

Jeremy Casil and Elizabeth Macias (editors)

*"Today, you can go next door and they don't know you":
John LaRue's Memories of Fullerton, California (1991)*

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O.H. 2216.

Oral Interview with John LaRue, conducted by Dale Swartout,

November 7, 1991, Whittier, California.

Introduction

The oral history transcribed below belongs to a collection held in CSUF's Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History (COPH) titled "Heritage House." The interview with John LaRue was conducted by Dale Swartout on November 7, 1991, in Whittier, California. This interview is 1 hour, 3 minutes, and 36 seconds long, and is archived as a digital recording/audio file at COPH (see "Copyright Advisory" below). The verbatim transcript edited here was prepared in the fall of 2023 by Jeremy Casil and Elizabeth Macias.

John LaRue's life, beginning when he was born in 1925 in Los Angeles, California, encapsulates a quintessential American narrative. Raised in Fullerton, California, in a middle-class family, LaRue's early years were steeped in familial bonds and adventures. His story unfolded following his parents' migration from West Virginia to California in 1917, making LaRue and his sister first-generation Californians. His childhood was marked by a memorable trip to West Virginia and the Chicago World's Fair, as well as everyday adventures like a twenty-eight-mile bike ride to Whittier with friends. LaRue's educational journey through Wilshire Junior High and Fullerton High School was punctuated by athletic achievements and early work experiences, including jobs at the Standard Oil Company and at Sunny Hills Ranch. His penchant for hard work and adventure continued as he joined the military during World War II. Post-war, LaRue's life took a turn toward education, and he began teaching seventh-grade history and mathematics in Norwalk. Music played a pivotal role in his life, as he met his future wife while playing in the symphony at Whittier College. By the time of this interview in 1991, LaRue was residing in Whittier with his wife, Carolyn. LaRue's rich tapestry of experiences, from humble beginnings to impactful career choices, establish him as a symbol of the enduring American spirit.

As detailed in this interview, John LaRue's life story offers meaningful insights into twentieth-century America, viewed through his experiences growing up in Fullerton. His early years were marked by joy and adventure, both locally and while traveling. LaRue's adolescence was filled with friends, athletics, and cars,

reflecting the vibrant experiences of youth in mid-twentieth century America. LaRue looks back on his life with a sense of fulfillment, cherishing the memories and relationships that have brought him joy. His memories of growing up in Fullerton paint a picture of the city's history, as he describes everything from changes in the public school system to his favorite hangout spot, Moore's Malt Shop. LaRue's story, a testament to the richness of Fullerton's heritage, serves as an invaluable resource for historians, students, and the Fullerton community, preserving the essence of an era gone by.

Only identifiable individuals, locations, and technical terms have been referenced in the footnotes, usually when they first appear.

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Verbatim Transcript (O.H. 2216)

LAWRENCE DE GRAAF CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: John LaRue [JL]

INTERVIEWER: Dale Swartout [DS]

INTERLOCUTOR: Carolyn B. LaRue, John LaRue's wife [CL]

DATE: November 7, 1991

LOCATION: Whittier, California

PROJECT: Heritage House

TRANSCRIBERS: Jeremy Casil and Elizabeth Macias

DS: This is an interview with Mr. John LaRue, (train horn) conducted by Mr. Dale Swartout under the auspices of the Cal State University of Fullerton Oral History Program. The location of the interview is in Mr. LaRue's home

in Whittier,¹ California, on the 7th of November at approximately 4 p.m. (pauses) 'kay, Mr. LaRue, if you could, uh, tell about your childhood and, and, uh, talk about your growing up in the (faint bird chirping) Fullerton² area.

JL: Well, I wonder if I could jump ahead first to Don Clark³ which is –

DS: – Sure. –

JL: – the reason that, uh, you had contacted me. My sister⁴ had told you that I knew Don Clark when I was a kid, and that was true. And we quite often played together with a group, but I'll, I'll never forget – and I've related this story many times to other people – when he first came to Fullerton, it wasn't long after he came, following the Long Beach earthquake,⁵ that it rained and Don came to school – we all went to Ford Avenue School⁶ and that was maybe three blocks from where his, uh, where his grandfather lived. And Don came to school barefooted. And I'll never forget how the nurse and the principal and the teachers were just beside themselves, that this child had come to school without any shoes on in the rain. So, I guess at that point in time they didn't know that this was Dr. Clark's⁷ grandson and so, in following back on it, it was through Dr. Clark's instructions that he had come to school with no shoes on because he didn't want his grandson to sit – to sit in the classroom with, with wet shoes and catch a cold. (laughs) And, so anytime that it rained, we were always assured then that Don would come to school without any shoes on, so –

DS: (laughs) That's good.

JL: Yeah. (pauses) Well, relative to myself, um, I was not *born* in Fullerton, only because my mother, uh, felt confident in a doctor who had delivered my older sister up in Coalinga⁸ and had moved down to Los Angeles.⁹ He had a practice he had taken over for his grandfather, I mean, for an uncle of his on the corner of 8th and Broadway in Downtown Los Angeles. So, my mother went to him, and I guess when I was ready to be born, they piled my mother and my dad in our '24, '25 Model T Ford¹⁰ – I was born in 1925 – and went into Los Angeles, and I was born there and two weeks later – they kept you a long time I guess at that point in time – well then, I came back to

¹ City in Los Angeles County, California.

² City in Orange County, California.

³ Childhood friend of John LaRue.

⁴ Josephine Chance, née LaRue (d. 2006), John LaRue's older sister.

⁵ Estimated 6.4 seismic event on March 10, 1933, off the coast of Long Beach, California.

⁶ School in Fullerton, California, closed 1989.

⁷ Dr. George C. Clark, physician, first owner of CSUF's "Heritage House."

⁸ City in Fresno County, California.

⁹ Metropolis and county seat in Los Angeles County, California.

¹⁰ Automobile produced by the Ford Motor Company.

Fullerton, and I always lived in Fullerton, but I could never claim that as my birthplace, I was born in Los Angeles. So, and I lived at 244 Jacaranda Place,¹¹ and I lived there until I went in the service at the age of 18. And, uh, growing up in Fullerton was just a lot of fun, it was a small community, well small by today's standards, it was, uh, maybe 10,000 people. And it seemed that we were always vying with Anaheim¹² as to who had a few more people, either Anaheim or Fullerton. But, uh, it was a fun place to live and, uh, you had a lot of freedom, uh, to kinda do the ki— things that kids perhaps should be able to do now, you could hike up the barranca,¹³ or you could take your BB gun¹⁴ out into the hills, or you could walk up through the groves, or—you could just do all sorts of things that aren't available to kids now. You always had lots of activities going on. (pauses) Um. I think an analogy I've often drawn as I've become an adult and, uh, I was in public education so I went through the chairs as a principal at various levels and all that sort of thing. But, I always knew that i—if Johnny LaRue went across town to the east side and got into trouble, his mom and dad would know about it. Now, today, you can go next door and they don't know you, perhaps. So, there's a different ballgame. But any place that we went as kids in Fullerton, when I was growing up, people knew you and so, you knew that you had to work or act within certain parameters. So, regardless of what part of town it was, although we got in trouble from time to time, it was nothing serious because we always knew that there was that reporting aspect back to your parents. But, uh, uh, we had a great, uh, neighborhood there in, uh, on Jacaranda Place. We had, uh, oh, kids my sister's age that were a group and then a number of kids my age probably 12 to 15 in my age group.

DS: Hm, wow.

JL: And, so we, you know, in the summertime it was, uh, playing "tap the finger" or "hide and seek" until late at night, or out in the street you could do the "kick the can" or riding your bike, doing whatever, or we built forts down in the barranca, or we dug holes, or we'd clear a lot and have a, kind of a, a, a track meet¹⁵ of sort. Um, we held boxing matches, uh—

DS: —Hm.—

JL: —we, uh, played football, uh, in the summer I can remember such mundane activities as sitting under the big English walnut tree in front of our house and having snail races.

¹¹ John LaRue's childhood home in Fullerton, California. As of this 2024 edition of this interview, the original 1922/1923 Craftsman bungalow is still standing.

¹² City in Orange County, California.

¹³ Flood control channel.

¹⁴ Type of air gun.

¹⁵ Track-and-field athletic competition.

DS: (laughs)

JL: We'd each get a real great snail and put 'em in the middle of a square on the cement sidewalk, and the first one to get out, which would take, you know, an in – interminable period of time –

DS: – (laughs) –

JL: – that would be the winner.

