

**Samuel Proctor Oral History Program**  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

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PCM-012

Interviewee: Boyd Brevington

Interviewer: Matthew White

Date: July 1, 2010

W: My name is Matthew White. It is July first and I'm talking to Boyd Brevington for the Panama Canal Reunion. He just asked me what I want him to talk about. What we're mostly interested in is the social aspects, the day to day living of what it was like to be in the Canal Zone. We can move from wherever that takes us given your history, but we're not interested necessarily in the grand events of the ebb and flow of international politics or the military or things like that. We're interested purely in your personal experiences and what it was like to live in the Canal Zone. Starting of course with who you are and how you found yourself in the Canal.

B: I was born in 1932. My grandfather, Harry Franklin Brevington, in May of 1912, left his three sons, daughter, and wife in Cleveland. The youngest son was my Dad. He went down there on May fifth and was immediately hired. He was very good with his hands, and his brains. They hired him as a carpenter to start with at Pedro Miguel, we called it Peter McGill. Then he was transferred to the Atlantic side where he became a foreman in the construction of defense [Pedro Miguel is a small town in the Panama Canal Zone, located on the east bank of the Canal near one of the locks]. The Canal had the north and the south, and at each entrance to the Canal, they built fortifications for defense purposes. Grandpa Harry-- I've got pictures of these huge canons that he had to install-- after that

was done, he stayed there and my Dad went to local schools. My Dad and my Grandfather rarely ever talked to me about their time there. Of course as a teenager, was I interested? Not until I got married and moved away. But Gramps resigned and went up to L.A. for a while, where my father graduated high school. Then in 1929, when the crash came, he went back to the Zone and was rehired.

W: Your Dad or Grandfather?

B: My Dad. My Grandfather went back and was rehired. His two sons, my Uncle Donald and Uncle Harold, stayed. Donald married. They stayed, they didn't go to L.A., just my aunt and my father went up there. They both graduated high school up there. Anyway, they went back and my dad started working for the Hotel Tivoli. The Canal didn't have any commercial things. You didn't advertise. There were no sales because it didn't compete against itself. My dad got a job as a hotel assistant at the Hotel Tivoli, which was on our Pacific side. The Hotel Washington was on the other side. Just as an aside, every year the lame duck congressman, with the government paying their way, came down to stay in the Tivoli for a few days and then went back.

W: Now when you say lame duck, were they—

B: They were not reelected.

W: They were just people who had just lost an election, so they—

B: They lost, or were retiring. But senators and congressman were ever coming down there because of legislation. We had no representation and all that kind of stuff. Just as an aside, politics was rarely ever discussed. You didn't know anybody being in any kind of a party, unless they brought it up. We all talked about canals and stuff—what was going on at your job and who's getting appointed, and you weren't getting up in the hierarchy of things.

W: Did you have any elections?

B: We elected nobody. Now, you had to keep on file your stateside residence, always. They kept putting out this information slip and it would change and who was still on the states that you—because when you went on vacation, your way was paid to that stateside location on the ship, trains and all that stuff. So that's the way they had to keep that going for you.

W: Pardon me for interrupting. Now, is that where you had to return every two years? What did they call it? The "home return" or something? Is that where you had to return to?

B: That, I do not know because we didn't do it every two years. Every employee worked, and for every month or so, you earn so many hours of vacation time. Since it was so far away to the States—like my dad, he would work for a few years and earn three months vacation. So, we could go to the States and really visit family and friends. We did that in 1948, after the war. We put our 1941

Plymouth on the Panama Canal railroad ship, took it to the States, got it and we toured around, put it on and we came back. People would do that. Since the canal did not sell cars and all those kinds of things, people would go to the states, buy a Chevy, put it on the ship.

W: Yeah, I was going to ask you where you bought your car.

