

OH 18 OMA Oral History Collection Earnel Durden Oral History Interview

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Interviewee: Earnel Durden

Interviewer: Dwaine Plaza

Transcriber: Desireé Gorham

[00:00:00]

DP: Today is February the 18th, 2014. I am lucky enough to be sitting with Mr. Earnel Durden, and we are going to be talking about his history of playing at Oregon State University. But we're going to start before that, in terms of him talking about his growing up experiences, and then eventually getting to Oregon State University. So it's going to be what we call a life history interview, Mr. Durden. I want to just say, thank you very much, and what I want you to do is just to say your full name, your date of birth and we'll start from there.

ED: My name is Earnel Durden and I'm seventy seven years old. I came to Oregon State in 1955 as a freshman, and I played on the 1957 Rose Bowl team that played Iowa in the Rose Bowl. I had some great experiences here at Oregon State. Some experiences that I do not ever wish to change, of course as a young freshman on campus there were some that took me out of my element. I was raised in Los Angeles, born in Jefferson, Texas – a little small town in Texas – and I was only there once after I left there. When I was three years old my family moved to Los Angeles, and they took up shop in the building war materials for war. They moved myself and my two brothers to Los Angeles. I was raised there, in Los Angeles, and early in my life I became somewhat of a musician. [Laughter] My mom insisted we learn some kind of music, and she set us down and said, ok pick the instrument you want. So I had one brother who picked the trumpet, the trombone, and I picked the clarinet. We became very well-schooled in those instruments. Every week my mom would set us off to school and for our lessons and learning to play these music instruments. By the time I was in junior high school I was pretty good. I could play any reed instrument there was and I could read the music. I found myself bouncing around in little bands at that time, and I thought I was on my way music-wise. One day I was sitting in the bleachers watching the football players and I said to myself, you know what? That looks like fun and looks like something I could do. So I went in and talked with the coach and asked him if I could become a member of the team. He said, yeah, you can. He brought me in, gave me my little uniform, my shoulder pads and my helmet and put me on the B team. [Laughter] B team was the

lowest you could be at. Then I started my career in terms of playing football. He put me down as a defensive tackle. I was really proud of myself and proud to be a tackle, proud to be on the team, really. That grew and somewhere along the line, as I approached the ninth grade, they switched me and I became a running back. About that time in my life my mom bought a home in the Los Angeles area. During the time I was in high school I was being raised in a place called Watts, and Watts was about a ten by ten area, community, and we called it the Real Watts. After the riots in Los Angeles, anywhere that there was a cluster of African Americans, they call that Watts. But that's not really Watts. But anyway, I enrolled in Manual Arts High School and that's where my football career really took off. And I had to make a big decision, whether I was going to stay with my music, which I was very comfortable with and by that time I could play a lot of instruments, the piano, and I had been introduced to that arena and I felt very comfortable in that arena. Somehow, I got caught up in the scheme of football. By the time I was a senior in high school, our football team had won the city championship. I was selected on the all-city football team, I led the city that year in eighteen touchdowns, which was a lot then but not so much now. Then there was a lot of schools that came calling. I had already made up my mind where I was going to school.

[00:05:38]

DP: And where was that?

ED: UCLA. I was going to go to UCLA. All the time that I was being raised in Los Angeles that was the school for me. I remember some of the great players in those days; [Edgar?] and Villanueva, First Down Brown, some of these guys and boy I sure wanted to be like them. Most of all I wanted to play in the Rose Bowl and I figured if I went someplace else I wouldn't get a chance to play in the Rose Bowl. I sure wanted to play in the Rose Bowl.

DP: Had you followed Jackie Robinson's career?

ED: Yeah, I knew of Jackie's career at UCLA and that was another factor for me. There was other black players who had done well at UCLA which also motivated me that this was where I wanted to go.

DP: So did UCLA sort of have a reputation by that point when you were making your choices as being a place where black men could go be successful and get playing time?

ED: Yes. That was a major factor and during those years, SC was black listed in the black community.

DP: Tell us what that means.

ED: It was looked upon with favor for many young black athletes going to USC by the time I was coming up. And the reason for that was because there was a young black athlete who was from same area who was recruited very heavily by a lot of schools, including some of the schools back in the Big Ten, but chose SC and after he was there for a couple years he went in to ask the coach why he wasn't playing. He said, I know I'm better than those guys you got playing for you, so why am I not playing? And the coach says, oh, you know we didn't bring you here to play, we brought you here so you wouldn't play against us. It shocked this guy, I mean he was stunned. So he packed up and went back to San Diego and he became the first black police officer in San Diego. The ironic thing about him was that the day that he retired from the San Diego Police Department, he found out he had passed the bar.

DP: He became a lawyer.

ED: [Laughter] He became a lawyer. Anyway, I knew the story because this was a story that was floating around the community that I grew up in, but I didn't know the guy or anything about him, just what had happened to him at that time. Then of course when I moved to San Diego I found out, I learned who this guy was. He was a member of the Richie family, who was a very prominent black family in San Diego. They were a relatively wealthy family. That was the reason that even Jonny Arnett, some of the other guys who were big SC people. Jon played at my high school and he left a year or two before I got there and he came back and he said, we really want you over at SC and things are not the way they used to be. I said, Jon, I'm not going to SC. I said, you are wasting your time, no disrespect to you. Jon was a good guy. So my thought was I was still going to UCLA. Then all at once, Tommy Prothro was recruiting for UCLA at that time. He was an assistant coach, practice coach, recruiting at that time. He became interested in me. I guess what we had done in high school, in terms of our team, our term was recognized throughout the state because we were an awesome offensive football team. He became interested and he started to recruit me to UCLA.