DS: (laughs)

JL: And, uh, but hiking around and just having the freedom to, uh, do and go where you wanted to go I think was the real plus as I saw it. Um, (pauses) when I got up into high school, um, wanted to earn some money of – of my own and be a little more independent, uh, I first worked for Standard Oil Company,¹⁶ just right after my freshman year, but my primary work experience as a kid growing up in Fullerton was working on Sunny Hills Ranch,¹⁷ from the time that I was, uh, a sophomore on through high school and then even after I got out of the service. And it was a working orange ranch at that time, it was, uh, the old Bastanchury Ranch¹⁸ that had gone into receivership and had been taken over by a group that was attempting to revive it, but I think ultimately what happened – and it was probably their original intent – was to, uh, make that into a, uh, an expan – expanded part of the community and to, uh, you know, build houses up there and sell property and that sort of thing. But, uh, lots of fun up there and lots of kids in Fullerton worked up there and, uh, we just had a great time. In the neighborhood where I grew up it was just middle-class America and, uh, I think probably the predominant industry for the people in *my* immedia – immediate area was the oil, uh, the oil fields. Not necessarily the Standard Oil field there, at, uh, which is now south and east of Imperial and, uh, Highway 39,¹⁹ the Murphy-Coyote Lease but, uh, some worked in Brea²⁰ and some worked out toward Yorba Linda,²¹ and the various oil companies that were in the area, but a significant number of the people in that neighborhood worked for one of the oil companies and, uh, we had a policeman on the block. And, uh, we had a couple of merchants, and, uh, had a couple of contractors –

DS: – Hm. –

¹⁶ American petroleum company (1870–1911).

¹⁷ Farm ranch in Fullerton, California, established 1935.

¹⁸ Nineteenth-century farm ranch, later re-named to Sunny Hills Ranch.

¹⁹ California State Route 39, a.k.a. Beach Boulevard in Orange County California.

²⁰ City in Orange County, California.

²¹ City in Orange County, California.

JL: – and, uh, it was just a cross section of middle-class America – I ‘member that there was only *one* person on our block who lost his home during the Depression.²²

DS: Hm.

JL: Uh, all of us seemed to be able to come along fine – I remember at one point in time, my dad was cut down to a four-day, uh, work week but that was for a very brief period of time –

DS: – Hm. –

JL: – and so, I think generally – at least *my* part of Fullerton – was very fortunate, the way we moved thru – uh, through the Depression. Uh, I remember the, uh, CWA,²³ PWA,²⁴ WPA²⁵ –

DS: – Hm. –

JL: – the various, uh, transitions it went through, and how they continued to work on the barranca and, uh, first they, uh, put in posts and wire and palm fronds and tried to do things to, uh, make it deeper and let the water, when it rained – we used to have some heavy rains – pass down there more freely, but I think they just initially, uh, fouled the thing all up and uh, first big rain or two we had after the, I think it was probably the CWA at that time, got started, it washed the bank away and I remember with one of those rains, maybe not too long after the Long Beach Earthquake, uh, the bank washed away right to the back step of the little house that was behind us that we had as rental property.

DS: Hm.

JL: So, um. (chuckles) Remember also when I was probably, um, 10 or 11, myself and three or four other kids got a bigger guy, maybe a high school kid, to help us dig a cave into the side of the bank of that, uh –

DS: – (laughs) –

JL: – barranca way back under Chapman,²⁶ and we had a chamber back there that would hold about four people. The good news was that, uh, the superintendent of the, uh, streets or roads for the city found we were doing that, and he brought us out and made sure we didn’t go in there again, and it was very sandy soil, I think we could’ve all been killed.

DS: Hm, I’m sure.

JL: In fact, I think back maybe the things we did just for fun –

DS: – (laughs) –

JL: – could’ve gotten us killed, but it was all innocent –

DS: (laughs)

²² Great Depression, period of economic downturn (1929–1939).

²³ Civil Works Administration, job creation program (1933–1934).

²⁴ Public Works Administration, construction agency (1933–1943).

²⁵ Works Progress Administration, public works employment agency (1935–1943).

²⁶ Chapman Avenue in Fullerton, California.

JL: – and the good news was we never were killed, so.

DS: (laughs)

JL: But, that was, that was not a smart thing to do.

[00:10:00]

JL: Uh, (pauses) I went through all of the schools in Fullerton, I s – Ford School from, uh, kindergarten through grade six, however, I'm not exactly positive – I think it was when I was a sixth grader, they, uh, retrofitted and, uh, reinforced the schools to meet the Field Act standards.²⁷ So that they were, uh, you know, more resistant to the earthquakes.

DS: Hm.

JL: And, uh, so – for my sixth-grade year, I'm quite sure that was the year, *half* of that year Chapman came to Ford, and we had half-day sessions, half-day for Chapman, half day for Ford. And the other half of the year, Ford went to Chapman School, which is now part of the Wilshire Junior High School.²⁸

DS: Oh.

JL: It's on the, uh, uh, sou – it would be the southeast corner of what is now Lemon and Chapman.

DS: Ah.

JL: That was an elementary school, there were – there were three elementary schools. There was Ford Avenue, Maple Avenue,²⁹ and Chapman.³⁰ And then there was one junior high school and that was Wilshire. And, I can remember my sister, when she first attended Wilshire, it was an old, I think, a two-story building. Now, that would've been at the northeast corner of Lemon and Wilshire. And, uh, they rebuilt that sch – they tore down the old school, and they built the new one there in, uh, (pauses) 1930, (pauses) oh, '36 or '7, '8 – wait, the first graduating class was the class of '38, and I was in the second graduating class from the new building which was 1939 – from the eighth grade. Uh, but anyway, after that then, I went to, uh, Fullerton High School³¹ and there was just one high school in the entire area that served Fullerton, uh, La Habra,³² Buena Park,³³ Yorba Linda, and when I was a freshman in Fullerton, it also served Placentia,³⁴ but, after that freshman year of mine in high school, they built Valencia High School,³⁵

²⁷ 1933 California law on seismic safety standards for schools.

²⁸ School in Fullerton, California.

²⁹ School in Fullerton, California.

³⁰ School in Fullerton, California, demolished 1950.

³¹ School in Fullerton, California, now Fullerton Union High School.

³² City in Orange County, California.

³³ City in Orange County, California.

³⁴ City in Orange County, California.

³⁵ School in Placentia, California, established 1933.

and so all of those kids then went to that high s – high school. Before that, and I think probably when my sister was in school, Brea also was a part of the Fullerton High School District,³⁶ but as you know now then there've been many other high schools built and, and, in, in fact a couple even closed –

DS: (laughs)

JL: –but, uh, to expand and take care of population growth throughout the whole area. Uh, I just did the normal things kids did. I, uh – my mother, uh, was active in, uh, you know, church groups and clubs in town and, uh, uh, she was someone who liked to have her kids achieve, and she involved me in playing the violin. I think I wanted to, uh, but I think it was only through her insistence that I became as good as I did – and I did become a pretty good violinist, but, uh, going in the service and having other directions I was more interested in, I've kind of left it behind, although that is the way my wife and I met. We met at Whittier College³⁷ because I was playing in the symphony, and she was the concertmaster.

DS: (chuckles)

JL: So, uh, anyway, I was – it had some positive aspects to it, um, (pauses) I don't know, maybe you have some specific questions you'd like to ask rather than me just rambling, I (sighs) –

DS: Yeah, you're doing fine. I mean, it, it's great. You're, you're talking about all your experiences and background, that – that's good stuff.

JL: –uh, (pauses) well, I had a lot of good *friends* I grew up with and maintained. Uh, the negative thing is even if you get just as old as I am – which I don't think is all that old –

DS: –Hm. –

JL: –some of those friends begin to leave you and, uh, my very oldest and best friend who was the son of the, uh, superintendent of schools in Fullerton, Raymond Green was the superintendent's name, and that was his name also, Raymond Green Jr. And, uh, just about three years ago, he died. He was actually, uh, killed in a rather tragic accident where he suffered from carbon monoxide poisoning in a –

DS: –Hm. –

JL: –um, cabin that he and his family owned up at Cedar Breaks, Utah.³⁸

DS: Hm.

JL: But, um, uh, maybe as a result of that (chuckles) and other things, we still go to Fullerton, but I find that there are fewer people that I can relate to because of the growth of the community and the fact that many of my

³⁶ Fullerton Joint Union High School District, founded 1893.

³⁷ Private liberal arts college in Whittier, California, founded 1887.

³⁸ National monument near Cedar City, Utah.