B: Oh, you could buy used ones in Panama City. My folks never had a new car, they always bought used ones. So, my mother graduated from Balboa High School in 1930, I graduated there in 1950. Somehow or another, my mom caught the eye of my dad--he was four years out of high school--and they dated. My mom was staying with two of her sisters, not married. The fourth sister had gone there with her husband, who was a medical doctor. He's got an interesting background. He had been to Alaska and Arizona, he was quite an adventurer. He met my Aunt Bessie in New Bern, North Carolina, the home of the Bell family, my mother's side. They were down there and I guess Aunt Bessie told her three sisters, it's nice down here, come on down, and they did. My mother, not having graduated high school, went to the new Balboa High School, which became an elementary school by the time I got to go to school. They dated, and my Aunt Nita, who was in charge of her, didn't much care for my dad. So he went home to Cleveland, she went to New Bern, North Carolina. They'd made arrangements to take the same ship back to the Zone. So, they met in New York City, were married, spent a night in the Hotel Dixie or so, got on a ship and when they got

back they told Nita, we've done it. After that, it was okay. They never had a church wedding or anything like that. Then in [19]32 I came along. They were married in [19]30.

W: Now, you said you graduated from Balboa High School?

B: Uh-huh.

W: In 1950?

B: Uh-huh.

W: What was it like to go to high school?

B: I went from kindergarten all the way up to grade 12, except for [19]42, I went to North Carolina because of the war for a few months. But anyway, your kindergarten class would go all the way through high school with you.

W: How large was your class?

B: Probably about 125 people. There was a high school on the Pacific and one on the Atlantic. We knew each other all that time, through every grade. We were a group that knew each other, dated each other, had parties with each other, played sports with each other, went to dances with each other, and so on. Occasionally, a kid would come in from the States and we would accept him or her into our group.

W: Did that include the military dependents as well? Did they go to the high school?

B: The military was there for the defense of the canal and their bases were within the Zone. Panama would not permit them on the outside until World War II, when the war was over they had to come back in. They came to our schools. The military had their PX and their commissary which they'd go to, but they didn't make schools and they came to our schools [PX, or Post Exchange, and commissaries were retail stores located on army bases]. So we got to know them-- the military brats and the Canal Zone brats got together. So, that was it. I'm having my sixtieth reunion tomorrow night and I'm going to present what I'm doing to you now, but we're going to interact with our group. There are about forty of us here. Reunions are very important to us, as this is. It provided a place where we could get together in high school, because we always came here. You wanted to know about how we lived with one another? Is that what you wanted-

W: Well I'm still interested in your high school or school experience. For example, I heard in the previous group we just listened to, they talked a little bit about sports teams and rivalries. I found that—did you play any sports?

B: Always.

W: Football, he mentioned. Who else did you play? Did you just play each other? Who else plays football in Central America?

B: Through elementary school, the Canal schools and recreation were excellent in providing activities. We were always busy. After school there were intramurals at the high school or varsity sports, et cetera. When school was out, we had a recreational program that was outstanding with archery, fencing and all kinds of things. Baseball, all of our buddies would get together, we were divided by age. There was no little league, no adult supervision. No adults coming and yelling at us. The coach would give us a bag with balls and bats and we'd go over there and practice and one of us would be captain. We'd take the train to play to Gamboa or Peter McGill [Gamboa is a township in the Panama Canal Zone, located on a sharp bend of the Chagres River, northwest of Pedro McGill]. We'd play the other towns. Basketball was the same. Then when we got to junior high we came together as one, all of the schools. We knew all the identities of the elementary school, but we all became one in the junior high and high schools. To this day, we still remember Balboa High as the place. Our teachers, we boast about them. They were all hired, mostly from the northeast, many of them from Columbia with master's degrees.

W: Columbia, you mean the school, not the country?

