of today. People had their radios on and everybody was – and you couldn't miss a lick on the news walkin' down the street, because everybody's sitting on the front porch and they talkin' about the train coming from Georgia, and I cried. I, I drove across the whole state of Kansas to see the state preserved [indistinct] home of Harry Truman. I was in St. Louis and told the wife, let's take a, let's take a trip, I wanna show you somethin'. Bess Truman was still alive at the time and we saw the home of Harry Truman. That's the kinda I am, I love that stuff.

AJ:

Were you in the police department at one point?

[00:15:26:23]

NT:

My job, my married job when I got married, I was working in the post office, and I'll tell ya how that came about. Smart guys – we called ourselves smart at Santa Monica College – it's Christmastime, you work the post office. And so what I did when I worked on my Christmas job in the post office, I learned everything about it. I knew how to, uh, sort all the complicated skeins that the, you saw white-haired guys throwing, throw the mail. I learned how to take care of all the security, uh, registered stuff, uh, I even carried a gun once, because--

AJ:

Here in Santa Monica.

NT:

In Santa Monica. I worked for the post office five years. And then I thought, well, I can't support a family on, on these meager things. I'd also had some interaction with the police. And I never was arrested or anything like that. In fact, I was, I was arrested for a curfew violation. And how I, why I was arrested was because I was in an integrated car. [00:16:25:07] I was the only Black among six kids in, in the car, and, and, and when the cops came, they flashed the light around and they just pointed the, the spotlight on my face and said to the driver, why is he here? And they took us all in. Three kids, three girls, three guys--

AJ:

This is 19--

NT:

1952 thereabouts, yes, yeah, we were, we were, you know. And, and we - the curfew's 10 o'clock. This arrest took place at approximately 10:05. And we were on Franklin Street here in Santa Monica, and it was called Franklin Hill. There used to be a water tower, a, a reservoir up there, on Franklin Hill. And we were taken in. And so my, my, my personality was that that's not right. I'd like to get inside that organization and change it. And, and, and, and I, I took, I applied for the police department and it was really interesting back in those days. I, I, I'm able to take tests and do very well. [00:17:27:02] And I came out and I did my interview in the police department. And one of the questions was, are you going to take Leroy's job? And I said, I don't know that I'm applying to take Leroy's job, I'd love to be chief of police one day. That was in my initial interview in 1958. And Leroy was the only Black policeman on the department. Now you won't believe what I'm about to say next. You're looking at an individual who wrote the first white man a ticket in Santa Monica's district. That's in the fifties! Meaning, as a, as a Black person. Because the Black officers before me to strictly Black neighborhoods, where they did not have any interaction with white feet, white people. [00:18:20:20] In Santa Monica. And so [laughs] I think it was quite an experience. I was quickly elected president of the police union. And, and we got highest pay in the United States, 'cause I know how to do that. I, I know the government, I know, I knew that as a kid, I knew it, you know, I went to as a student, the student body president of Santa Monica High School, we went to

Sacramento and we learned all these things. And I don't forget what I learn. And I tell youngsters now when I talk to them, I worked in the student store Santa Monica High School and we had the responsibility for the books, the purchasing, learning business. As a high school student. And it stayed with me. So it's a beautiful world.

AJ:

And so how long did you work for the police department?

NT:

I was there for 11 years. And the reason I didn't retire is again, I was challenged and I always took my challenges I caught gracefully. The police department was really good to me. I still have friends in that organization. [00:19:21:15] Uh, the theory was, if you entered the police department, you lost all your friends. No. We socially integrated the police department. We had parties at our home with, with police officers who had never been in a Black person's home in their lives, other than to arrest somebody. And, and so it was a wonderful experience. And it, it's dear to me because currently, I, I am a retired police officer. I have all the rights and privileges. I can carry a weapon if I choose and arrest people if I choose, but I don't. But I am a retired police officer. And it, it makes me proud the current police chief has an annual ceremony where he, uh, promotes people for heroism and, and, uh, gives 'em awards and stuff. And I was so honored [indisdtinct] I got him, and he called me and he, he called me out. I didn't know it in advance. He said I would for you to stand and read the code of ethics. But we were part on the Post Commission, when I served there. I was chairman of the

California Police Officers Standards Post Commission for police officers. We, we, we, we created this document that I was reading. And I could hardly read, because I was, the tears were welling up in me. But that's the kinda life I lived, a wonderful life. Carry on.