- friends have gone from the community, or else as with Ray, they aren't there anymore.
- DS: Yeah.
- JL: Um, uh, (pauses) holidays, certain holidays, were a big thing, I think my very favorite holiday as a kid growing up was Fourth of July. You could get enough firecrackers and fireworks to just do a heck of a job for about two dollars. And we'd save and save, and we'd go out and buy our fireworks and then—mostly firecrackers—and, uh, the first guy to wake up, which was usually about five o'clock in the morning, would go off to another kid's house and he had put a, an elk or a cherry bomb³⁹ or something under his window and that'd wake hi—him up and then we'd go to another kid's house and wake him up. Pretty soon—
- DS: —(laughs)—
- JL: —we'd have a whole bunch—and all day long, we were shooting—
- DS: —(laughs)—
- JL: —off firecrackers and kicking cans up into the air or blowing up handholds or what have you—
- DS: (laughs)
- JL: —then, at night, the, uh reserve we had, uh, uh, for the night fireworks we'd do in the middle of the street and, uh, that was my favorite holiday, I think.
- DS: (laughs)
- JL: We also had a lot of fun with Halloween and it wasn't like kids did—do it now, but, uh, uh, we'd go around trick-or-treating and that sort of thing—we'd also do a little mischief. I can remember Ray one time carrying a, uh, flower pot he'd picked off someone's front yard down the street, and it was our good fortune that here comes a policeman and stopped us and wondered where we were going with (laughs)—
- DS: —(laughs)—
- JL: —the flowerpot (laughs). 'Nother time with Ray, I remember, uh, being out front and we had these 1920s style, uh, lighting fixtures down the street, uh, they were cement, was kind of a serrated edge and a, kind of a decorative lamp style top. But it was glass, and here Ray and I were, shooting with a rather weak BB gun—
- DS: —(laughs)—
- JL: —at the glass top and (laughs) putting a few holes in it and here up, up, uh, drives a policeman and—
- DS: —(laughs)—
- JL: —and, uh, y' know reminded us that was not a good thing to do. (laughs) I don't remember that we had anything that we had to pay for that but, uh—
- DS: —(laughs)—
- JL: —but, they were there mainly helpful, you know? And, uh—

³⁹ Type of firework.

DS: – (laughs) –

JL: – one of the fellas on our street was a policeman: Jake Diced. He was, I think, the one traffic officer, he didn't ride a motorcycle but he wore the (clears throat) the leggings and the –

DS: – Hm. –

JL: – bloomed pants that were emblematic – symblematic of that, and, uh, uh, everybody liked him on the street, he was just a nice guy. (pauses)

DS: (laughs) Were there a lot of, um, uh, o – out of your playmates or the, the kids you knew throughout the – your neighborhood and the town, were a lot of them descendants of some of the, uh, old families of Fullerton? Uh.

JL: Uh, no, they really weren't. Uh, most of them I think had a, y' know, they were just the – well, for example, my sister and I were first-generation Californians in our family, and I think that was pretty typical of most of them. You didn't find many "native Californians" older than we. Um, I know my mom and dad who both had come from West Virginia,⁴⁰ uh, would take my sister and I back east and they would always – people would always comment, "Oh, they're native Californians."

DS: (laughs)

JL: They wou – and I can remember for *years*, even as I grew up in Fullerton, if you were a native Californian, that was really something. Y' know? And, uh, uh – my folks came to the state in 1917. And, uh, I think many of the people on the block were probably in that same time frame and, uh, uh, I can reca – one family I know came from Pennsylvania⁴¹ – I'm not sure that I know where everyone came from. I really don't. But most had come from someplace else. But, uh, I know when the people started coming as a result of the Dust Bowl,⁴² not so much to Fullerton per se, but to the surrounding areas – and they filled up some areas like Bell Gardens⁴³ –

DS: – Hm. –

JL: – or maybe, a part of Fullerton that wasn't quote "as desirable" or Buena Park or some of these other places, maybe La Habra. Uh, there was a (laughs) feeling, it's difficult to describe, but I think it was there to some extent that, uh, uh, people who by this time regarded themselves really as Californians, they were there just a little bit before these "Dust Bowl People,"⁴⁴ maybe didn't really feel they were quite on the same level they were. Which, uh, I guess might have been a type of prejudice – I don't think it was anything malicious, but, uh – I think you could tell that, uh, they

⁴⁰ State in the eastern United States.

⁴¹ State in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

⁴² Period of severe dust storms and drought in the American prairies (1930–1936).

⁴³ City in Los Angeles County, California.

⁴⁴ Great Plains residents affected by dust and drought in the 1930s, causing them to migrate.

- thought “Well, (clock chiming) they just didn’t come quite with the same resources we did when *we* came,” kind of—
- DS: —Hm.—
- JL: —thing, y’ know?
- DS: Hm.
- JL: But, I think everyone tried to help. In fact, I remember during that time, uh, you know, we regard cafeterias in, in th—in the schools as just being a commonplace thing now. Well, there were none, and I was a student at Ford Avenue in whatever grade I was in at the time, third, fourth, fifth, I don’t know. But, uh, the PTA⁴⁵ generated interest, and I think the school built a facility, but they started a soup kitchen. And, the women—such as my mother—would go to the soup kitchen and volunteer, and they’d make the soup and then serve the children and it was a penny a bowl.
- DS: (in disbelief) Wow.
- JL: One penny—
- DS: —That’s—
- JL: —a bowl.
- DS: —incredible.
- JL: Yeah, vegetable soup usually, and I, I forget whether anything else was (pauses) served with it, but it enabled those who had less—
- DS: —Hm.—
- JL: —to at least have a nourishing meal during the daytime. And then, that—probably from that—is what, uh, caused the cafeteria or, uh, uh, the f—
- DS: —Hm.—
- JL: —the food system to develop in the schools.

[00:20:07]

- JL: Remember, we—from the time I went to high school—we had a well-developed cafeteria, and maybe it’d been there forever, I don’t know, but in the (clears throat) in the elementary schools it just didn’t exist. (clears throat) Pardon me. I remember my favorite thing when—and I think it was everyone’s favorite—when I was in high school in the school cafeteria, every once in a while they would have artichokes when they were in season.
- DS: (laughs)
- JL: And seems to me you’ve got an artichoke with a big, uh, well, a little container of melted butter for a dime.
- DS: (chuckles)
- JL: And, uh, my allowance, from the time I was in the seventh grade on through high school, ‘til I started getting some of my own money, believe it or not, for lunch was a quarter a day.
- DS: Hm. Wow.

⁴⁵ Parent Teacher Association, founded 1897 as the National Congress of Mothers.

JL: And, uh—I could usually eat for less than that, and I'd (laughs) have something leftover for a candy bar or something—

DS: (laughs)

JL: —(laughs) like that. And, uh, favorite thing you did as you got a little older was to go down to Moore's Malt Shop.⁴⁶ Uh, that would be just south of Malvern on the west side of Harbor, just across the barranca, maybe—the first little building there, I think, was a dry cleaners, it's all one unit, but there was a dry cleaners and then Moore's Malt Shop, and then I think there was a little Chinese chop suey place.⁴⁷

DS: (laughs)

JL: And Moore's is where everyone went. And you could get the biggest, best malt in a glass—they'd served it to you in a glass, uh, container that they'd mixed it in—for ten cents.

DS: Hm.

JL: And then I remember, uh, it gradually went up. Went up to twelve cents and then fourteen cents. I think when I went in the service it was maybe fourteen cents for a malt? And, I'll never forget when I came back from the service, I was with another good friend of mine, Dave Hammond, he had come back also. And, uh, we went in to Moore's 'cause that's where you went. And, uh, who met us as we were going in but Art Johnson. He had been, uh, the boys' physical education teacher in the Fullerton District from the time you hit the fourth grade. You started organized activities of physical education, we had competition with the other schools in, touch football, baseball, and speedball⁴⁸ which was kind of a—

DS: —Huh. —

JL: —forerunner of soccer.

DS: Oh.

JL: And, uh, Art saw Dave, and I and he took us in and he bought us each our malts, coming just back from (laughs) the service. And, he went on after he retired and everything, I remember my mother, um, after I'd lost my father which was, uh, 19 (clears throat) 59, I believe. (coughs) My mother was alone, and Art Johnson then was kinda working for the City of Fullerton, uh, I don't know whether he did it on a volunteer basis or whether he, uh, was paid for it, but he organized trips for senior citizens. And I remember she went, and he was the leader of the trip to Hawaii⁴⁹ with a group. But, uh, Art was really a nice guy, and I think probably gave us all our start in athletics and participating and enjoying them. But, uh, I had good teachers in the Fullerton school system, uh, all the way through. And so, I think it

⁴⁶ Former counter-service business in Fullerton, California.

⁴⁷ Former eatery in Fullerton, California.

⁴⁸ American ball sport, invented 1921 by Elmer D. Mitchell.

⁴⁹ Chain of islands in the Pacific Ocean, U.S. state since 1959.