B: Columbia University. Which I understood back in those days was pretty high on teacher education. Some in the Midwest, Wisconsin. But very few, if any, of our teachers came from the West Coast because it was easier to go up and recruit. We got an education; all of our books were from the United States. We studied

United States history. We did not study Panama history. We had it all. Our English in ninth grade was *Ivanhoe* and tenth grade was *Silas Marner*. Junior year, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and senior year she was getting us ready for college. We were divided into two groups, by the way, college bound kids and non-college bound kids. But it didn't make any difference to us who was going where. One of the biggest parts of our education was dance. In elementary school we went to a class called cotillion where they taught us to dance-- the foxtrot, waltz, all of those things.

W: And what year was that? That was elementary school?

B: That might have been the beginning of junior high, somewhere in that area. We did it at the YMCA in their auditorium. And then in the high school, we had about four formal dances, wore a tux. Think about the tropics. I had mine tailor made in Panama City, wore it all the way through. We had a Christmas dance, Easter dance, all these things, and then if we didn't have a big formal one, we had informal ones after a game. If that wasn't enough we'd get in the gym and play records. We had circular tables and we held our big dances at the Hotel Tivoli. Manners and social niceties were big. We sat at a circular table, a couple went out to dance, when they came back all the guys stood up when the girl was seated. Our junior senior prom—we just learned all these things from these parents who had gone through the Depression, et cetera. Which by the way did not hit the Canal Zone as much as it hit the States. In fact, many people moved

down, you hardly ever felt the effects of the Depression down there. As I said, varsity sports were big time. Whom did we play?

W: Yeah.

B: Cristobal High School, on the Atlantic side. They were a little bit smaller than us. Also the junior college, which was housed in the same building as Balboa High School. That was our scholastic league.

W: Just three teams?

B Three teams. In football, we played home and away, basketball, home and away, and baseball, we'd play a few more games. We had a track meet. Since we were living in the tropics, when you got out of school at 3 it was quite warm and humid. It didn't matter. You hardly even knew it, you grew up with it. We had intramurals and then we had all stars, and they played the other schools. Then, when I was a junior we brought in the varsity system, no more all stars. We started wearing uniforms. In my senior year, the fall of 1949, we had our first tackle football game. Since we had lights at our stadium and the other side had lights, cooler evenings. It didn't matter that we practiced in the evenings. My high school, we were the first interscholastic champion, we won 4- 0. I was a quarterback and it was a lot of fun. Guys from that school went away to scholarships at big schools and so on. My number one sport was baseball. I just loved baseball. When they got us uniforms for baseball-- Balboa High was red and white—from head to toe

the uniforms were red. Wild. Blue and gold was Cristobal so their uniforms were all blue. And the JC was green and white, their uniforms were all green.

W: Not even interrupted by stripes or—

B: No. Well we played each other.

W: It frankly sounds quite garish-

B: Oh no, [laughter]. Then, when you got out of school—there was a group called the working boys. The kids who got out of high school and stayed there and went through apprenticeships or whatever-- and they wanted to continue playing. So, they became working boys and the high school would play them in an off-season, a few extra games, and that was kind of neat.

W: Now tell me a little bit about this time period, about your family. How big was your family? Where did you live?

B: My grandfather, three sons, and a daughter; they all came down. The youngest, my father, I've told you about him. My Aunt Etha, she spent some time there and then she went to LA, stayed, and married my Uncle Tom up there. They never went back. Donald married a girl from Connecticut, and he lived on the Atlantic side. He worked for the commissary division. He was an electrician. Over there, on the Atlantic side, they processed our milk and ice cream and shipped it to our side. He worked with them until he retired. They had one girl, my cousin Jane.