[00:20:37:04]

AJ:

So when you finished up with the police department, that would have been in the mid--

FF:

[overlaps] I, I left in '69 and I left, again, I say, I left because I wanted, I took my lieutenancies, I was a sergeant and I was the first African American s-, promoted officer in the Santa Monica police department. I was a sergeant. I had – my troops would do anything for me. We had a sanitation worker strike in Santa Monica during Mar-, s-, 1968, the year Martin was killed, Martin Luther King. 21 days. And I'm president of the union, but [stutters] and so there was, there was a lotta contention that the garbage workers had their headquarters in the Miramar Hotel. I would go to the Miramar Hotel and I was being, I was being surveilled and trailed by my own brother officers. [00:21:38:08] I was given an assignment to s-secure the San-, the, the, trash guard [indistinct] the trash was piling up like mountains, there's a Matterhorn down at Disneyland – a big pile of trash. So what I did, I used an Army dep-, an Army deployment. We got in the fire tire training tower. I laid troops on the, on the perimeter and we had night glasses and we covered it, nobody gonna burn it down. So one night about three o'clock

in the morning we're out there and a car was coming with lights off. So we thought, wow, we've got [indistinct] And the, the occupants were city officials. The city manager and some council members or somethin'. I cannot honestly say what their intentions were, but I had one of my officers approach the vehicle, made contact. They turned around and drove away. Why would they be comin' with the lights off and [INDISTINCT] Maybe to see if we're all asleep. That's – and I'll give 'em the benefit of that. [00:22:42:27] My, my inner self will not allow me to say what I think on the recorded [indistinct] [laughs] So that, that was exciting. I mean, it made, it made, it made NBC News. My uncle in New York called me. I'm standing on top of the police car in the Calvary Baptist Church parking lot. The place was packed. We kept the peace. There was no riots. We trained the, the garbage collectors how to picket with-within the law. We gave 'em money. And this white police association supported that. And I was smart enough to get secret ballot. Put, put it in the safe to cover me. And I knew they wanted to fire me because of my leadership in that particular instance.

[00:23:28:13]

AJ:

And so in terms of the garbage workers, it was a mixed crew.

NT:

As municipal work is and was in those days, and many times you had hand labor, maintenance work, done by people of color. Most, most of 'em. So the garb-, the, the sanitation workers were hardworking, two person's crew. The back end of the truck and a driver. Huh? Tossing all these things and, and they worked

their fannies off. And so, um, that strike was my contribution – and I use ‘me’ only to say, I wanted, I wanted, I was a police – I co-, I had the recipe for if they got outta line. But I will give Santa Monica Police Department. During the sixties, when people were bashing heads, we were coming up with concepts of how to deal with these issues in a non-violent manner. GTE had people. Du-, um, we had a strike in [indistinct]. We used techniques that other of-, other departments started to figger out. [00:24:46:08] We used women officers to get the sit-in people up. The natural inclination of a man on the ground, if a women reaches down and say, he gets up. Guy [indistinct] goes up, because he wants the lady to take him. And we, we used those techniques. Um, uh, do you remember s-, the name Sa-, uh, Sidney Poitier? Well, Sidney got his Oscar at Santa Monica’s Civic Auditorium. Guess who was on duty with the crew that night? Nat Trives. I’m standing right on the line where he gets – guess what happened that night? The Black Hollywood NAACP picketed the Academy Awards?

AJ:

What year was that?

NT:

[overlaps] 1968. ’63 or eight. I can’t re-, this’d be the sixties. Now, we had the good sense to meet with—

[00:25:42:27]

AJ:

What did he get the award for?

NT:

'In the Heat of the Night,' I believe. And, um, no, he get it for 'Guess Who's Coming to Dinner'. [crosstalk] At any rate, um, we, we, we met with the Hollywood people in advance of the Academy Awards and set down with 'em and we got a judge to agree with what we called photographic warrants. We took pictures of each person who was going to picket and we had a predetermined spot that if they touched the red carpet, they had trespassed on the private property. And this is, this is public, uh, auditorium. But what we did, the auditorium was leased for that one event, so [indistinct] legal mind, that's and they agreed sign the documents, and, and all I did was, I was drivin' the paddy wagon. [00:26:45:15] I had the paddy wagon there, [indistinct] shined and, you know, I would escort like I was escorting a prom date, a person who was just arrested over to the paddy wagon, where they were taken and released on their own OR, but they got to picket on national television without having the fear that their brains would be laying out in the street. And we were so proud of that. And I, I, I think I had a little bit to do with that, because I, I was sorta like the conscience of the police department with respect to my values.