- was a good place to grow up and receive an education. (pauses) I just kinda rambled I – (laughs)
- DS: No, that's, that's (inaudible) have a good story. Um.
- JL: – I can tell you my most embarrassing time, maybe you don't want this on tape, I don't know, as a little kid in kindergarten – (laughs)
- DS: Okay. (laughs)
- JL: I shouldn't tell that. Why not? (laughs)
- CL: It doesn't have anything to do with the history of –
- JL: I know it doesn't. Okay, we won't tell that.
- DS: (inaudible) Wha – what was your neighborhood, the neighborhood you were raised in, uh, you mentioned –
- JL: They were just, uh, (pauses) they were houses built primarily in the early '20s. I think our house was built in 1923, and they were individually built. Although they all looked very much alike, uh, uh, you know, you went out, and you got a contractor, and you had a house built. I guess, it was before I was born.
- DS: (laughs)
- JL: And, uh, uh, as I recall, my parents, well they built the house facing Jacaranda, at the corner of Jacaranda and Highland,⁵⁰ and then *behind* it, a little one-bedroom house, which they always used as a rental, which faced (pauses) Highland.
- DS: Hm.
- JL: And, I believe that the whole thing cost \$10,000. And, uh, I believe that my parents told me that they had paid it off in three years.
- DS: Wow.
- JL: So – and I can remember during the Depression, them renting that, uh, little house for as little as \$15.
- DS: Wow, that was (pauses) – hm.
- JL: And, uh, it initially – our house was initially a two-bedroom house. So, when I was seven – well, then – between the two units there was a double garage and, uh, dad went over to Mr. Ellis who lived across the street and up three doors, and he was a building contractor, and he struck an a – an agreement with hi – (clears throat) with him, and we put a second story up over the garage, so that was my room. (laughs)
- DS: (laughs)
- JL: So (pauses) but it was a, it was a nice place to grow up. Uh, as I mentioned, the others, uh, had jobs kinda similar to my dad, and they all seemed to have adequate resources. No one was rich, but they were all comfortable. And, uh – (dog barking)
- DS: Can you talk about some of your experiences working on the ranch?

⁵⁰ 244 Jacaranda Place, Fullerton, California, on the corner of Highland Avenue.

JL: Well, I can remember the first day very well. I had worked with Ray Green, my dad had gotten Ray and I a job with the Standard Oil Company along with eight other boys. We were on a weed crew. And we knew the job was to last ten weeks. And it was right after my freshman year in high school. And, we were paid five dollars for an eight hour day, that was sixty, I think sixty-two and a half cents an hour—which was the *same* money that a Roustabout⁵¹ was paid. The basic (clears throat) the basic entry level for, uh, uh, working in the oil fields. Pardon me, could I have some water, honey, please? (creaking sound)

JL: But anyway, we had to produce. Um, there were um—four of the other kids I can remember came from the general area (clears throat). Stan and George Kraemer lived over a couple of blocks, their dad was also a Standard Oil employee. And, uh, (rustling sound) so we all worked, we did the ten weeks and (dishes clinging) then when it was over—well, the summer wasn't over, so Ray and I thought, "Gee, we want a job." So we went up to Sunny Hills Ranch, we knew Lowell Smith who was the son of the mana—not the manager, the (coughs) superintendent of the ranch, Vern Smith. (coughs) And so, Vern decided he had put us on, he must've had, uh, twenty kids working up there, and they were mainly hoeing weeds and, and, uh, (sound of ice cubes in glass),⁵² building basins around trees and uh, uh, doing some pruning, and some did irrigating. (pauses) And, the first day that I worked up there, uh, I was assigned to a crew, and there was a German fella named John Beers, an old guy he must've been at least forty (laughs).

DS: (laughs)

JL: John Beers was our foreman, and, uh, he had us out on the side of the hill, and it was all limestone or plain avocado trees and so you had to use a digging bar⁵³ to dig the hole. It was just like digging in cement. And you'd dig the hole, and then you'd put the avocado tree with the ball attached in the hole, and then you'd fill it in, put a little humus⁵⁴ around it and build a bas, then you'd go on and do another one. Well, at the end of the day, I had planted more trees than anyone else. And it was simply because I was used to working for the Standard Oil Company, and we had to produce. And Old John came up to me and he put his hand on my shoulder, and he says, "Son," he says (slightly exaggerated German accent) "Rome was not built in a day."

DS: (laughs)

JL: (laughs) But, the good news was in three days, I was driving a truck, and the other guys were—

⁵¹ Unskilled laborer.

⁵² This sound recurs through the end of the interview.

⁵³ Metal bar used to break up compacted materials like dirt, mud, or ice.

⁵⁴ Organic soil matter.

DS: (laughs)

JL: – (laughs) were still plantin’ trees and digging holes and all that. And so most of the time that I worked up there I drove a water truck which was to plant new planting – we had a 550-gallon water truck, and I went, I – down over the contours and hills and everything. It was unusual if I didn’t get pulled out by the caterpillar tractor⁵⁵ –

DS: – (laughs) –

JL: – at least once a day. And then, uh, when it was the, the right season, uh, and I guess they thought I was strong enough – well, I started swamping on a, uh, an orange truck. You’d pick the fruit up out of the field ‘nd then I’d drive the truck, got – so I drove the truck and I’d have a swamper⁵⁶ with me. And we’d handle maybe as many as 1200 boxes of oranges in a day, on the truck and off. The packing houses⁵⁷ were operating there at Sunny Hills,⁵⁸ it was an orange packing house and a lemon packing house. And as I recall I think the oranges in a, uh, field box⁵⁹ weighed seventy pounds, I could be wrong, maybe sixty-five. Seems to me the lemons weighed ninety, so we preferred to haul the oranges (laughs) rather than the lemons. But you’d pick them out of the field, stack them on the truck (pauses) – was it, five high or seven high? I think it was seven high. And the swamper’d do half the truck, and you’d do half the truck so half the time you were swinging ‘em up from the ground and the other time you were stacking them on the truck, and then you’d get to the orange packing house – you had a conveyor belt you’d just lift ‘em off onto. If you went to the lemon packing house, you had to truck them off of the dolly.⁶⁰ But, uh, (chuckles) as a result of that experience – I did that through high school even though I did participate in some athletics – uh, I would continue to work some after school and on weekends, on Saturday. Uh, when – before I went in the service,⁶¹ and I went in the service in September of ‘43, I’d worked out on the ranch the whole, the whole time, that summer. So, I went in the service, and I went to Air Corps Basic Training –

DS: Hm.

JL: – which was I think like ten weeks.

[00:00:30]

⁵⁵ Tractor built by CAT a.k.a. Caterpillar Inc., an American manufacturer.

⁵⁶ Assistant worker.

⁵⁷ Building intended to process food items.

⁵⁸ Reference to Sunny Hills Ranch, see above.

⁵⁹ Temporary box used to transport produce during harvest.

⁶⁰ Cart used to move heavy items.

⁶¹ Military service.

JL: And, uh, wasn't as tough as being in the Marine Corps or the Army, I don't think or all that, but it was tough, and the guys were just dying out there. Well, it was *easier* than what'd, I'd (laughs) been doing.

DS: (laughs)

JL: So, it was—I had a good time. (laughs) But that was probably the best shape I was ever in, in my life really (laughs). Now, Lowell Smith who, uh—he came to Fullerton when he was maybe in the fifth grade, I think. He grew up on the ranch, uh, because it was the manager's house, the superintendent's house, and a few of the foremen's houses up there that they lived in. Um. And, uh, he now lives in Littlerock.⁶² He's a, uh, land developer up there.

DS: Hm.

JL: It could be—if you have an interest in contacting *him*, he would have some other aspect of the area and, and his upbringing that, uh, than I would have. He didn't live in the community where the houses were per se, he lived up on the ranch.

DS: Yeah.

JL: But, Lowell M. Smith is his name and, uh, it's, uh—well, d'ya want *his* phone number?

DS: Uh, we'll get it (squeaking sound).

JL: Okay.

DS: I'll make a note of it.

JL: Yeah.

DS: Okay.

CL: What about Marcelina Arroues?⁶³

JL: Oh, uh, yeah have you ever met Marcelina Arroues? That isn't her last name now, though. Uh, the—they have—she has been there forever, uh, they were Basques⁶⁴ who came to the area and had property, you know where the President's home—(tape cuts out for 4 seconds)—when I first began teaching in 1949, I was a seventh-grade, uh, history and mathematics teacher in a junior high school teacher in Norwalk,⁶⁵ and she was the physical education teacher. And, uh, so, uh, we've had a lot of things to reminisce about over the years but Marcie, uh, married a, uh, doctor—a physician in Fullerton⁶⁶ 8 or 10 years ago?

CL: (confirms)

⁶² Census-designated place in Los Angeles County, California.

⁶³ Marcelina Arroues Mulville (1911–2001).