She married a stateside man and they lived in New Jersey. After my aunt and uncle passed, they moved into their house in Rock Stream, New York, which was built during the Revolutionary War. Beautiful house, we stayed in it once. My Uncle Donald, if you want to know about him, he had his problems. He married a woman in LA and brought her down to the Zone for a while and they divorced. He was a very sad man. I don't know what his problems were, but he took his own life. I was walking home one day, past his bachelor quarters, and I saw a police car out there and thought, my Uncle Donald lives there. Got home, another police car out front. I got up the stairs and my dad was crying; they'd told him. My grandfather came down from Pasadena and spent some time with us. Donald left ten thousand dollars and Grandpa divided it among the three living kids, he didn't keep anything for himself. So, that was Uncle Donald. My dad, as I say, retired down there. My mother went to work there. She went to work for the laundry. One laundry serviced the whole isthmus, one bakery serviced the whole isthmus, one dairy—all of the dairy cows were on the Atlantic side. The trains were going back and forth all the time. The canal had three ships up to New York, up and back, up and back, and that's where we got all of our dry goods.

W: So, let me interrupt here for a second, everyone sent their laundry? There were no in house machines or hand doing?

B: No. A maid. You always had a maid, as soon as you got up enough salary you hired a maid, a Panamanian lady. They were paid like forty dollars a month. They

could come in the morning and leave in the evening. They could do your laundry. Every apartment, every building, had its own washtubs, every house had its own clothesline. But my mom, since she worked at the laundry, she would take shirts and things like that, give them off, take them home. Dry cleaning and white shirts and all that were sent to the laundry. It was a huge building, modern [inaudible]. My dad, at one time, got to work for the housing division, which took care of all of our buildings. They said in the Canal Zone it was as if a gardener had come along with scissors and cut the grass. Immaculate, nothing out of place. I used to tell people, what do you do, well my dad cuts your lawn and my mom does your laundry. But be that as it may, where do we go from there?

W: Well, you said your uncle lived in bachelor's quarters, and then you lived where? Who chose where you got to live?

B: Early on, in the construction days, the government in the States decided that it had to do a number one job. It couldn't be like the French. We're gonna go down there, we're gonna take charge, we're gonna get this thing done, it's gonna take ten years, and it's gonna be within budget, et cetera. Nobody goofs off. They hired all these guys in the States and sent them down there. They were foreman types, because they brought in from the islands, the Caribbean, the manual labor guys to do all the digging and that kind of thing. The men who went down there, like my grandfather, they were tradesmen mostly. Then the Canal, five miles on each side of the waterway, the boundaries . . . And at that time most of the guys

were bachelors. Well, what's a bachelor to do after he gets off of work? He drinks, he does whatever, and so they go in the wild. They made their own police force, which was almost like an army. Then they decided we can't have this. So they started providing the commissary services, the recreation, entertainment schools, everything, for the Canal employees. You didn't have to pay anything for these things. If they started goofing up, and if you didn't cut it, back to the States you went. They had inspectors. We called them gum-shoes-- couldn't hear them around-- and they watched people working. Work was it, you did your job, you did an outstanding way, or I'd come do it again. There is a book called *The Canal Builders*, which I'm telling you about right now. A history professor, University of Maryland, wrote the book, excellent book. You can see it here in the museum if you want to take a look at it.

W: I'm from Maryland, actually, so a little pride there.

B: That book explains to me why it was I lived the way I did when I was there. Because it started there in 1910 and all that, building all of these-- As I say, you didn't elect anybody unless you had an absentee ballot. We never had an election for anything. The governor was basically just a name, it was run by an executive secretary who was the boss. We all knew who the executive secretary was. Then there were all these sub-bosses going down. However, I got the feeling as a kid growing up down there that all the Zonians didn't much care for

the Democrats in charge back in Washington from FDR on. Because they made certain policies but we carried them out.

W: Well then, of course you've got a Republican, Eisenhower, there—did you guys notice a difference between administrations in Washington?