AJ:

And then you went back to UCLA after you left the police department.

NT:

[overlaps] I left the police department because I, I got, in my mind – and I think I was right – I scored very well on the lieutenant's exam. But I got a 69 on the oral. Those of you who've taken public exams, you know, I, uh, if you got a 69



on the oral, you, you, you may have a speech impediment or, or, you may be, uh, uh, have other impediments. I have never had difficulty communicating with anybody orally. [00:27:54:26] And so I got a 69 and then I realized after going back over the oral, I was set up. The questions that were asked of me were hostile. I didn't take 'em in that vein. One of the first questions – how can a union president be a good, good, uh, uh, commander? And I named off all the police chiefs in the United States, just, just popped 'em right off, who were union presidents who went up through the union movement and who were successful. I thought that was a great question, right, but it's hostile. 'Cause if, I could, I could tell by the response, you're a rabble-rouser. You know, and stuff like that. I mean, it's stuff that did, that didn't make any sense in a, in a promotional exam, because I was thoroughly prepared. I'll give ya an example of how well I was prepared. When I told my people at Cal State LA, as a, as a student that I, I was shafted in the, in the lieutenants exam at Santa Monica College, I was offered a job as a professor with a Bachelors degree, subject to going to going to UCLA and getting my Masters. [00:28:59:07] In 1968 I, or nine, I left Santa Monica Police Department. Before I left Santa Monica Police Department I also did something that paid me dividends today. I flew to Sacramento, I knew Sacramento like the inside of my hand. I went over to PER, Public, Public Employees Retirement System. Went in the place, back inside with an oc-, actuary, sit down just like you and I are talking, what if, what if, what if, what if. He said, don't touch it, defer it to the future. And it's as good as gold and you, you determine when you wanna retire and you can do. I said, thank you very

much, sir. And so I wrote the chief a memo that I intended to retire at some point in the future. [laughs] He called me upstairs and we knew each other and he said, what in the, but I can't say it on camera [laughs] what's this all about? Fast forward, uh, 1997, I retired from the Santa Monica Police Department, even though I left in 1969. [00:29:56:21] And that was good business sense. Others who di-, who left, took their cash [indistinct] retire or whatever they did. I didn't do that. And I think my judgment, I hate to say it, I love the police department to this day. I don't have any negative feelings about the police department, other than certain people did not wanna see, uh, people of color go forward. Now, our department in a community that has so few people of color, there's an extraordinary, extraordinary mix of women and minorities in, in high-ranking positions, and I'm very proud of, of this department and what it's done.

AJ:

You moved here in 1949, so you were a young person, and this was like a whole new environment for you. What was it like for you to grow up here in the fifties, and what was your dating experience like? What were your friends like?

[00:31:06:16]

NT:

[overlaps] Well, it was fascinating. And these are, these are excellent questions because when I arrived – and I hope you don't laugh at me – when I arrived, my first day at Lincoln, I wore almost like a Lord Fauntleroy outfit. [laughs] With short pants, a tailored jacket, you know, like a, like a prep school guy? And I went to school, but I'm a big guy. And everybody looked – you could almost feel

the snickers. [laughs] So immediately, when I told my mom about this, I said, you know, junior high school. I rode a bicycle, by the way, and all the cars in the parking lot at Lincoln. I couldn't understand it. I'm ridin' a bicycle, right? [laughs] At any rate, I sat in my class the next day, I, I actually went down and got sch-, I like, I like, um, open collared shirts and sweaters and, and, and, uh, I wore slacks. And eve-, and, and, you know, James Dean? Everybody was in the James Dean mode. Tee-shirts and, and, and Levis hanging off their, their, their rear end. And I'm coming here from the Midwest, y'know, and, where were in basically a prep school environment. But I was still a good student so people, they, they, they elected me class representative. I mean, God, I'm just a new kid that showed up next, yesterday, and they elected me class representative.