[00:10:04]

DP: This is what year, roughly?

ED: This is around 1954. He started to recruit me and most coaches have guys and people who they will say, go out and talk to this guy.

DP: These were typically black men?

ED: Yeah. The guy that was assigned to me was a guy by the name of Horace Johnson, who was kind of a leader of the black community, kind of. He came over to my house and talked with my mom and talked with me, he was trying to convince me. During this particular time Tommy Prothro didn't know of it when he first started recruiting me, but then he had been offered the job here at Oregon State. When he knew that he was coming to Oregon State he asked me to come to Oregon State with him. I said, oh boy. I don't know anything about Oregon State, I have no idea where it is, I had never seen them play in the Rose Bowl. [Laughter] I don't know about that coach. So he sent Horace Johnson to my home, Horace talked to my mom, he talked to everybody he could talk to, my relatives. One night I was sitting down with my mom and she says, well what do you think? I said, I don't know, I said, what do you think I should do? She says, I have no idea. She said, the only thing I can do for you is to pray for you and ask God to help you with the right decision. So I went back to school the next day and I was messing around at school and all at once a friend of mine who played on our team, there were three all-city guys on that team – myself, Ted Bates, and a guy by the name of Willard Pen – Ted says, you know, this school is really after me and I'm thinking really seriously about going there. And I said, what school is this? He says, Oregon State. Oregon State? They've been after me also. I said, are you thinking about going there real seriously? He said, yeah. I said, well that helped me make up my mind.

DP: Interesting.

ED: So as time went on we both decided that we were going to come up to Oregon State.

DP: What was the reaction like in your community when you made that announcement that you're not going to UCLA?

ED: It was kind of silent. I didn't hear very much about it because they all thought I would be going to UCLA. Here is the best running back in the city of LA going to someplace like Oregon, where in the hell is that? [Laughter]

DP: I get you.

ED: Ted and I, Horace Johnson, who was also interested in Paul Lowe. Paul Lowe went to Centennial High School which was in Compton. It was a little [suburb?] outside of LA. He was an awesome talent. Just awesome. The thing that was more intriguing to Prothro about him was the fact that in high school they ran out of the balance wing offence. He just said, I have to have this guy. He sent Horace over there and Horace went over there to work on his family also like he did my family and Ted's family. To make a long story short, in those days there were coaches that stole players.

DP: Tell us about that.

ED: Sam Wesley was one. Sam Wesley came from Dallas, he was on his way to the University of Oregon and he got off the bus at the wrong stop. They kept him here. [Laughter] He became a beaver rather than a duck. In those days, guys would take players that were on their way to one university. Somebody was on their way to the University of Virginia and some scout; some recruiter from another school would intercept him and talk him into going to Georgia, or someplace. So Prothro was a very wise coach, he decided that wouldn't happen to him. So he put Ted, myself and Lowe in the back of a '55 Mercury and had Horace drive us from LA to Oregon State. Boy that was an uncomfortable ride.

DP: Three big guys in the back of a car, with your luggage and all of that in the trunk.

[00:15:00]

ED: With Horace and his wife. So we drove up here and it was in the fall of 1955 and that was the day I became a member of the Oregon State community.

DP: Can you tell us about your first memories of coming on campus? You arrived in '55 in the fall, what was it like?

ED: We arrived here about, it was dusk. I remember getting out of the car and looking around. It was dusk, we went inside, put our belongings in, it was Weatherford Hall we lived in, that we were assigned to. The next morning, Ted and I got up, we put on our jackets. You know that summer we had been going from place to place playing in these All Star games, and this one game in San Diego, the bad part, all-star game City of San Diego SCIF Southern Section. These beautiful jackets: white sleeves and blue with red trim. We put on our jackets, boy we were walking around the campus and we came upon this lady who was walking this little boy and as we passed this little boy looked at us and said, mom, look at that big old black man. [Laughter] Oh boy, I knew I was out of my element. I knew I was someplace that I had to make some great adjustments if I was going to stay here and during my freshman year I thought about leaving many times. Coach called us in the office and talked with us, and he said to me, life is going to throw you a lot of curves and it's not whether it's going to throw you a lot of curves, is going to be how you deal with them. I don't think there was anything racial this little boy said, it was just something he was not accustomed to, you know, he just wasn't used to seeing black people. I hung on a little bit longer, but I was totally unhappy being at Oregon State in my freshman year. We'd have, always have these eyes on us, people were always staring us down. There were no black girls on campus, and the boys that were dating white girls, the administration didn't like it. So they would call

the girls in, to talk to the girls, but they never talked to the boys. My reasoning was, I figured out that the reason they didn't talk to the boys is because they didn't want it to become a national issue. They're these football players, football players with some ability and some steam. They didn't want the national press to get a hold of this kind of stuff. So they talked to the girls, the girls would come back and tell us what they said. You know this went on. I believe that during the time that I was here had a lot to do with Oregon State recruiting black girls. I really believe that. During my junior year, the first black girl came on to campus. They made it known that they were going to actively start recruiting black girls.

DP: Oh really, they made that note?

ED: The first black girl came on campus, her name was Rachel, she came on campus. My senior year, the second black girl came on campus. So when I left here there were two black girls on campus. And several of the boys who were dating white girls married them. Including this African guy, Minsu [sp?], married a Caucasian girl here, his daughter became Cum Laude at Harvard. And Minsu [sp?] became one of the world's most important metallurgic people and he was still sought after. The state department would come and ask his opinion on all kinds of stuff. He was right here from Oregon State.