⁶⁴ Indigenous of the Basque region in southwestern France and northern Spain.

⁶⁵ City in Los Angeles County, California.

⁶⁶ Dr. Maurice F. Mulville (1912–1995).

- JL: So, I'm not sure what her last name *is* now, but I would think she would be an excellent resource as well as her sister.⁶⁷ If her sister is still living.
- DS: Hm. Okay. (inaudible)
- JL: Uh, and sh—I think she lives in that, uh, area of the President's—the Presidential or President Homes,⁶⁸ unless, uh, when she married her husband, she moved from that area.
- DS: Okay.
- JL: But, uh, my sister and her husband⁶⁹ had a 40th wedding anniversary party about four years ago and Marcie was there, and we just had a good time. We must've talked together for an hour.
- DS: (chuckles)
- JL: Hadn't, hadn't seen each other for quite some time. And, I think you'd find she had a lot of information. (pauses)
- DS: You mentioned in your—as you were growing up you played a, a series of games, and, uh, like “tap the finger” or something? I've never heard of—
- JL: —(clears throat)—
- DS: —of that before.
- JL: Oh, haven't you?
- DS: No.
- JL: Well, uh, on a summer, summer's night, uh, we'd get, uh, all the kids in the neighborhood and they'd come for maybe several blocks around, kids that just would congregate on our block, it was kind of a gathering place. And “tap the finger” just a simple innocuous game but, uh, you would, uh, one person would go up to the tree and hide his eyes. (slapping sound) You know I don't even remember what tapping the finger had to do with it. Oh, I remember.
- CL: (inaudible)
- JL: Uh, (pauses) at some juncture in the game, a person who was caught had to tap the person's finger who was out to try to find him. It was like “hide and go seek” with a little embellishment on it.
- DS: (chuckles)
- JL: And, uh, to be very frank I can't tell you the specifics anymore. But, that was our favorite game, was “tap the finger.” Now I was in the Boy Scouts,⁷⁰ we had, uh, Troop 90 Boy Scouts, and they had a drum and bugle corps.⁷¹ We were sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign War.⁷² Foreign Wars and,

⁶⁷ Presumably Josephine Arroues Voorhees (1909–2004).

⁶⁸ “Presidential Collection Community,” gated community in Fullerton, California.

⁶⁹ Frank W. Chance.

⁷⁰ Youth organization, established 1910, to be known (from 2025) as “Scouting America.”

⁷¹ Ensemble consisting of brass and percussion players as well as color guard.

⁷² American Veterans organization, established 1899.

- uh, *they* met up at the Walton Building⁷³ up in, uh, Hillcrest Park.⁷⁴ And, uh, we weren't a Boy Scout group, I don't think, who really learned an awful lot about Boy Scouting. Uh, (laughs) the main effort was to perform as a drum and bugle corps, and we were pretty good.
- DS: (chuckles)
- JL: But, up there in Hillcrest Park, a game that we played when we'd go up and have our Scout meetings was "capture the flag,"⁷⁵ and I'll tell ya that really used to be *rough*. You know, you'd have two sides, there'd be a flag, and it was the object of one side to get the flag from the other. And the one who captured the flag was the winning—the team, was the winning team. But that'd get pretty rough. But, uh, (rustling sound) yeah, I remember we played, uh, uh, we—we'd make a lot of games up. Uh, we (clears throat) would play can hockey. We'd get a stick and just a can and have sides, and we'd beat that can up and down the street, just play out in the middle of the street 'cause very few cars would come by. And we'd have goals, kinda like field hockey, but we'd use a can, and we just kinda made up our own rules.
- DS: (chuckles)
- JL: But we were always making things, I remember we'd make box scooters,⁷⁶ you know you'd, you'd, you'd get a two by four, and put a little handle on the front of it, and take the front of a skate and the back of a skate and put it to either end of the two by four and that was your box car.
- DS: Yeah.
- JL: Or maybe you'd put a box on the front of it, that's how it got it—or a box scooter, that's the way it got its name originally, we just streamlined it down or maybe you just ended up with a post. Or, we would, if, uh, got tired of using a wagon, we'd take the wheels off of it and we'd make like a, a (pauses)—what are the cars called that, uh, General Motors⁷⁷ used to sponsor? The—maybe they still do—the races⁷⁸ in Akron?⁷⁹ Where they uh, they coast down the hills, you know, they make the—
- DS: —Soap box?
- JL: —soap box! Only they weren't soap boxes, they weren't nearly that sophisticated. But, we had them so that, uh, we got them sophisticated enough so we'd use a broom handle to the front, uh, board that held the wheels on either end, and we could steer it with that. We'd use a, wind a rope around the broom handle and, and secure it in some way so that if you

⁷³ Izaak Walton League Cabin in Fullerton, California; built 1931, reconstructed 1996.

⁷⁴ Oldest public park in Fullerton, California, established 1922.

⁷⁵ Outdoor children's game.

⁷⁶ Makeshift motor-less transportation device.

⁷⁷ American automotive manufacturer, established 1908.

⁷⁸ Chevrolet's "All American Soap Box Derby," established 1934.

⁷⁹ City in Summit County, Ohio.

- turned the broom handle with kind of a disk on the top of it to the right, the car would go to the right, or if you went to turn it to the left, it'd go to the left, just like a steering wheel. And we'd have a brake that, uh, maybe you'd just attach a, a piece of wood to the side of the box, of, of the little car you'd made, and if you wanted to brake it, you just pulled back on that piece of wood, and it would drag on the ground, and that would slow you down.
(laughs)
- DS: (laughs)
- JL: (creaking sound) And, uh, we used to skate up and down the street a lot, and we had, of course, the old skates that, uh, clamped onto your shoes. They were nothing like the skates today. And, uh, (pauses) I don't know. We, we were always making things. We made guns that shot, uh, rubber bands that we cut from tires or, uh, we made little guns that, uh, uh, would shoot the rubber bands we'd take off the newspapers that were delivered at night. And, uh, usually, uh, to drill a hole in those things, uh, we just, uh, we'd get an ice pick and make it red hot and poke it through the wood, we never did (laughs) –
- DS: – (laughs) –
- JL: – use a drill. (laughs) But, but it was really kind of ingenious, they weren't bad, bad-looking little devices when we'd finally finished 'em, you know? And, uh, uh – but w – we made up a lot of games and things and, uh, had a lot of fun just doing that. Or, uh, I remember I didn't get a bicycle until I was in the sixth grade. The one kid on the block who had one when I was in the fourth grade was the kid down at the other end of the block, Franny Wilson. Ho, he had a neat bike – it was just a 20, 20-inch wheel. Not a (pauses) 26? I think when I finally got mine the balloon tire bikes were 26-inch wheels. And before that the old, old bikes were 28-inch narrow wheels.
- DS: Hm.
- JL: But, Franny had a 20-in – 20-inch, uh, bike when I was in the fourth grade, and he was a year older than I was, and if I was real good to him sometimes I could ride it.
- DS: (chuckles)
- JL: But anyway, after we all got bikes (clears throat), we would, uh – one of our favorite activities was to take them apart and clean them and, and grease them and put them back together and –
- DS: – (chuckles) –
- JL: – almost all of us changed the sprocket at the back end so that instead of a conventional, conventional 10 or 11-tooth sprocket – which was easy pumping, and you had to go around a whole lot of times to get up any speed – we'd put an 8-tooth sprocket back there so that you could pump more slowly, but once you got going you could really generate a lot of speed, you know?
- DS: Um-hm.

JL: And, uh, we even rode our bikes down to the beach on occasion and, uh, uh, usually we'd go down Brookhurst to – Avenue, is it? Brookhurst?

DS: Brookhurst.

JL: All the way to Huntington Beach⁸⁰ and you'd – there were practically no cars. Brookhurst was just a little two-lane road.

DS: Ah.

JL: And our favorite thing to do in getting down there would be to get behind an alpha – alpha truck and let them draft for us –

DS: – (laughs) –

JL: – (laughs) so we didn't have any wind resistance. (laughs) And, uh, I remember a kid who lived about a block away, Harry McGraw, and I we – our first big adventure was riding our bikes to Whittier and back. And, uh, uh, Harbor,⁸¹ which was Spadra,⁸² was Highway 101.⁸³ There was a sign right at the corner of Chapman and Spadra says, "101 miles to San Diego."⁸⁴ You know, I mean, uh, it was, a, an "Automobile Club of Southern California"⁸⁵ sign, but it was San Diego 101. It was 101 miles to San Diego and that was the main highway from, you know, along the coast. Not right on the coast – that's 1, but from San Francisco⁸⁶ down to San Diego. Went right through Fullerton.

DS: Hm.