[00:32:26:12] So I got involved in, in Lincoln's, uh, little student government. But I, I met people of high influence. Um, Arthur Lake, also known as Dagwood in the movie business, Joyce, his niece, was sitting right next to me in class. I'm doing my own [indistinct] test. We were way ahead of these kids. And so I'm going [makes sound] knock the test out and I, I could feel this burning of eyes. And Joyce was copying off my test. And we became dear friends, dear friends. She had 1948 convertible Pontiac. I'm riding a Schwinn bike. [laughs] And they lived in, in acreage on, on San Vicente that overlooked the Riviera Golf Course and all of this stuff, so Joyce and, and her, her, her friend. So I got into that clan of friend. [00:33:19:04] I also had the clan of friends who were playing ball. I played, I was center, ninth grade, center on the Lincoln basketball team. Then all four of – I was starting center. The other four people went on to be All-

Americans, NFL. All huge stars. I couldn't make the team at [indistinct] high the next years. Beca-, I was six-foot-two, I have a wingspan that's enormous, even to this day. I could palm a basketball and, uh – but I didn't, I didn't feel badly about that, Alison. I, I felt, well, the next thing you know, I had all these guys supporting me when I was running for student government offices. And I would win, win, win, win anything I'd run for and I was always outspoken. I was never shy, and I was like a good union steward for the kids because sometimes somebody'd get in trouble. The dean would call them in, or the vice principal, and they'd call me to be the mouthpiece. And we'd always, we'd always solve the problem, because I acted as an adult. I guess the classic story that I would share with you about my high school experience, if you, if you would allow me.

[00:34:24:07] A young lady is pregnant, and boy, back in those days, you were persona non grata if you became pregnant while you were in high school. I said to the young principal – we had a very young principal – I said, look, if she's wearing a robe, nobody's going to know the difference. And this is only one day in her life. What's wrong with that? I said, if you don't tell, I won't tell. Had it gotten to the superintendent, there's no way she would walk. She walked. She walked. I did things like that because I under-, I, I try to see a bigger picture in life than just the rules. And I don't mean that I'm here to break the rules.

[indistinct] So that experience. Inter-racially, we were integrated, we went to things together. One of the things I learned early in life, if you find all the nice young ladies at the churches and synagogues. So I made the rounds. We had a

group of guys, who we made, we made all the rounds. And we had a little club of, of, of called the quiet men.

[00:35:29:24]

AJ:

The quiet men?

NT:

Yeah. John Wayne made a movie called 'The Quiet Man.' And, and, and we, we had this little club, we dressed real cool. We were cool. We had pipes. We had [indistinct] We wore tweeds. And we were in Beverly Hills. We were going, we were going where we want. And, and, and, and, and I could tell you – and I mean to do this, because we're being taped, but I was in Bing Crosby's home with, with his son, um, um – not Nathaniel, oh God – went to school with him in Santa Monica College. And we would party. And so you meet people. And, and, and my attitude is, when you meet people, you meet and treat people like human beings. And I, I will tell you, a lasting, very lasting relationship, uh, I told you about Mr. Lagatta, John Lagatta, John Lagatta, a student, with me, parallel, graduated the same time. His dad was the premier artist for 'Saturday Evening Post.' [00:36:35:03] Did all the covers for 'Saturday Evening Post.' And he was, he was the Norman Rockwell of that time. But he was the pre-, he wasn't pretentious. He, he didn't – now we're trying to recover his work for this, for the Santa Monica Historical Society Museum. And John's willing to get, to give his paintings – their fabulous, uh, portfolio. We're gonna have Butterworth, the auction house, do the, do the auction for us when we get it all together. But John

is an extraordinarily accomplished financial guy. And, and I was, as I was speaking of John, um, we have kept our relationship from 1952 to now, and I can name – and won't – and I can name tens and twelve people – same relationship.

AJ:

In terms of some of the fun things that you would do, you played sports, you were involved in student government. In terms of some of the family activities, because you were newcomers to the community.

[00:37:42:13]

NT:

Oh, we took a, we, we, we went to the zoo. We went to all the things middle America would do. I, I gotta give my. My stepdad credit. We, we went to Hollywood, we saw the Walk of F-, you know, the Stars, and on.

AJ:

So you interacted with the whole region.