DP: But he was also from, you remember you told me he had come as a foreign student.

ED: At the time he was there it was called the Gold Coast, and while he was here on campus the name was changed to Ghana.

DP: Yes, that's right.

ED: He was a brilliant guy. There were four of them that came. We never included those guys in the other, you know...

DP: Yeah, because they were really foreign students.

[00:20:00]

ED: Anyway, there were four of them. Minsu [sp?] and then Cujo was a guy I took a lot of time with in fact he went home with me one summer.

DP: Interesting.

ED: And then Bruce, Bruce was a guy who would talk to nobody. He left Oregon State and the next thing I hear from him is he's getting his masters at Syracuse.

DP: Oh, nice.

ED: And I don't know what happened to the other guy.

DP: Alright, let's come back to your time in that first year when you arrived on campus. Any recollections of some of the things you were doing as a student. Taking classes, that sort of thing.

ED: Yeah, it seems that I spent a lot of time being concerned about what people were thinking and that took up a lot of time when I should have been studying. Anyway, I remember this one class that I had, chemistry. There were a lot of professors at the time on this campus that didn't give a darn who you were, football player, or not football player and if you didn't do well in that class they're going to flunk you. There were some people that leaned toward football players and there were some that just didn't care, like it probably is right now.

DP: Yes, it is.

ED: I was in this chemistry class, having a hell of a time in chemistry. One day this professor called me in and he said, Earnel, you're not doing well in this class. I said, yeah, I know that. He said, you're going to have to do a lot better in order to pass this class. He said, let me tell you something, if you flunk this class, they're going to condemn your whole race, you guys just can't make it, especially a football player, you can't make it, but if a white guy fails this class, they'd say, oh well he just didn't have it. That stuck with me and to this day that was embedded in my brain. Here was a white professor telling me that I better get my ass on the stick, and I better start studying. I went home and I put in the time and I passed that chemistry class. I never will forget that guy. I don't know how he looks, I can't picture how the guy looks, I can't even picture anything about him, except for the words that came out of his mouth to me that day, but he motivated me to no extent; not only in the chemistry class but in other classes that I took. I just made up my mind I would not go home having flunked out of college, I wouldn't do that. That put me in a position where I studied and studied and studied and to the extent that I did graduate on time.

DP: You did and you got a degree in Physical...

ED: I got a degree in Physical Education and in Science. I could teach any physical education, art, science, biology and kinesiology which I became very proficient at. I remember during my sophomore year, things started to light up a bit. Perhaps people had gotten used to me, seeing me on campus, I certainly got used to people seeing other races intermingle with other people, this kind of stuff. Things were starting to clear up for me a little bit. When the football season started, when the football season starts you have little time for anything because not only do you spend a lot of time in football meetings, in football practice, but then you got to have your studies and I find myself having no time for anything but football and studying. I remember that year, the first game that we played against UCLA, the school I wanted to go to, and came here. It was raining just like it is outside right now, it was raining. It was 1957 and Prothro was not the guy for a lot of talking. He wasn't for this "hoorah" type of thing. He was sitting down just before we took the field, and went down to get dressed, we were sitting down having our pre-game meal and he got up and walked around. He looked out the window, it was raining, he came back, he looked at the squads, he said, the team that wants it most today is going to win this game.

[00:25:07]

DP: That's all he said?

ED: That's all he said, then went and sat down. We went out there that day and we just kicked UCLA's butt. I'm sure to this day that we did not have the talent overall that UCLA had on that team, I know Pete O'Garro was on that team and he was awesome. He went up and he spent all fourteen years playing up in Canada and he was really, really great. I don't know if you've heard of Pete O'Garro? He's dead now. They were an awesome team and we beat them, we beat them that day, put them on the thirteen, right here on this field. That was in my mind and never left, that great speech because as I became a coach in the National football league, these head coaches I would run across, they were really fire and brimstone type but never like Coach Prothro, very calm. I started to kind of figure out, the reason that he didn't do that, and this is me thinking, because they knew as a coaching staff they had prepared us like no other team, that we were so prepared we could do what we needed to do, and they didn't have to...

DP: Give a fire and brimstone speech, right.

ED: Because they only last for a few minutes anyway, and after the first five or ten minutes you lose that on the field. If you don't have what it takes...I learned my sophomore year, very similar to my freshman year, that this was some of the toughest guys that I had ever come in contact with; guys that didn't have ability, but were absolutely tough football players. As we went through our schedules, team after team

after team fell in front of us, then we met that UCLA team here on the field and I think that year we lost to SC and we lost to Washington, only two losses for that whole year.

DP: That was your first year?

ED: First year as a sophomore because we couldn't play as freshmen.

DP: So is that considered a turnaround season then? For the team?

ED: The turnaround season I believe came in '55 when I was a freshman. They didn't win as many games, but boy what a great, great effort. That was the team that upset Stanford, I think went through this. The team when I first saw, what I thought, was an all American Football player, Sam Wesley, who John Brodie, was a great player in those days. I don't know if you remember him, John Brodie and Isaacs was a great receiver, and Bill Tar was a great running back, all from Stanford. They came to Oregon State, they played Oregon State in Multnomah Stadium in Portland. I was a freshman, I sat in the stands, and I saw this little tattered group of guys fighting this giant and overwhelming team, Stanford. Stanford would march up and down the field, but they could not get it in. They could not get it in and twice, down on the ten yard line John Brodie went by and he spotted [Isaacs?] in the center and let it fly and Sam Wesley would come up with the interception. Oregon State ended up winning that game 12-13? I don't really remember what the score was at the close of the game.