JL: So, uh, when I was in the sixth grade and I had this bike, and Harry McGraw and I decided to ride to Whittier, that was our big adventure. It was 14 miles, uh, between Fullerton and Whittier, about all you would pass would be occasionally after you got past La Habra, were little orange stands –

[00:40:01]

DS: – Hm. –

JL: – where they sold oranges and lemons and other kinds of fruit, and, uh, uh, some of them would have a few souvenirs. And, uh, so we'd stop at about each one of those we'd come to – we finally ended up at the little square or park in the center of Whittier,⁸⁷ we turned home, and that was our big adventure –

DS: (laughs)

⁸⁰ City in Orange County, California.

⁸¹ Harbor Boulevard in California's Orange and Los Angeles counties.

⁸² Spadra Road, original name of Harbor Boulevard.

⁸³ North-south highway traversing the U.S. states of California, Oregon, and Washington.

⁸⁴ City in southern California bordering Mexico.

⁸⁵ Member club of the American Automobile Association (AAA).

⁸⁶ City in northern California's Bay Area.

⁸⁷ Presumably Central Park in Whittier, California.

JL: – we’d ridden 28 miles on a conventional bike that day and we weren’t very old either.

DS: Hm.

JL: And I remember we each brought our mothers back a little gift, and I brought my mom back a little pottery, a little pottery vase, just a little one, with a little cactus in it. I bought it at one of the stands, I think. In the, uh— it must’ve been after that time, I don’t think we had a third lane yet, that road became a three-lane highway and then ultimately four lanes, and then in the mid-’30s, uh, Manchester, Firestone Boulevard, became 101 alternates. So, you had two 101s and then of course after the war⁸⁸ you got into the change of all these things based on the freeway system, so that was no longer the main— but that was El Camino Real.⁸⁹ And, you still see the, uh, the bells around various places designating that as the “king’s highway.”

DS: Um-hm.

JL: See, and it went right by Pío Pico’s Mansion⁹⁰ and then on in through East Los Angeles, Belvedere Gardens,⁹¹ and on into Los Angeles. But that was, that was the main highway, the—from north—northern California to southern California—

DS: Hm.

JL: – went right through the heart of Fullerton.

DS: Hm. I didn’t realize that.

JL: And going into Fullerton you’ve probably seen pictures as you came down from just past the area of Hill— where Hillcrest Park is there’s now a kind of a shopping center⁹² on the west side there.

DS: Hm.

JL: There was an arch that you went under, it said “Welcome to Fullerton,” and across the top of that arch was the, uh, Pacific Electric Railroad⁹³ and a freight railroad train, I think, that utilized that, uh, right of way. And, uh, you had to pass through that cement arch to get into Fullerton.

DS: Huh.

JL: And they’ve since torn it down, of course, it makes it much more attractive now, but, uh, you oughta see if you can find one of those pictures that—

DS: – Yeah. –

JL: – shows that.

DS: I will, that sounds amazing.

⁸⁸ World War II (1939–1945).

⁸⁹ “The King’s Highway,” 600-mile route originally connecting California’s Spanish missions.

⁹⁰ Pío Pico State Historic Park in Whittier, California.

⁹¹ Neighborhood in East Los Angeles, California.

⁹² Presumably Hillcrest Park Center in Fullerton, California.

⁹³ Now defunct privately owned mass transit system in Southern California (1901–1961).

JL: Yeah, you've never seen it, huh?

DS: No.

JL: Oh, yeah.

DS: I don't believe so.

JL: (pauses) We used to have a lot of fun up in Hillcrest Park, uh, going up there on Saturday and Sunday, uh, it was not, uh—I don't think, I think it was built maybe in the '30s, I could be wrong. I don't remember it as a little teenie kid. But, uh, we'd go up there and ride our bikes and roll down the hills and, uh, uh, I know there were a couple of places that, uh, had real nice, a real nice slope to them. Kinda like a big basin. And we found (chuckles) that if you got a cardboard box and got it up at the top because it was so steep, you could go down that as though you were on a bobsled, and we'd have a lot of (laughs) fun doing that until the, until the box finally wore out.

DS: (laughs)

JL: Y' know, all of the things we did I don't really remember kids getting hurt. Uh, a few broken legs or arms or something but nothing (laughs) real serious.

DS: Were you ever, uh, were you ever in and around the Clark Home⁹⁴ much?

JL: Well, just, uh, with Don, uh, just—y' know kids, kids didn't ever, we didn't see any particular significance in being in someone else's house, you were just there.

DS: Yeah.

JL: I don't remember though really playing in and around the home. We'd go and get Don, and maybe we'd be in for a little bit but we usually went to play someplace else.

DS: Hm.

JL: Now, why? I don't know.

DS: (chuckles)

JL: But, uh, it was usually—we'd go someplace else to do whatever we were going to do. (pauses)

DS: Do you have any—you told a great story at the beginning about, uh, about Don, d'you have any more stories like that of, of Don or other people that you knew in, uh—

JL: (pauses) Well that was the one about him, uh, going to school barefooted, wasn't it? Well, uh, none, none pop, none pop into my mind—

DS: (inaudible)

JL: —right now. I'm sure there are many, but I just can't think of them. (pauses)

DS: You mentioned you, you played some athletics as you were coming up through school—

⁹⁴ Dr. George C. Clark Home, a.k.a. CSUF's "Heritage House," a 1894 Victorian, originally situated at 114 N. Lemon Street, Fullerton, California, moved to CSUF's Arboretum in 1972.

JL: –Yeah, nothing great but I did participate in athletics on the track team. I played basketball a couple of years and, but I was on the track team the years I was in high school. And, uh, I was someone who started out as a little peanut. I remember I— they had a, an exponent system in, in, uh, high schools at that time. And the smallest group were called “Ds” and then there were “Cs” and then there were “Bs” and then there were “varsities.”

DS: Hm.

JL: And my growth spurt, or pattern, was such that I started out as a “D” and by the time I was a senior, I was varsity. So, I grew one—

DS: –(chuckles)—

JL: –(laughs) one particular level each year. I remember when I graduated, in fact, Ray Green and Dave Hammond and I all were just about the same size when we graduated from high school. I think we all were around 156⁹⁵ and were about 5’10 or 10 and a half.

DS: Hm.

JL: And then I grew another inch and a half or so when I went in the service, and I put on some more weight. But, uh, (pauses) I guess we were average? (chuckles)

DS: (chuckles)

JL: We liked to, uh—as we got older and had, uh, vehicles to get around in, I got my first car when I was—well, my first car I bought with a kid who lived not too far from us, a kid named Kenny Sigmund.⁹⁶ And, uh, it was a 1928 Model A,⁹⁷ and he found he could get it for \$15.

DS: Wow.

JL: Well, I didn’t have any money and my share was gonna be seven and a half, so Kenny had a little money, he loaned me 7.50. So together we bought a Model A (laughs) for \$15. And we had that for a while, just kinda did it together but then, uh, after I’d worked one full year for Sunny Hills—I guess it was just prior to my senior year in high school, I bought a 1936 Ford Coupe.⁹⁸

DS: (chuckles)

JL: Cost me \$225, so I got more independent at that point. We used to go to the beach a lot and, our beach, the beach the kids regarded as “theirs” who were in Fullerton—a lot of ‘em went to Huntington but most of us regarded Corona del Mar⁹⁹ as “our” beach.

DS: Oh, really?

⁹⁵ Referring to American pounds.

⁹⁶ Kenneth E. Sigmund (1926–2020), World War II veteran from Laguna Hills, California.

⁹⁷ 1928 Ford Model A “roadster” vehicle.

⁹⁸ 1936 Ford Coupe vehicle, likely Model 48.

⁹⁹ Neighborhood in Newport Beach, California.

JL: And, believe it or not, going down there—and there weren't the breakwaters¹⁰⁰ that there are now, a little jetty,¹⁰¹ (clears throat) went out quite a ways. There was nothing on that beach. Nothing.

DS: Hm.

JL: It was just a virgin beach. And the waves broke in, in such a way that if you were real brave and wanted to try it—and we did—you could go clear out to the end of the jetty to check a, to catch a breaking wave¹⁰² and then ride it on in.

DS: Hm.

JL: Yeah. I remember another funny story about a kid who's now dead, he's been dead for some time, I believe, his name was Sunny Poor. And, in fact he was the senior class president when I was in high school. But in, uh, at Wilshire Junior High School, we had woodshop. Owen Richelieu¹⁰³ was the woodshop teacher, he later became a principal in the district. I think—isn't one, aren't one of the schools named (pauses) isn't, isn't there a Richelieu school? Maybe not.

DS: No, I don't—

JL: —No, I don't think so. Anyway. I think he became principal of a—is there a Nicolas Junior High School?¹⁰⁴

DS: That sounds familiar.