B: No, no, they always—I won't use the word, but they always complained about what the States was doing, oh, leave us alone. There was a Panama Canal; I think it was a committee, under the direction of the Secretary of the Army. This was the number one guy in Washington, D.C., that was representing the Canal to the secretary back in those days during war and then the president. The governor was usually a general in the Corps of Engineers. You can understand why. He was more of a title. He had a nice house up on a hill, a beautiful place. Now, you asked about homes. And they built these homes-- the town of Balboa was a marsh. There's this hill called Ancon Hill and another hill, Sosa Hill, and the Canal. And what do you do with the diggings? You bring them and you put them in this marsh and then you bring them out and then you build this town. What else do you do with the diggings? Well, there were these three islands out here where they put these fortifications. How do you get back to the mainland? You build a causeway, all from the diggings. So, that's where a lot of that went. We lived in the Balboa Flats, the land was all flat there.

W: And that was on top of sort of fill—

B: It was fill dirt, yeah. We all lived on fill dirt there. Then Balboa Heights was a little up the hill, Ancon Hill, toward Panama City. They built two kinds of houses, wooden ones, built for the tropics, all screened in, and there were four families.

W: In one building?

B: One building, four families, A, B, C, D. From the administration building, which was up on a hill, down to the center of my town of Balboa, where the clubhouse was—there was a restaurant and toiletries and a theater, all that kind of stuff—there was a street coming down there and on both sides of that we built concrete houses, once again four. Houses always built off the ground, not for flooding—insects. You go up the stilt and there was this tin thing going around to keep them from going up. So, we had those and each house had these two laundry things. You did not live, according to the Canal records, on a street. You lived in a house. We lived on streets, they had names, but according to the—you lived in Balboa 0848 House B, that was on your official record.

W: Would that be your mailing address? If I mailed you a letter that's what it would say?

B: No, no, no. No mail came to the house. Never. No mailman walking around. Balboa Post Office, Diablo Post Office, Ancon, each town had its own post office. It was all delivered there and we all had a box. Three and a half, two and a half, four and a half, that was our— It was delivered there.

W: What was at three and a half, two and a half?

B: That was the combination to get into our—

W: Oh, you remembered all of these years?

B: Oh yeah. And it was funny because ours was box 111 and it was in the top row and we'd drive up into the parking lot, stop the car, look up at our box, and the lights inside the office would reflect. If we saw the light, we drove on because there was nothing in there. Just an aside. Everything was air mail if you wanted to get a stateside bag. If you mailed something regular mail it took three to four weeks, on the slow ship. So that's the way mail was. No long distance telephone, we sent cables and so on, wrote lots of letters.

W: When you were growing up, what about your immediate family? You told me about your aunts and uncles. What about your immediate family?

B: I have a sister, lives in Connecticut now. She's three years younger than I. So there were four of us.

W: Were there sports for her to play?

B: Girls got their sports too, but not as much as boys. In high school they played volleyball and softball—did I say basketball? That was about it for them. They didn't have track, and so on. They would play the other schools and we would go out and cheer them as they would go out and cheer us while we were playing.

There was nothing to keep you from being an active person, whether you be a boy or a girl. In high school, the Spanish club, the chemistry club, and the photography club—we had all these clubs that you could join. Each club had a sponsor from the high school and that was good.

W: What were your favorite hobbies in school? Besides the sports.

B: Gee, not much. I had an electric train as a kid and I just loved my electric train. Lots of rain. It rained 85 inches on my side, Pacific, and 115 on the Atlantic side. So we had 9 months rain, 3 months no rain.

W: A lot of indoor hobbies, I suspect.

B: Yeah. So I would get the train out and play with it. I didn't mind being alone. I did model airplanes, which you can't get anymore, made out of balsa wood. You can't get those, hardly—can you find them?

W: With rubber bands and stuff, not the kind you make yourself and put an engine on.

B: We made our own scrapbooks. A buddy of mine, Albert Joyce, he and I did football, and another friend of mine, Norby Jones, we did World War II. To me, and my group, if we say war we know what we mean. It was the war, World War II. With my group, that was it. The Panamanians made our newspapers—there

were two, a morning and an afternoon. I don't know if you've been told about that.

W: No, I haven't. As a matter of fact I was just thinking to myself how you kept up with events.