DP: They won.

ED: Years later when I started to coach for Coach Prothro, we talked about that team and he admitted that it was probably his favorite team, the '55 team that gave so much with so little. I remember some of the players on that team, boy I looked at these guys, Howard Buettgenbach. Howard was about 6'6", 195lbs, he was a tackle. [Laughter] He had play this big guys from Stanford, 260-270 lbs...[Laughter] But that was the kind of grit those guys had: Norm Thiel, DeGrant, Joe Francis, Jesmer, Witte, John Witte, all these guys were on that team. Not a lot of talent, but a lot of heart.

[00:30:24]

We went through that season, when I was a sophomore, pretty handedly, lost pretty close fights to SC and to Washington, and it came down to, we had three games left in the season, and it came down to we had to win two of the three remaining games in order to go to the Rose Bowl. We started off with Stanford, at Stanford, Palo Alto. That was the game that Paul Lowe hit me on an out and up pass, and went sixty yards and we pulled that one out. We came back to the campus, that night, and our whole team was totally exhausted. We were exhausted, guys going to sleep on the bus, on the plane.

We got on the bus, and we landed out here in Corvallis, a big jet, I don't know how...anyway the bus came and picked us up and guys were nodding as we drove back to the campus. All at once, I'm half asleep, and the bus hit the curve and drove up on the lawn by the Memorial Union. And I'm thinking, what the hell, what is he thinking? Is he drunk? What the hell are you doing? Then we get out, and I didn't see any of the student body, and we go inside the student union and everybody is there and they are yelling and cheering and all this kind of stuff. That was my first impression that...

DP: They were also calling your name too, weren't they?

ED: Yeah, they were saying, we want Durden, we want Durden. I was thinking to myself, I wasn't the only one doing these things, you know Paul threw me the pass, we had great defense, I just caught the pass.

DP: You caught the key pass.

ED: I did, but our defense played great, kept them out of their zone...anyway. That was the very first time that I started to feel some acceptance on this campus. From there, I went on to become Joe College.

DP: Tell us about that, it's an interesting story.

ED: The guys in my house put my name in as a joke. They were messing with me. They would dare at night you know, they would really crack up and tell me. Hey Durden, how are you coming along in that contest, the Joe College contest? I said, ok you guys will get yours one of these days. They were just laughing and just hooraying, and then on Wednesday night when the house mother wasn't there, they would get up and they would say, oh, Joe College. It went on, it started off with sixty-four houses and got down to thirty and my name was still there. The teasing started to subside a little bit. It got down to sixteen, then they started talking and thinking maybe our house can win this thing. So they all got behind me and started going and campaigning and doing all these things. To make a long story short, I was selected that year as Joe College. Joe College represented the typical sophomore who had good grades, popular on campus, and this kind of thing. That was a milestone during the time I was here at Oregon State. On the girls side it was Betty Collegiate and Joe College, and I really enjoyed that. The pictures in the year book...

DP: We didn't find it, but we'll go and find it. You then had a big dance.

[00:35:04]

ED: We had a big dance at Gill Coliseum, and this dance was the last three guys, they would announce who the Joe College was and who the Betty Collegiate was that night. We had a big turnout, all of the student body was in there, and they announced who the Joe College, three guys...I don't remember the guys...then I was chosen. I was Joe College! So, Joe College and Betty Collegiate had to lead off the dance. So, I forget the girls name, so we led off the dance and that kind of thing which was a big thing in those days.

DP: Coming back to those days, would there be any sort of segregation that was going on in the town of Corvallis, if you want to talk about that, or on campus?

ED: You know, I learned something during those years. Like I said, I came here as an eighteen year old adolescent, and when I left here I was a twenty-two year old man. I learned so much, and I learned that everything that happened to me wasn't all racial. A lot of things people just didn't know, but there was some racial situations. There was no question about that. I remember Chuck telling me about this one situation our town doctor was the team doctor and so whenever a player had to see the doctor he had to go downtown to the doctor's office. Chuck Marshall was sitting in the doctor's office one day, he's sitting there reading this magazine, and this little boy is sitting right next to him. Chuck sees the little boy and said that he put the magazine up, and the little boy pushed the magazine down and he took a good look at Chuck, and Chuck put the magazine back up. The little boy pushed the magazine down again and he was looking at him, and he said, momma, why do you make me wash my face and he doesn't have to wash his face? [Laughter] Chuck came back and told me that story, we laughed about that. It was because people had never, you know, they had never been in that environment, and I had never been in that environment, so the two clashed and it was a matter of getting to know each other. Chuck says, he was so embarrassed, the doctor's office was full of people, and kids, you know, have got one tone and that's loud. He came back and he was telling me about that story, and I tell you what, we laughed about that. There was entertainment -wise, on this campus during the years I was here was non-existent for black guys. We made up our own things to do. There was one black family living in Corvallis, his name was Bud, and Bud had a wife and two kids and we would go over to Bud's house on Friday nights and Saturday nights and we'd play cards and talk and all kinds of stuff. He was always interested in bringing us up to date. There's one thing I remember very vividly, one reason I believe that the university at that time was very cognize of and didn't want any racial things to break out. We had in the city of Portland the Assistant District Attorney was a black guy. I don't remember his name, I don't remember anything about it, I never talked to him, but some of the other guys did and I would see him driving around the campus from time to time. Nobody wanted this guy to get a hold to anything that he didn't have to get a hold to. So, the administration, the Dean of Women and the Dean of Men, just never...I

remember the priest or the minister from one of the churches coming down and talking to some of the girls, they never talked to us, they never said anything to us, they didn't want this thing to get blown out of proportion, any of this stuff. We always got a second hand, that girls always came back and told us what they said. We always knew what was going on. Anyway, the majority of the time I was here, the activities for...the fraternities and sororities would have their get-togethers and parties and have their luaus and we didn't have, we made our own entertainment. There was nothing here for black athletes to do. I know that that's changed, there's so many on the campus. Those were the days that things were not as they probably should have been, but we made do.