NT:

Oh, yes! No question. [crosstalk] San Diego, Tijuana, uh, all of the places, um, and we did travel as a family. You know, we went back to, back to, uh, Ohio. Uh, we went back to the south. Uh, uh, we did that as a regular course of action. I stood in the four corners, uh, in the, the four states where you sta-, you can stand in four states at once. Because that's – my dad thought that was important in my development. Uh, and I, I, it, I couldn't agree more. When you're looking down at the, at the, at the Grand Canyon, a-as a kid or you, you take Route 66

and literally travel. And then you listen to, uh, the president of Pepperdine, the chancellor of Pepperdine tell of his story. He traveled and he wrote and he big videograph of it. And, and I could, I could re-, I walked up to him once and I can relate to what you said. He stopped and talked to people in various places along the route. And, and I love to do stuff like that. When I, when I go overseas I still do it. I engage people.

[00:39:02:13]

AJ:

Now your stepfather, James Blakely, was he from Ohio?

NT:

He was Kentucky guy. He was born in Kentucky. He's quite a, quite a distinguished fella and I – it's interesting because he wore a fedora. And we'd be traveling in the south and he'd walk in, he could go in and buy stuff, because he could literally pass for white. He had a nice Roman nose and, and, and, and, um, somebody asked him one place, what are you doin' with this pickanninies in the car? And he was talking about the kids, us. And he said, oh, I'm just getting 'em some food, you know, he wouldn't – but, uh, that's, he was such a cool guy. Lived to be 92 years old. And he could handle flowers like, like magic. Make, make floral arrangements for this beautiful estate in Beverly Hills and, and it'd be shown in 'Home and Garden' and stuff. But he had no credits, 'cause that's not, that, that wasn't done. And I wouldn't mean it wasn't done because he was Black. I don't think anybody in that role, whether it be an Italian or whatever, they just didn't get credit. Like now if the floral arrangement are, are, there, there'll be

a credit. [laughs] Of pictures, you know, they'll get credit. But he, they did things like that. Uh, we had, always had a car. We have pictures that where I'm sitting in the rumble seat of a Model A Ford, uh, he, he would, we would always get treats, ice cream. [00:40:26:20] And he, he took care of the, the being a parent in a way that you can remember very fondly. Discipline, but trust. Discipline, but trust. And, and, and I'll jump back to one thing that probably marks the fiber of the kinda guy I am and, and the family I lived in. We're out on graduation night. We're kids. Another guy got a new car. [imitates] Jump in, gonna go to Tijuana. Wanna go? Said, I gotta ask my parents. It was late. We'd been at the drive-in here on Wilshire. Called Jack's Drive-in. And I think Jack's stayed open 'till three or four o'clock in the morning. And we going home at two or three o'clock. And I woke my parents up. Said my friends wanna go to Tijuana. This is 1952. This is a working man. He woke up and he said, well, you know, you have never been a problem for us. And he reached in his wallet and he got out a 20 dollar bill. [00:41:26:28] You don't have to do the math. Be careful. Gave me a 20 dollar bill. That trust level – you know I'm not gonna do anything wrong. Because that's the future. You know, I'm just so proud of those kind of, uh, memories.

AJ:

Did you interact a lot with the Santa Monica and the Los Angeles community, in terms of your personal life?

AT:



My parents, I mean, my mom and dad belonged to a, a, denomination, Church of Christ. The Church of Christ is sprinkled all around. There was a Church of Ch-, there is a Church of Christ at 15<sup>th</sup> and um, Michigan here in Santa Monica. But there's an older Church of Christ called Figueroa Street Church of Christ, downtown Los Angeles. Many Church of Christ. My uncle, uh, was a pastor in the Church of Christ. Church of Christ, okay? We went to various churches. You meet people. You have dinners. [00:42:28:01] Where the civic auditorium now sits, that was a Black community. That was a Black community. And, and we had dear friends there and, and belonged to the Church. You go to dinners and, uh, you have folks over for dinner. So we go to, uh, picnic, you'd go to Griffith Park. There was a restaurant downtown that didn't ha-, didn't discriminate, um – oh my goodness.

AJ:

Clifton's?

NT:

Clifton's Cafeteria. Uh, that we went to Clifton's Cafeteria. Um, and my wife later – my, my – this is before she is – before I was married. My wife's mom worked for Goody Goody, which was at Berkeley and Wilshire in Santa Monica. Fabulous, fabulous, first-class, uh, drive-in. And I, I, um, I knew people. We'd go to, we would go to Goody Goody and I never knew at that time, 'cause I hadn't hooked up with my wife. I didn't know her mom and her family that well. She may have worked there too, as the salad person. I, I don't know. But the Goody was a fine drive-in. We had the Goody, we had [indistinct] restaurant. Jack's

Drive-in at 10<sup>th</sup> and Wilshire. [00:43:39:07] Then at, uh, where the Cadillac dealership is on Olympic and Bundy was a drive-in theater. And that's what you really – the youngsters – we'd load them in the truck and pack – close the door. One person come in smiling [laughs] go in, pay the, pay to get in, and then, and when we got in, we'd all get out, out of the trunk, get in the car. We'd all packed our lunch, we wouldn't go to the concession if we had to [laughs] we always saved money, so.