B: *La Estrella*, "The Star and Herald" was the morning, and the *Panama American*, the evening. That was divided into two parts. On the outside was English, three or four pages, and the inside was Spanish, three or four pages. But no matter who you were, you got both. I was greatly interested in the war. Every evening I would get the paper and find out what was the Fourth Army doing, what was the Fifteenth Air Force doing, and I knew the commanding generals and where they were going each time. I followed it all the way to Normandy and all the rest of this stuff. So that's how we did that.

W: Let me ask about the newspaper real quick. You said the Panamanians produced it?

B: Yes.

W: And were they Panamanians who did the reporting and the writing and the—

B: No. In the English—the AP, the NEAA, the UP, that [News Agencies during World War II that covered international affairs Associated Press, United Press]. They however, would have one of their reporters write up our sports in English,

or something that was going on with our local government in the Canal Zone. We also had some Americans; some Zonians, would be employed by the newspaper to do things. We had our own local news in the inside.

W: I was going to ask you, as a sports fan, were you able to follow stateside?

B: Yes.

W: And how did you do that?

B: All they gave were the line scores, no box scores. Oh, I devoured it. My dad was from Cleveland so I was an Indians fan. You know, I hated the Yankees and all this stuff. And every kid who was a Yankee fan, oh you just wanna be a winner. Anyway, I followed all the bowl games in football, and then Indianapolis, and the Kentucky Derby. All these things were important to me, and to this day still are. All we'd get were the homerun leaders. But at night, radio, short band. I'd turn the dial and I might get a station from New York City or Florida.

W: Oh really? Florida I could see, or maybe Dallas or somewhere in Texas. But New York, fabulous!

B: Yeah, and usually I would get a baseball recreation game that took a half an hour. Now this was a whole thing—Boyd come to bed! You know, the folks. And then on weekends we got radio live. Red Barber for the Dodgers and Mel Allen for the Yankees. I just fell in love with those guys. To me, they were the ultimate

baseball announcers. So that's the way I followed those. Our radio, it was the armed forces radio station. That was the only English. Later, after the war, the TV came down. Our radio, we would have the Shadow, Jack Benny, and Bob Hope; but they were three months late. Our movies were the same way. We got your stateside movies, but they were three months later. But we did get the Movietone News right on the dot. Each town had its own theater, so down would come *Gone With the Wind* and it would start in Balboa, go to Diablo, go to Ancon [Fox Movietone News, was a newsreel that aired before films between 1929 and 1963 in the United States].

W: So you had one copy for the whole Zone?

B: Yeah. So if you missed it in your town you could go to the next town. Movies were very big. Friday nights was a Buck Rogers serial with a movie and during the summer they put on for us, to keep us busy, a serial on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, a matinee. We didn't get an air-conditioned theater until the year I graduated high school in 1950. We were the first class to have the air conditioned theater. There was no air conditioning while I lived in the Zone—fans, whatever. So that was kind of neat [Buck Rogers is a character from a well known science fiction series, *Armageddon 2419 A.D.*].

W: You said you graduated in 1950, what did you do after that? You said you were on the college track in high school, so did you go to college? If so, where?

B: My mom, North Carolina. My dad, Ohio. Where you gonna go to school? Oh, I think I'll go to Duke, or maybe Ohio State, maybe Southern Cal. What are you gonna study? Oh, accounting—my dad. So I wanted to go to a small school. There was a small school in North Carolina called Guilford. My grandmother was given a scholarship there. It's a Quaker school. I got their application and everything and my dad said, you know, Grandpa is living in Pasadena, and I remember a small school there, let's see about that. Occidental College. Four years, went to Oxy. Then married, two years in the army, Berkeley, another credential, started teaching. So, in 2008, my genealogy society—the second one I belong to—I said, you know folks, I've got something in common with our two candidates, McCain and Obama. McCain and I were born in the same place—he was born in the Canal Zone—and Obama and I attended the same college. I was brought up to think, you can never be President of the United States because you were not born within the continental limits, even though I was an American citizen by birth and location. Well, up came certain people during the thing who wanted to say oh, McCain can't do it because he was born in the Canal Zone. He was born, in the Navy, in Coco Solo on the Atlantic side. But he had two American parents, born in American territory. I thought well, that blows my—

W: Well, someone lied to you. [laughter] Just an aside, I grew up in a military town—

B: Did you? Where?