[00:40:42]

DP: You had spoken to me a little about the Paul Lowe bike incident and I wanted you to talk about that.

ED: You know we used to come back to school, two or three weeks before the student body got here...

DP: To practice?

ED: For fall practice. Boy they were some tough, tough days. They were two-a-days. Practice in the morning, at night, practice in the afternoon. Boy, you're talking about people that were beaten. Those football players, we were just all beat. This particular day, as I came out of the coliseum, Gill Coliseum where we dressed, there was always this bicycle lying on the grass. I was too tired to ride it or I would have...

DP: Ridden it yourself?

ED: Yeah, but I was too tired to pump. I walked back to the dorm. But there were guys taking that bicycle, riding it all around and nobody knew whose bicycle it was, but they would bring it back and lay it on the grass and another guy would take it and he would ride it. This one particular day, after practice, everybody else was tired and they went back to their rooms and flopped on their beds, and Paul Lowe goes downtown to see this girl who worked at a restaurant down there, and he takes the bicycle. The police arrested him for stealing the bike. The little boy's father, Tommy Prothro explained to this guy what had happened, and that this bike was just lying there and all of the players used it and it was just this one time that Paul was caught on it. The thing that disappointed me the most is the guy would not drop the charges, he chose to press charges against Paul, so Prothro had to go out and get a lawyer to defend Paul and this became national news. It was in every newspaper, and I was getting calls from L.A. What the hell's going on up there? I said, nothing. Paul rode a bike that we all ride and

the press just blew it out... you know. I had a friend that was at Arizona State University and he called to ask me, we heard that Paul Lowe is in trouble up there with the law stealing someone's bicycle. That's what they didn't want to happen on the racial front. Eventually, Paul was cleared, but I don't know who the man was, I had no idea, and I'm a second hand guy looking in at this stuff from afar and I never discussed it with Paul, I don't know what happened, I just know eventually he was no longer charged with the theft. I know that Coach Prothro had to go to Portland to get an attorney to defend him, and I thought that was tremendously unnecessary, especially because of all the things Paul had done for this community. Here's a guy that's going to stick this thing to him, I thought that was tremendously unfair. Anyway, that happened. Paul was way ahead of his time in terms of, during the years I was here, no black was allowed to play basketball. So, Paul takes a basketball and he goes out there and he's dribbling on the court, and four or five of us sitting up in the bleachers watching Paul seeing what the hell he was going to do. He's bouncing the ball down there, and Slats there with his whistle and all these players come over on the other side and Paul was running around down there. Paul was a CIF player, he was a hell of a good player. He would shoot from the court, swoosh, and I thought to myself, I wonder if Gill is up [?] I wonder if he's seeing this. You know we're sitting up in the stands and here Paul is swishing them. He would dribble around down there and Gill was over here and he would dribble the ball by him up on there. Oh man, this guy is insane. Paul had no fear of anybody, he was much like Dave Mann.

[00:45:32]

DP: Tell me about him.

ED: He had no fear of anybody and circumstances. Pretty soon, I guess he realized he was being completely ignored, he went in and got dressed and we all walked home together talking about the experience. The funny thing about it was no blacks were allowed to play basketball, but Mexicans were, Latinos on the team. It was only against blacks. It was after I had graduated and I was, I don't know when Valenti took over, but that was the end of the color thing in terms of basketball here. They had some great basketball players: Dave Ganby, the Swede, they had those guys here, they never won anything, never won the championship or anything like that. I don't know why Slats took that position, I have no idea. I never talked to Slats, I would see him and that was it. I never talked to him and he never talked to me before he passed away. That was it.

DP: Can you come back and talk a little bit about, I know you never met Dave Mann, but can you tell us...

ED: Dave Mann had a reputation, and when I got here in '55 I guess he was just leaving. I thought he was here earlier than that, he was here in '51 and '55, I came in in '55 and I guess he was leaving in '55. Dave Mann was an awesome player and he was much like Paul, he had no fear of anything or anybody. And they would tell me Dave would catch the quarterback in the huddle and pull him toward him, and tell him, I want that damn ball, give me the ball. He got the ball. [Laughter] That's the kind of guy Dave was, when the game got tight, he put the team on his back. A lot of times he didn't win it, but boy he gave it his all. He didn't always win, but Dave Mann was that kind of player, and he was a tough dude. That was a legacy of Dave Mann that I encountered when I got here. There was one other thing that I remember, there was also a black, student body president.

DP: Really?

ED: I don't remember this guy's name, but I remember there was a lot of conversation on campus about this guy. He got caught up in some faculty scandals, some faculty members embraced him and he became known as a Communist. Later, driven from the campus, but I never heard anything about the professors being driven from the campus, just him.

DP: Interesting. This would be about what year roughly?

ED: This would be in the late '49s '50s.

DP: Ok, we'll check on that. I mean because we didn't know this person even existed.