JL: I think so. I think he became principal there when it was first built. But, anyway, uh, when you were an eighth grader you could make almost anything. And a big item when I was an eighth grader was for a kid to make a paddleboard.¹⁰⁵ Well, you know, how they evolve. They're really very sophisticated now, and they're very small, and they're made out of synthetic materials and they're coated with vinyl and all that. Well, the way that you made a paddleboard then (chuckles) was to cut individual ribs, (pauses) uh, have, uh, mahogany strips along the side that were about 3 to 4 inches high and the top and the bottom were curved. And it was a board that was (clock chiming) about 10 feet long. So, it was hollow inside, and so when you made that for Owen Richelieu, well you, uh—they used white lead and cloth, and they would use that as a waterproofing device, I guess, be—between the side strips and the top, which was put on with brass screws and seeded down, you know? And then—

DS: Hm.

¹⁰⁰ Man-made offshore structure used to safeguard against dangerous waves.

¹⁰¹ Another term for breakwater, see above.

¹⁰² Swimming or surfing into the peak of an ocean wave.

¹⁰³ Owen Richelieu (1931–2011).

¹⁰⁴ School in Fullerton, California.

¹⁰⁵ Long board used for swimming or surfing.

- JL: – covered, I mean they were beautiful boards and, (chuckles) well, Sunny Poor made one of those—I didn’t, I made a table. But my mother always said, “Owen Richelieu made that table.” *I made it*—
- DS: (laughs)
- JL: – all he did was rout around the outer edge when he wouldn’t, which he wouldn’t let us do. But that was her way also of telling me she didn’t want me to be a carpenter or cabinet maker.
- DS: (laughs)
- JL: But, (laughs) but Sunny made this, uh, paddleboard and he was so proud of that, and he took it down to Huntington Beach, and he got it out beyond the pier. On his very first ride, he cracked into the end of the pier (laughs)—
- DS: (laughs)
- JL: – destroyed the pa—the paddleboard and there it was (laughs). That was, that was the end of his year’s effort. (laughs)
- DS: What was it like when you were young and, uh, little, what was the, your, uh, (pauses) (beep) your family’s, uh, weekly, uh, regimen if you will? What did your—how did your mother work through the week, or?
- JL: Well, my mother was never employed, which was very typical of most of the women at that time. Uh, they were, uh, housewives, homemakers, they were mothers. You know? And they kinda raised the kids while, uh, the fathers worked. And, uh, so our regimen during the school year would be that my sister and I attended school, we’d do our homework at night, we’d listen to the radio at night, you didn’t have television—

[00:50:08]

- DS: (chuckles)
- JL: – and we all had our favorite programs, like *Amos ‘n Andy*¹⁰⁶ and *Lum and Abner*¹⁰⁷ and *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy*¹⁰⁸ and *Jimmy Allen*¹⁰⁹ and *Little Orphan Annie*¹¹⁰ and—
- DS: – (chuckles)—
- JL: – and there were all sorts of promotional things that you could get, uh, through Ovaltine¹¹¹ or the Richfield Oil Company¹¹² or—
- DS: – Hm. —
- JL: – what have you, regarding these various, uh, uh, radio personalities, and they all had clubs it seemed. But, uh, you’d listen to the radio at night, go

¹⁰⁶ Comedy radio show (1928–1960), starring Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden.

¹⁰⁷ Comedy radio show (1931–1954), starring Norris Goff and Chester Lauck.

¹⁰⁸ Adventure radio show (1931–1950), starring Charles Flynn.

¹⁰⁹ *The Air Adventures of Jimmie Allen*, adventure radio show (1931–1937), starring John Frank.

¹¹⁰ Dramatic radio show (1931–1942), starring Shirley Bell Cole.

¹¹¹ Brand of powdered milk flavorings derived from malt extract.

¹¹² Petroleum company based in California (1905–1966).

to bed, the next morning you'd get up and do your thing. My dad always got two weeks' vacation every year and we always took a two-week vacation some place, I felt very fortunate. Uh, Yosemite,¹¹³ San Diego, San Francisco, the Redwoods,¹¹⁴ uh, usually in this area – although about every four or five years we would go back to West Virginia. And, uh, I had one real great experience when I was in the third grade, it was the only time I didn't go to school the full year in Fullerton. My grandfather died, my mother's father, and she went back in early March through the end of that year¹¹⁵ with my sister and I. So, we had our first experiencing, experience in, experiencing snow and winter weather, which sometimes can be severe in West Virginia.

DS: Yeah.

JL: And I remember (chuckles) it happened so quickly and we got on the train, I think it was a four-day trip by the time we got to Chicago,¹¹⁶ we were dressed in Californian clothes and, uh, uh, my mother took us to Sears-Roebuck.¹¹⁷ You had to make a train change there in Chicago. Maybe you still do if you take the train from the LaSalle Street Station¹¹⁸ to whatever the other one was (chiming sound), Dearborn,¹¹⁹ I think.

DS: Hm.

JL: And she took us to Sears-Roebuck and outfit us, outfitted us in, uh, winter gear, and then we were okay to continue and go on, and so I did spend that time, uh, 3 to 4 – well I guess it was about 4 months back there. And in returning, my, uh, mother and my sister and I – my dad had had to come back and go to work. I'm not sure he went with us. I don't think he did. Anyway, my mother took my sister and I, uh, to Chicago, and we went to the World's Fair¹²⁰ for one week in 1934, and it was a great experience. Stayed at the Sheraton Hotel. But we always took a vacation. My, my dad and mother always wanted us to have that two weeks that he got.

DS: Yeah.

JL: Then I remember when he had worked for the Standard Oil Company 25 years, he got 6 weeks. And that year we drove back east, and he spent the 6 weeks in return, and we spent another 6 weeks or so before we returned home.

DS: Hm.

¹¹³ National park in central California.

¹¹⁴ National and state parks in northern California.

¹¹⁵ Presumably 1933.

¹¹⁶ City in Illinois, west of Lake Michigan.

¹¹⁷ Nationwide department store chain, established 1886.

¹¹⁸ Commuter train terminal in Chicago, Illinois, established 1852.

¹¹⁹ Dearborn Station in Chicago, Illinois (1885–1971).

¹²⁰ "A Century of Progress International Exposition" (1933–1934).

JL: But, uh, I had things around the house I guess I was expected to do, but I don't remember there was ever a lot of pressure. I always had to practice, I know that, and the kids would come and call, "Johnnie! Can Johnnie play?" And—

DS: —(laughs)—

JL: —and, "No" my mother would say (laughs), she would intercept them, you know, "he has to practice." (laughs). And, uh, and then yet I wanted to be one of the guys, and I think I was but, uh, that kind of diverted me a little bit (laughs) some of the time. And, uh, uh. (pauses) What else was I gonna say? Uh, my sister would usually accompany me if I'd play, she's—

DA: —Hm.—

JL: —played the piano as long as I can remember. Uh (whistle sound). I had to mow the lawn usually, but sometimes my dad would, would do that and uh, (pauses) I just, uh, my main job was just to kinda grow up and be a kid and uh, learn, and, uh, achieve and, uh, and, uh, do good things. You know? I went to church every Sunday, went to the Presbyterian Church,¹²¹ which is located down on the corner of, uh, Malden and Commonwealth on the north, northeast corner. It was a rather, uh, almost New England style wooden building.

DS: Hm.

JL: It was kinda rambling there. Dr. Graham C. Hunter¹²²—

DS: —Hm.—

JL: —and, uh, great influence in my life, really—he was a fine man, and he had a son who was my age who was killed in the war, Stewart. Uh, Stewart and Irene, who must live in Fullerton someplace, were both adopted, but, uh, Dr. and Mrs. Hunter were just really great people and, uh, I'm sure that, uh, much of whatever moral fiber I re—I came out with was due to that influence. Um, you know, church activities and things associated with that. (clears throat) I can remember from being a little kid (clears throat), uh, Ladies' Aid Society¹²³ would have potlucks and they always would sell things like for a penny, like fudge and cake and what have you. Oh, that was the best fudge that ever happened, y' know? And in the summertime the churches—it was usually the Presbyterian, the Christian, the Baptist, and the Methodist, I think it was those four, uh that were involved—would have a daily Vacation Bible School in the summer. And I think probably up until I got into junior high school or so I always attended that. And they had some neat things that they would involve us in, in addition just to the activities at the church that had happened to be held at, at that time. Remember, one of the things they seemed to do every year was to go

¹²¹ First Presbyterian Church of Fullerton, California, established 1889.

¹²² Reverend at First Presbyterian Church of Fullerton.

¹²³ Nationwide volunteer organizations, originated during the Civil War.