W: Edgewood, Maryland. It's now called Aberdeen Proving Ground—chemical stuff, weapons and ordinance. But I had lots of military friends and they were born all over the world and they were always told they could be president, as long as they were born on the military—and their parents were—that's what they were told anyway.

B: Lies, lies, lies. [laughter]

W: Once you finished college, did you return to the Canal Zone?

B: So [19]56 came, first child, [19]58, second child, [19]61, third child.

W: Where are you—

B: In Sacramento. Oh no, Mark was born in Arizona when I was in the army, Douglas, Arizona. Back in Sacramento, the two girls. My folks still working, both for the Panama Canal. They paid our way down when the son was two and the daughter was one. We went down for a Christmas. They brought me home my first summer from Oxy, and then the next three summers I stayed and worked at the school and went down for Christmas time. That was [19]59 I think it was. Then I didn't go back until [19]79. [19]79 was the year that the Carter-Torrijos Treaty took place and the land—five miles on each side, coast to coast—was in October of [19]79 to become Panamanian [the Carter-Torrijos Treaties were two treaties signed by the United States and Panama in 1977 agreeing to transfer control of the Panama Canal over to Panama by 1999. The Panama Canal Zone

was dissolved within two years of the signing of the treaties]. So my sister and brother-in-law were still working there and they said come down, last time. So I went down and spent two weeks with them and I took my daughter who had just graduated high school. That was [19]79. Then I kinda got homesick. In 2004 my wife and I went back to what's called a dry season tour—there is a company here operated by a classmate of mine—and you spend nine or ten days down there and they take you around. I just loved it, we had a great time. Then in 2005, my wife and I, and my sister, and my cousin, and her two cousins went with us. Then the next year my wife and I went alone and I said I don't want to spend so much time touring, I want to spend time in Balboa where I can walk around. In 2006, I said to my wife, hesitantly, are we going back to Panama? Yes! Oh, we are? Who's going? She said everybody. I said what? She said yeah I talked to the kids. They all wanna go and we're taking them—thirteen of us.

W: Wow. So you had kids, grandkids?

B: Three married children, five grandchildren. I got in touch with my high school friend and gave her all the arrangements. I ordered all the tickets, got them all down there. Had a great tour, we had our own little minibus, went all over the place and they saw the places that I was talking about to prove that I'm not a liar. (laughter) That was 2006 and we had a good time. In 2008, I took my son. I wanted him to see, just he and I—a little bit more bonding and we could do what we wanted to do and he could ask questions. In fact, he would put his audio

thing, recorder, on and he interviewed me while we were there. Why, Dad, did you do this? Why'd you do that? We had a good time. So, 2008 was the last time.

W: Do you plan on going back?

B: Yes.

W: Any specific plans?

B: Each time I've been back I go to a place that I'd never been as a kid. On the Atlantic side I went to Portobello. Which is quite important in the history of trade because colonial ships would come to Portobello, ship them by river and back to the other side. Chilean gold would come up, go across to the... The Spaniards were down there for only one reason, to bring back gold and silver. That's why they have the political systems they have now, whereas in the states it was colonizing back to the king, et cetera, and that's why we have what we do today. It's interesting to go back. I'd never been to the interior of Panama toward Costa Rica. I did that in 2004. I know where my coffee comes from now. And I order all of my coffee from Panama! There's an outfit right here at the convention they call Coffee from Panama. They're Americans and they buy their coffee there, ship it to Florida, grind it...