ED: He was a student body president, here on this campus. I don't know his name, I've never seen him, but that was the talk. Did you know about him? Who? He was student body president here, you don't know him? I don't know everybody! No I didn't know him. Oh man, let me tell you about this guy. He was a brave person, and he had to be real smart to become the student body president, he was doing very well, until he got caught up with some professors that were communist and they took a hold of him and started guiding him in the wrong direction and he was branded a communist. This might have been later than the '50s, I don't know. But they ran him out of here because he was a communist.

[00:50:30]

DP: I know you and June had been going out long distance. Can you tell us about your relationship with June?

ED: I met my wife in high school, she was a junior I was a senior. She never really knew anything about football, but I was good, I liked that. I realized that she was dating me not because I was a football player, and we dated a few times in high school. Then I went away to college and we would write. I think once or twice she came up here to see the campus, but it was just an off and on type of thing, we were never really that serious until I graduated, and after I graduated we married, and I started my teaching and coaching career. I met Ted in high school, met my wife in high school. One thing I'd want to leave with you is that my mom said to me, I don't know what to tell you in terms of where to go to school, I'm going to pray for you – my mother's religious – I'm going to ask the Lord to guide you and that you make the right decision. I feel I made the right decision, I feel that when I came to Oregon State, I went through some things, but I made the right decision, this was the school for me.

DP: Can you talk a little bit now, as we are coming to the end of this, about your last year, the last two years you were here because that was the Rose Bowl year and then...

ED: The Rose Bowl year was the '57 year, I was here from '58 and '59...

DP: So you had two more years to go?

ED: Yeah. During my senior year I was doing my student teaching, and once again, I don't know whether they were trying to protect me, I don't know what happened, but they sent me to Portland to do my student teaching, everybody else was student teaching around in Albany [Laughter]. Wow, I drove all the way to Portland and they had a professor come out to me, he came out to evaluate and check on my stuff, and I did my student teaching at Jefferson High School. Mel Renfro was one of the senior high school players at that time, went on to become a great all-pro football player with the Dallas Cowboys, and his brother was there. So after I did my student teaching I came back here and my parents drove up and I graduated, then I left and went home. That was a short version of my senior, but there was something else in my senior year. Did you know that...I don't know whether it was my major, but I believe it was everybody at that time, had to take a swimming test in order to graduate from Oregon State. Look that up because every Saturday I went out and I was swimming and I had to swim the length of the pool and I had to go down and...

DP: Pick up something?

ED: Pick up a big 30lb weight and bring it to the top, and the swim on my side. I understand that a couple, three years, soon after I left they knocked that out because there were guys that were graduating in forestry and guys graduating as an engineer couldn't swim a lick, they couldn't get their degree. [Laughter]

DP: Are you serious? I'll definitely have to look into that one.

ED: That was a lot of fun, we had some things going here at Oregon State in those days. When I left here I left knowing a lot of people, people that to this day I still stay in touch with. In fact I had a call from Dick Cory's daughter when he passed away, she called to let me know that he had passed, otherwise I don't think I would have known. Then a good friend of mine who I visit often, Sterling Hammack, he played behind me, he was ahead of me class-wise, he passed away, prostate cancer. Sterling and Nub Beamer. Sterling was the only child in his family and his mom and dad were so proud of him, and he was my roommate on the road. His mom would come and she would make us this big basket of cookies, and boy, we would just tear into those cookies every night. He flunked out of school with three weeks to go.

[00:55:38]

DP: Oh my gosh, really? Wow.

ED: Nub Beamer, his senior year, the last game we played he checked out of school. Nub went on to play in Canada, became a very wealthy man. I saw Nub the last time I was here, four years ago, with the reunion of the team. What a nice, polite, quiet guy, but just would bust your butt on the football team. [Laughter]. He was a tank, he was that wide. Those two guys I remember because they were the only guys that ... I've never seen a guy play his last game and drops out of school. You know, he goes to Canada and Sam Wesley went to Canada. When he declared ineligible he was a junior here, he went to Canada, made the team, and came back and paid his way through Oregon State.

DP: So he played his seasons, then came back to take school?

ED: With the money that he earned playing professional football, in Canada, he paid his way through Oregon State. He graduated, I think he moved to San Jose or Fresno, one of those communities up there. I understand that he passed away here not too long ago. Those guys in my era...

DP: There are fewer and fewer guys, absolutely.

ED: Of course Amos Marsh passed away. The story with him was quite tragic. I never knew what happened to Chuck Marshall. Billy Parrott was on our team, Billy was not an athlete. Billy was out of the Air Force, and he was 25 or 26 years old and I think he was just wanting to do something...then he wanted to become a professional student. Five years after I left Oregon State, he was still here. He had a brilliant mind. So one

day, he made some mistakes and sent a resume and some work he had done to some firm in New York and they hired him right off the bat. He wanted to stay and be this professional student, and he took the job there and I lost contact with him all together, I don't know whatever happened to him. Another guy who was here was Victor Hall. His name will never show up in the books. Victor came here as a freshman, a great athlete, he was the guy that was projected to win – we used to call it in those days 440, now it's 400 meters – for the United States Olympics.

DP: Wow, he was that fast?

ED: He used to race quarter horses. Victor came here and he was going to play football. Victor flunked out, went back to California and the next year he enrolled in Cal Poly. He was in that plane crash that killed all those players. My wife and I, she was still my girlfriend at that time, were at a party one night and they announced this plane had crashed. They said, we will start giving names as we notify next kin. His name was among the first five that they gave.

DP: Wow, what a tragedy.

ED: So we left the party and went to his home. I shouldn't have gone there because his mother was crying, and she said, why didn't he stay up there with you? She didn't realize he had flunked out. What can I say? I left because I just felt so bad for her.