Let me throw a light thing on that. We'd go to Jack's Drive-in and the person that worked in one of those bakery bought pies. And we would order – this is a true story – [indistinct] utensils, well, how do we get away with this? Know what we did? We gave the server more than anybody in the house. But still it wasn't as much as we would've if we'd been buying pies there. See what I mean? And the servers loved us, because they were getting more tips from us in a real sense by just bringing us water and, and we'd sit there because it was kids coming sharing pies – it's a car hop, you've seen 'em, you've seen the movies, and we had that, we lived that life.

[00:44:53:06]

AJ:

Were you beach people? Did you go to the beach?

NT:

Yeah, we would go, we would go, we would treat the beach like we treat Disneyland. We'd go, we didn't, we didn't live at the beach, meaning lots, lotta people are, are, they get to California. I can remember when we first got here in

the first week. We went down and did the, the proverbial foot in the Pacific. Sure we did that. And right at the spot where you and I were at that, at that [indistinct] where we drove down, that's Hollister. And we walked out on the sand and, and, and, and, and, um, christened our toes with the Pacific. Uh, some, some like to fish, some, you know, all, everybody had a different water thing. Um, I like Catalina. When I got a chance, I went to Catalina as a, as a student, and they had a very great Y camp, I mean a Boy Scout camp at Catalina. Learning about Catalina, it's a beautiful place. Then as an adult, we've been to Catalina many times. Yes, as, uh, baseball was a big thing for me. I went to ball games at, at, uh, Wrigley Field, which no longer exists in Los Angeles. [00:46:00:08] Uh, they had a – where CBS is on Melrose was a, was a baseball field. I went to the Hollywood Stars games. Um, uh, we went to movies in Hollywood. You could ride the streetcar when we first came, first came. You could get on a street car in Santa Monica and ride the street car all the way out to Hollywood. But you can't do that now. We're tr-, we're trying to get light rail. So I, I had a, a well-rounded, uh, I think, adolescent life, teenage life, um, I, this whole theme of mine in life is, I have these connections that I – I went to beaches that normally Black kids couldn't go, or wouldn't go. You had to determine the legality of all these things. I was able to go to beach in Malibu at, at Paradise Cove because the owner of Paradise Cove, it's private beach, is a classmate of mine. Uh, I'm going to be honored at, at Santa Monica College on graduation night this year, 16<sup>th</sup>, I guess. Next week. Along with a guy, Ricky Grigg, who's one of the world's classic surfers. Well, Robin and I were in the same class, his sister. Robin Grigg. And

so we got to know – I knew all these, all these people. [stutters] These guys were, you know, when you, when we did, the, uh, [indistinct] all the guys. All these guys were decent guys. [00:47:25:24] The water tends to be a place that, that brings about, uh, ability trumps other things. And that even goes to gender. Now if you, 'cause you had women surfers. And, and I think that when, when, when the good surfers recognize the women could surf, then you, you saw that fade away, because surfing is a survival sport.

AJ:

Yes, it is, you're out there with the sharks.

NT:

No, no, for real, sure, sure.

AJ:

In terms of your socializing with the beach, it was more of a sporadic thing.

When you went to the beach, it would be more of an event kind of thing.

NT:

Fourth of July, people want to go to the beach. Why? You wa-, we had the greatest fireworks in the world. Right on the, right on the, right off the beach.

[00:48:25:00] They usually have a barge out there that shot the fireworks off.

We picnicked and whatever. You find a nice spot. If you could walk down to where we were, called Hollister Park, and smell the barbecue and, and all of that stuff, that's a, you know, the holiday spirit was there. And, uh, we had, we had a, a little transportation system called trolleyway. A little tram used to go from Venice to Santa Monica pier.

AJ:

On the boardwalk, right?

NT:

Uh-huh. And you'd ride that. And a nickel or somethin'. Or you, you'd see pictures of guys hanging on the back, just sneaking a ride. But that, that was part of Santa Monica. Ocean Park pier.