- through the Crystal Ice Company,¹²⁴ and you'd get to see how ice was made—
- DS: (chuckles)
- JL: —but also, the interest there was that it was so cold. And I shou—I don't know if *that's* still there or not.
- DS: I don't know. That's a good question. (engine sound)
- JL: It was, uh, just the other side of the railroad tracks as I recall, uh, on whatever that service road would be down there to the east of, uh, Spadra or Harbor, Harbor as it is now.
- DS: When you were in high school, with your friends like, uh, Don or, or, or Ray and so on, what did you do for entertainment, uh, when you were out of school?
- JL: (pauses) We just had fun. (laughs)
- DS: (laughs)
- JL: I don't know. We, uh, (pauses), we rode our bikes. Uh, we were—you know, I was going out for athletics, heck, you were involved there until dark at school and, uh, you were busy and physically tired but yet, uh, it was a good feeling. And you'd come home and do what you had to do and go to bed and then do the same thing the—
- DS: —(laughs)—
- JL: —next day and, um, (dog barking) we had, uh, some clubs and activities at high school that we would participate in. Some of the kids went to DeMolay¹²⁵ dances, and there were of course high school dances and things—I never participated in those to any great extent. But, uh, and then as we got a little older, we all had girlfriends and, uh, uh, (pauses) we went to the show. Uh, the Fox Theater¹²⁶ was there when I was a kid. And, uh, usually you'd go to the show on the weekend, maybe just Friday night, maybe just Saturday night. Maybe one of those nights plus Sunday if the show changed.
- DS: Hm.
- JL: As I recall, as a kid it was only a dime, and as an adult, I think it was only, a, qu—or as a high school and adult I think it was only a quarter. And, uh, during the Depression they had a lot of bank nights¹²⁷ at the theaters, where they would draw people in because they would give away things like a, a living room set or a bedroom set or \$200 or, uh, you know, that sort of thing, and they'd fill the theater up, and they'd have a time where they'd call all these numbers and—

¹²⁴ Ice delivery company, established 1965.

¹²⁵ DeMolay International, global fraternal organization, established 1919.

¹²⁶ Fox Fullerton Theatre, movie theater in Fullerton, California (1925–1987). As of this 2024 edition of this interview, it is still being restored.

¹²⁷ Nationwide lottery game franchise during the Great Depression.

DS: – (chuckles) –

JL: – and uh (chuckles) I remember one kid who, I think, was probably several years behind in grade. Uh, when I was in the Fullerton Elementary District, we were always segregated as to ability until I got into the eighth grade. In the eighth grade they did everything alphabetically, I guess it was the new wave of progressive education, (clapping sound) and I'd never been with a kid who quote "wasn't smart," you know?

DS: (chuckles)

JL: And, uh, we had this one kid and, uh, who was older and I won't even relate his name but, I'd never seen a kid like that because he didn't know anything.

DS: – (laughs) –

JL: And I remember one question—he was in my history class—and one question was, "What is the greatest naval power—uh, what, what is the great—what has been the greatest naval power on Earth?" I think that was the question. And that is the only question he answered on the whole test, and he had written, "the Britannica¹²⁸ rules the waves." I thought that was the funniest thing I'd ever heard. But, anyway, at one of bank nights, he won a bedroom set.

DS: Ah.

JL: And they asked him what he was going to do with it—even in eighth grade he shaved, I remember, and he carried a pack of Bull Durham tobacco¹²⁹ with the papers to (laughs) roll the cigarettes, and no one seemed to think anything about it. (laughs) But, uh, they asked him what he's gonna do with it, and he was—he worked in the junkyard on a part time basis. That's when you got five cents for one hundred pounds of newspaper (laughs).

DS: (laughs)

JL: And, uh, uh, he said, "I'm going to give it to my mother." And everyone was so proud of him, thought that was really a nice thing, you know? (pauses) But, and, you went to Moore's Malt Shop—you did a lot of hanging out at Moore's Malt Shop—

DS: – (chuckles) –

JL: – and, uh, (pauses) we'd still do explorations up into the hills or down the barranca or, uh, walking just for miles.

DS: Hm.

JL: (clears throat, then speaks hoarsely) And, uh—(voice returns to normal tone) It was just, we were just kinda laid back and, uh, had a lot of fun just doing what kids—the things that kids do, I guess?

DS: (laughs)

¹²⁸ Reference to "Rule, Britannia," a British patriotic song (1740) featuring the line "Rule, Britannia! Rule the waves;" conflated here with the name of the famous encyclopedia *Britannica*.

¹²⁹ Bull Durham Smoking Tobacco (1868–1988).

JL: Of course, uh, after Pearl Harbor,¹³⁰ y' know I, I remember the first thing I thought was "Well I'm not old enough, I won't have to go in the service."

[01:00:01]

JL: But, um, I certainly did, and, uh, probably one of the most heart-rendering experiences I've ever had was, uh—we went to the dedication of the Plummer Auditorium¹³¹ (clears throat). I don't remember how many years ago that was, but it's probably been maybe twenty, Carolyn?¹³²

CL: Oh.

JL: And you're familiar with that, aren't you?

DS: Oh, yeah.

JL: As you walk in the foyer, uh, there's a door here and a door here and then, on the wall inside the foyer is a big brass plaque. Have you ever looked at that?

DS: Hm. I can visualize it (inaudible).

JL: And it has the names of the, uh, servicemen—I don't know if there were any women, and women I'll say—of the Fullerton High School who were killed during World War II.

DS: Hm.

JL: Well, *most* of them were in *my* class, class of '43 and I think the class before. I think we were shoved in at the end and maybe not trained quite as well? Or maybe things got more hectic, I don't know what it was.

DS: Yeah.

JL: But I'll never forget standing there and looking at that. I bet I stood there 20 minutes just kind of digesting—so, I, I had some, I have some kind of empathy and (clears throat) feeling for those of the Vietnam era who have done the same thing before that massive wall in Washington, D.C.¹³³ But, uh, and I don't know that I've been back in that auditorium since or had the opportunity to, again, look at that. But, I remember it was really quite a, quite a heart-wrenching experience for me.

DS: (pauses) I, I look at Fullerton now and, and of course everything's well-irrigated, and there's lots of water, the watered yards and—

JL: —Oh, we had lots of water then. But, uh, you know, throughout this area, you relied mostly on groundwater.

DS: Oh.

¹³⁰ Japan's surprise military attack on Hawaii (December 7, 1941), catalyst for the United States' entry into World War II.

¹³¹ Now known as the Fullerton Auditorium, established 1930.

¹³² Carolyn B. LaRue (b. 1927), wife of John LaRue.

¹³³ Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., established 1982.

- JL: That's how Artesia,¹³⁴ the community of Artesia—now Cerritos¹³⁵ area—got its name. There were Artesian wells there.
- DS: Ah. (chuckles)
- JL: So, uh, and I remember, uh, the uncle of one of the neighbors in our block there—Bob Kaylor and his family lived across the street and up four, four doors and his uncle, uh, Joe, (pauses) I guess during the Depression, work was hard to come by, and his uncle Joe became one of the workers who worked on the Boulder Dam¹³⁶—
- DS: Huh.
- JL: —uh, project that, uh, was a, you know, a different way, and a, an additional way to get water to the area that they could foresee us needing water in the future.
- DS: Hm.
- JL: And, uh, so, he worked over there in all that heat and under all those conditions and helped, helped that project be completed so that we have the water we do now. Along with, you know, the other resources we utilize, but I think it, I think, I'm, you know, I'm no technician in that regard, but I would think that most of our water came from local wells.
- DS: Hm.
- JL: And, of course there has always been—as long as I can remember that—Bastanchury Water Company¹³⁷ up in Sunny Hills Ranch, are you familiar with that?
- DS: No.
- JL: They market water still. You don't see many of their trucks, but it's like Sparkletts,¹³⁸ they have the trucks that go around with the bottles and all.
- DS: Yeah.
- JL: Inquire about it. You can, uh—it's still up there someplace.
- DS: Hm.
- JL: Uh, someplace north of Valencia Mesa Drive and on east of maybe, uh, Basque, if it would go on through. Is there still a Basque Avenue out there?
- DS: I don't know. I don't know.
- JL: I think there must be. It'd be a mile or so on west of, uh, I think of uh, Euclid.¹³⁹

[01:03:36]

END OF INTERVIEW

¹³⁴ City in Los Angeles County, California.

¹³⁵ City in Los Angeles County, California.

¹³⁶ Hoover Dam, on the border between the U.S. states of Arizona and Nevada, built 1936.

¹³⁷ Water company in Fullerton, founded 1926, sold to Yosemite Waters Company 2010.

¹³⁸ Bottled water company, established 1925, now owned by DS Services of America, Inc.

¹³⁹ Street in Fullerton, California.