DP: Can I get you to now talk a little bit about your, leaving Oregon State University; I know your knee had gotten injured.

ED: Yeah, I had reconstruction knee surgery and had every intentions of going into playing pro football. The two teams that were after me most of all was the Green Bay Packers under Lombardi, and Saskatchewan Roughriders immediately. Those two teams came after me very hard, and I said, look I can't run, I've got this knee that's all screwed up here. Of course surgery in those days is not like it is...you know...this is a far cry from where it was then. I said, I'm going to maybe show up as a free agent or something for one of these teams once my knee is strong and in those days there was only fourteen teams. I got married and I started teaching school, and then my wife was pregnant. And then I said, oh shit, if I leave my job to go try to make one of these teams and I don't make it, I got more than myself to think about here. I said, I'm not going to do it, so I didn't play pro football because of that. I looked at the guys who I played with, Amos Marsh played behind me and he went on to be a big star on the Dallas Cowboys. For a long time, it took me a while to get over it. Then I became a coach, went over to Compton high school and I taught school there and I coached. I was there for a few years, I'm not sure how many, four or five, and then I went over to the junior

college, I became the coach. I was an instructor there teaching class in community disease, and I left there. People over at Long Beach State University were interested in me coming there, so I went there and I became a coach, and I also taught classes in physical education.

[1:02:08]

DP: During all of this you were actually the first African American coaches at all of these places.

ED: I was the first African American P.E. teacher at Compton, very first one. Then I went to Compton Junior College and I was the second African American to coach at Compton. I was the first African American to coach at long beach. The first African American to coach at UCLA. The first African American to coach with the Rams. The first African American coach to coach with the Houston Oilers, and the second African American to coach with the Chargers. Lamar Lundy was the first. I went through a lot of firsts.

DP: Yes you did.

ED: That means a lot of problems.

DP: Just in general.

ED: I enjoyed my time when I was at the high school. I coached the football team there. We had some great experiences there, learned a lot under the coach who was the head coach, he was a guy by the name of McCutcheon, learned a lot from him. I went on to the junior college and that was two years at the junior college – probably one of the best jobs I've ever had. I can understand why these guys wind up at the junior college and they never leave. I taught a class in commutable diseases there. The people at Long Beach State came after me, so I went to Long Beach State as a key instructor and also as a coach, and I regret to say, it was probably one of the worst jobs I've ever had. I was the defensive back coach at Long Beach State, and I was only there for a year because during the time that I was at the junior college, the last year I was there, I had signed to go to Long Beach and I went to a seminar that, of course, Prothro was giving. Coach Prothro, at the end of the seminar, Coach Prothro said, oh you got a few minutes? I want to talk to you for a second. So I said, yeah, heck yeah. We went to a little coffee shop around the corner, we were sitting there talking and that's when he asked me, I'd like to have you on my staff, is that possible? Yeah, it's possible, but I had already signed to go to Long Beach State. I said, coach, can I join you at semester break? He said, yes. So, I went back to school. During the football...during one year I was there in the football program, I coached the defensive-backs, they didn't know that I was

leaving. The coaching staff didn't know. Fred Miller, who was the athletic director, he knew, and he tried to talk me out of leaving. He said, you stay here, you're an assistant professor here now, you stay here and in a few years you'll be an associate professor and work yourself into full professorship. The coaching staff...I coached the defensive-backs on that team...I never saw one game because they always had me on the road recruiting the team that were going to play, and they were never interested in what I told them. This was to say that we've got a black on the staff, so I wasn't going to stay there anyway. The thing was, I went to UCLA, I stayed at UCLA for three or four years, then I went to the Rams. The same coaches that didn't allow me to see the games or anything then came to me and said, hey, look can I send this guy over, would you look at him?

[1:06:44]

DP: Interesting, that's frustrating.

ED: You know, it was probably the worst job that I had, the Long Beach State thing. Then UCLA was a fine place to work. Along with Compton College, I could have stayed there all my...it was a fine place to work, I enjoyed that the most. We had great teams in those years. We tied one game against Stanford and lost to SC or we'd have gone to the Rose Bowl, the last year I was there. We came up here, we beat Oregon State. Those were the years and Tommy was a great guy to work for. Tommy, I'll tell you a little bit about Tommy. Tommy was an aristocratic southerner. He didn't waste his time with a lot of people--white, black, Mexicans, whatever--because he was always taught growing up that he was beyond those people.

DP: Interesting.

ED: I had one coach tell me once and I just looked at him because Coach Prothro never came at me like that. This man was the closest man, he could have been my second father, that's the way I looked at him and that's the way he treated me. I had one coach, head coach and I won't call his name, who told me one day, Tommy Prothro is the most prejudice man I've ever seen. He said this to me. I never said a word to him, I just looked at him and walked away because that wasn't the way he came off to me. I could only speak for what I felt. When I started to work for Coach Prothro, he came across as...we used to sit and talk about some of the experiences I had here at Oregon State and he would enlighten me on some things I didn't know was a student athlete, but I found out in my conversation with him how do these things really work together. As for the coaching part of it, the man was a master. He will never, never get the credit that he brought to this profession. For example, now these quarterbacks wear these ear pieces in the helmet, Prothro came out with that in the early '60s when I was there, late

'60s, '68, '69 with Gary Beman, but it was against the rules because we never used it out on the field. We experimented with it.

DP: Ah, you did, in practice.