AJ:

I was gonna ask, did you hang out at the piers?

NT:

Of course! Ocean Park Pier was, was a place where you, you had a wonderful time, because it was an amusement zone that actually preceded Disneyland. I remember when Jane, Jane Mansfield, before she had her tragic ac-accident in Alabama, she appeared for the millionth guest at, at, at what we called POP at that time. It was Ocean Park Pier. Big, big rollercoasters and just like, uh, Coney Island-type stuff, right there at, at the end of Santa Monica, between Venice and Santa Monica. [00:49:43:07] That's where I met Lawrence Welk, at, at, Lawrence Welk played at the, uh, Aragon Ballroom [indistinct] And he was on the television and everything. Everybody saw Lawrence Welk, so—

AJ:

And that was on the Ocean Park Pier?

NT:

It was south of, uh, City of Santa Monica. You ca-, Aragon was in Venice. They had two big, huge theaters there. Uh, the Dome Theater and the Rosemary

Theater. They had great delis. I mean, like New York. They had great delis of pastrami and all of the, the east coast stuff. Right there in, in that, in that area that is now, uh residential.

[00:50:22:05]

AJ:

So would you walk down from your house?

NT:

You know, in those days, you, you'd always, you, you would – from 21<sup>st</sup> and Pico I could easily walk down the beach. But if you start walkin' you're gonna see somebody you know. And you throw a thumb out and you get you, you pile in the car. Or if you, if you wanna do the bike thing, whatever. Or if you, if you're in a more formal sense, you've got dates, you figure out who's got a car. And then al-, we always take care of the gas. And then we, we, and one guy had an old Hudson, looked like you could put the whole sc-school in th-, in this huge Hudson that he had. And so we, we worked, we worked as a team. We went to Big Bear, we went to the snow, we did everything that young people do. We have stories to tell and we can't tell, but we did, we did all the things. I mean, we, the, the best thing that, we went to the various churches and we made dates with people, you know. I, I was, uh, I went to Beth Shalom Temple, I was very active in, with, with some of my best, dear friends were, were out of that temple.

[00:51:28:17] My best man came out of that temple. You know, and, and the rabbi, he knew, you know, he knew me, and, and we didn't have any negative feelings. And I even dated a, a, a, a rabbi's daughter from Tucson. It was – and

during high holy days, my big deal, I was so proud, I was pumped up, I'd go over and open the doors and, and do things they couldn't do because of their faith, just to be a presence.

AJ:

As a young person coming here, after having had the experience of living in Ohio and Alabama, did you find it different here than in those places, or that wasn't part of your reality?

NT:

Well, they, they, life is, life is an interesting thing. Um, as I said to you earlier, I lived in a, in a, in a, if you could imagine three worlds. [00:52:26:21] There's, there's a, there's a Black world, and so let's, let's imagine spheres, like you have an eclipse, okay? I lived in about three worlds. I lived with athletes, and I was, y'know, I wasn't, um, like I told you, I didn't make anything. [stutters] I know sports, I know 'em very well, I could manage a team or do that kinda thing. But I lived with Blacks, I lived with whites, and I even had a fourth sphere. I lived with affluent people, people who had money. And people who, who I had a fella wanted me to go to his home in Texas. We were so close. And my dad says you can't do it. You can't do it. I know he means well, but you can't do it, you can't go down there with him and, and, and, uh, and that was probably a wise thing, back in those days.

[00:53:23:19]

AJ:

This is in the fifties.

NT:

Yeah, yeah, you know, these kids, these kids had – we were so tight and, and, and so on campus, you could go to my yearbook, and you'll see me with all kinds of people, my pictures, with, with people, but, but these spheres, they would, they open, I, in other words, how could you get elected student body president of a school where the, the numbers were so low with respect to how many Blacks were there, if you didn't have a sphere, a group of people that's thought you were a decent person and, and, and they all worked together. And this whole notion of unifying people is, that's what I'm about. One of my best jobs that I got was based on other people thinking that I could do a job, and when I took the San Francisco um, uh, police department's integration, federal, working for a federal judge, my job was to integrate that police department. [00:54:22:25] And [indistinct] I competed with 18 lawyers, I was the only non-lawyer in the group, came out in the top three and was interviewed, and when the judge interviewed me, uh, he said that the reason you're here is because I think you can keep me out of court and I think you can get the people here who've been fighting – I mean, it's fierce, seriously fighting for years, together. And when I left, we had a, we had a, we had an integrated police department. We had women up at chiefs, c-, chiefs, it's San Francisco. Chief as a woman, we've had Blacks as chief, we've had Irishmen as chief, we've had people working in areas they never has worked in the history of the department.

AJ:



I want to go back to the socializing and the beach thing. You were much more of event people. Did you go to the beaches where African-Americans went for parties and things like that?

[00:55:36:21]

NT:

See, we had, uh, a-as kids, Dockweiler Beach is in, in, in, uh, south, it's Playa Del Rey. We had fire some-, they had fire pits. So we go to Dockweiler and have a party.

AJ:

And this is the late 1950s. [crosstalk]

NT:

Yeah, yeah we would go to Dockweilers. [crosstalk] And, and with the family, family's not – family was purely holiday – it's a working family.

AJ:

Right.

NT:

Holiday, Sunday after church kinda stuff. But we also had a wonderful home. So we could use the yard to have a party or food out, outside in the, and enjoy the summer. Santa Monica, you know, you don't, you don't have extraordinary heat. Uh, where, except on rare occasions, but, um, uh, my social life was as a student, as a kid, was enjoying those things that this community offered.

[00:56:46:16] And that was a broader – it was broader than to say, we would go to Mount Wilson, to the observatory. We would hang out at the museum. And

we would do oddball things. We would drive to Santa Barbara just to say that we had an outing and, and maybe we'd get a hotdog or something, and then drive back and stop somewhere. We'd do those things. At Santa Barbara as I recall, we use to have [indistinct] Uh, like art things going on, and then you could just sorta drift in and out and do things like that. [stutters] The idea was to get in a car and go somewhere with somebody. Cars were, were very important. And wh-, we got smart, see. We, we would, we had, we had connections. We had a fellow who had a key to the fire trail off Mulholland. So we were heroes among cha-, young ladies who would like to take a - you ever heard of snipe hunting? [coughs] We'd go snipe hunting. [stutters] But when the word got out that somebody opened the fire trail, we drove up and these girls would tell all this.

[00:57:54:05] We'd have people wanting to go with us because nobody could do this. [crosstalk] And all we'd do is play the go-, let's move the records and, and, and, uh, depending upon the kinda girls we were with – meaning, some did not drink any alcohol – so we always made sure we had the right Coke or the right this, the whatever, 'cause we were, we were called ourselves gentlemen.

AJ:

Quiet gentlemen.

NT:

Quiet men. [chuckles] [crosstalk] That was our club. And we never had any problem with women, believe me. My wife, my wife, uh, see when I – we, we, we followed. My wife sang in a choir before I married her. And, and, that's how we knew Santa Barbara. We'd be in the back of the church, sharp as a tack.

Cashmere sweaters, you know, and these ladies, these girls are in the choir. And we'd be smilin'. And they'd go sing somewhere else and we'd be there, we'd just show up. And that's where we, we, we start trailing 'em and then we start dating and then next thing you know, we would be, we're lucky. We got married.

[00:58:49:29]

AJ:

As it relates to the beach known as the African-American Beach and sometimes known as the Inkwell, did you ever go to that beach for parties?

NT:

Of course. Yeah. [stutters] It was, it was [stutters] In, um, common folk talk, we'd call it Spook Beach.

AJ:

You called it what?

NT:

Spook Beach. Spook Beach. And, and, and, and you never saw anybody there that at party time that, that wasn't Black. Now ironically—

AJ:

At partytime. [crosstalk]

NT:

People go where they go and go where they feel comfortable. [crosstalk]

Ironically, at that same location, it became a rendezvous place for gays and lesbians. [00:59:54:18] Same location. Now if you think about it, if it viewed to

be a safe space for an oppressed minority, then you just move the title oppressed minority over to another group of people and they found themselves in that same space. And that's sort of ironic in, in my, in my reflections on the times. But that, that, that was a meeting place and, uh, no [stutters] I don't recall any abuse coming from Blacks toward the gays and lesbians in the, in, in my recollection. Gay bashing was uh, was, uh, quite common in those days. But I didn't see any in that, in that location that I knew of.

[01:00:44:14]

END OF REEL #1 – INTERVIEW WITH NAT TRIVAS. CONTINUES ON REEL #2.