ED: We were never to tell because the NCAA didn't want...he was a brilliant man. He came out with, you know how the quarter backs throw the ball into the ground to ground it now? In those days you threw the ball out of bounds, when the clock was stopped. Prothro came out and put this in the national football league. We were playing, Roman Gabriel was our quarterback, it was getting close to the game ending and we hadn't scored to win. Roman dropped back, boom, because we had taught him to do it all week. The referees blow their whistles and their flags came out, that's not in the rules you can't do that. Prothro was saying, yeah, we can, we've contacted the legal office and they said it was a legitimate thing that we can do. They said, no you can't. Gabriel takes the ball, boom, stops the clock again, they throw more flags. Monday he gets a call, the league says, you are absolutely right.

[1:10:50]

DP: Ok, right.

ED: And from that day on all of the professional football teams, and all the teams in this country started to do that. He started that. There were so many other things that Prothro did. It was amazing, just amazing. I remember when the paper used to call him aloof, saying you're aloof from your players. I used to talk to him about it and say, coach, they're calling you aloof, why is that? He said, well maybe I am. He said, I've got to make decisions to cut this guy, to cut this guy, keep this guy on the board, and he says, I don't want my personal feelings to get involved with that. So, I don't get to be buddy-buddy with a player. I keep a player a player and I can do my job there without feeling any remorse. To me that makes sense.

DP: Yes, it sure does.

ED: There were all kinds of little things like this that we got to talk as I became one of his assistants that he felt comfortable sitting down and talking to me about. I really do feel that I was one of the last coaches to talk to him before he died. We gave a big ol' appreciation, award dinner down in Memphis, Tennessee for him. This was in the summer of '95. We were down there for that shindig, my plane was going to leave that afternoon at 3 o'clock. Shirley picked me up at the airport, I left my hotel room at 9 o'clock and she drove me to their apartment the coach and I sat and talked for all that time. People didn't realize it but Coach Prothro was a very wealthy man.

DP: Oh, I didn't know that.

ED: He was very wealthy. His father, either owned or was one of the original managers of the Boston Red Sox. They called him Doc Prothro. He told me, you know – at this time he was severely afflicted by prostate cancer. He said, you know, I've been to every doctor in this world, none of them, with all the riches that I have, none of them can get rid of this cancer. He was talking about himself like that, you know, he went on talking about himself. Then I remember both of them drove me to the airport when it was time for me to leave, and we said our good-byes. At that time I owned an automobile dealership in Hayward, a Chevrolet dealership. Later on I called it Durden Chevrolet, I changed the name Hayward to Durden Chevrolet. I somehow went to the store, we would call them dealership stores. Anyway, I was on my way to the dealership and I had the radio going and they broke in, and said Tommy Prothro had passed that night, this was either the late part of January or the first of February.

DP: In '96.

ED: I said, oh man, did I hear that? So when I got to the office I called Shirley. Shirley said, yes, he passed that night. So that was it. He also told me this, he said, he'd left Oregon State a lot of money, I won't discuss the amount. He says, when I pass, this money will automatically go to Oregon State, but until she dies, Shirley will get the residuals of this money, and when she dies, all of it goes to Oregon State, a very substantial amount. Even though he was at UCLA and coached UCLA, he never left Oregon State. That was his baby. I got my masters from Long Beach State, but I never left here either.

[1:15:53]

DP: That's very true, very true.

ED: So I looked back on what my mother said, I made the right decision I think. I made a lot of friends, people that I'm still in contact with, white people, black people, it didn't make any difference, a lot of friends and people I still care about.

DP: I was going to say, as we end of this interview, I was going to say, would you mind saying something about your sons? I know they were quite successful.

ED: I was getting ready to get out of coaching because my sons were getting at the age where we wanted to settle down so that they would have some stability. My oldest son went on to play basketball. The first year in his high school career he never played football, he was a basketball player. His junior year the coaches were constantly after

me, so his junior year he decided to play. Boy did he stir up things. My oldest son was a real athlete, he had talent, he was big, he was 6'1", 6'2" and he could run. The four years that he was at Helix High School, he was the only athlete that – Bill Walden went to the same high school – my son is the only athlete that ever scored four years, as a freshman on a [pro?] varsity basketball.

DP: Oh ok, interesting, wow.

ED: I don't know, maybe Bill didn't play when he was a freshman, I don't know.

DP: But your son did?

ED: Yeah, he never was defeated in the quarter mile his whole career in high school. When UCLA came the thing that bothered me a lot was Oregon State never recruited.

DP: It's a shame.

ED: What in the hell is going on?

DP: Never tried.

ED: They never came by, anything. All of the other schools: Washington, SC, and UCLA, Colorado, a lot of the big 12 teams. He really wanted to go to Colorado, I mean they came after him hard, but he wound up at UCLA. He was on that team that beat Michigan in the Rose Bowl. My youngest son, he played – I knew Bill Walsh very well – so he said, Earnel, I'm going to take him as a safety. So he went to the 49ers. My youngest son was drafted by them – he turned out to be Walter Camp All-American at the University of Arizona – and he was drafted by the Detroit Lions. After a few years they traded him to San Diego Chargers. That's where he was injured and decided he didn't want to play anymore, so he didn't play anymore. So my middle son never [Laughter] he didn't last [that was?] in college. My sons turned out to be pretty good athletes, all of them. All ran track, all played football, so I was very proud of them, and every chance I got, I tried to steal some time to go watch them perform. That's that.

DP: Well, I want to thank you very much. It was a pleasure to do this interview with you and I just want to acknowledge that all your contributions to Oregon State University, and we will do it again tonight in terms of acknowledging you. I wanted to say thanks, it's been a pleasure to work with you since you've gotten here and prior to that.

[1:20:00]