W: Now, if I'm thinking about comparing Panamanian coffee to other coffee, what am I looking for? What's good about Panamanian coffee, other than it's from your home?

B: Altitude, shade, and rain make your coffee. The best coffee is grown, the beans are grown—they're called berries by the way—in shade.

W: Okay, I've heard of shade-grown coffee.

B: Most of Costa Rican and Panamanian, from the top Boquetes where it's grown, that's where it is. And we went through one of those while we were there in 2004, very interesting. How to grind it and how to make it. We Americans like our drinks sweet, we don't like sour, so we put in sugar and milk and our beers and cokes are all... Buy anyway, Panamanians drink café con leche. [leche is the word Milk in Spanish]

W: Uh-huh.

B: You say uh-huh?

W: Well, I've heard of it.

B: You have the coffee in this hand and the milk in the hand and you go like this. We were in Costa Rica once—

W: So is it steamed milk or is it cold?

B: It's usually canned milk. It's heated and then taken off, before it curdles or whatever. We were in San Jose, Costa Rica going back in [19]79, put our daughter on an airplane, shipped her back home, my wife and I stayed there. For breakfast, we said café negra. Señor? Café negra! [negra is the word Black in Spanish] You don't offer black coffee in Costa Rica, you just order coffee. No leche. No leche. He didn't know what to do. We were sitting there with the volcanoes and all that. Sitting there one morning in our cubicles where we were eating breakfast so you couldn't see over the top. We overheard -well, we're gonna go today and I'm gonna go here in Nicaragua and you guys go over there and we'll meet here and there. It was ABC news. What's the guy's name? Not Alfredo... He's now with Fox News.

W: Oh, uh...yeah, I could picture him.

B: And Alfredo is getting in the way—it'll come to me—

W: Geraldo Rivera?

B: That's it! He was saying that we're gonna do this and we're gonna try to—now this was the Nicaraguan revolution—the Sandinistas were doing [The Sandinista National Liberation Front (Spanish: Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, or FSLN) is today a social democratic political party in Nicaragua. Its members are called Sandinistas in both English and Spanish.]... In the hotel one night we heard all this ruckus and that was when the Sandinistas finally took control [Sandinistas were Nicaraguan Leftists who fought Somoza regime during the

Nicaraguan Revolution]. The Costa Ricans who had Sandinistas living with them because they didn't want to be there—I mean the others—they were given permission by the Costa Ricans to parade. So we were there during that time, rather interesting.

W: What was that like? In [19]79 you went and visited. You knew that your home was about ready to be sort of turned over to the Panamanians. What was that like? What did you go back and see? What was important to you? How did you feel?

B: Until 2000, when the whole thing was given over, my friends and my sister was still there somewhat. By treaty, the Zonians were offered full retirement before age 50. You could stay and keep working and then retire and get more. My sister and brother-in-law decided to stay a little bit longer. So, they kept staying in the Zone which was still Panama. It was done the right way. There was a commission operator. For the first few years it was American five, Panamanian four, chairman American. After that, it switched. They were making sure that all of these positions that were very important to the operation of the Canal were being handed over in the right way. Training a Panamanian, the American would stay, and so on and so on. It went rather well. But when I went down in [19]79, I said to my classmates, hey guys how come? They said, Boydy, the senators came down here and they interviewed us and they said you're right, we have to keep this. They went right back to the senate and voted for the treaty. So, some of them were a little bit upset with that. I never was.

W: I'm sorry I'm a little confused. The senators came down...

B: U.S. senators.

W: And they were told what?

B: They would interview my friends who were still living there, local employees, what do you think? They said no we have to keep doing this. The most important thing about an American wherever you go is maintenance. We maintain things. We don't let them fall apart. And that was important to the operation of the Canal. You had to clean those gates every few years. So they were concerned. They made sure that during the interim time those who were to take over would know what to do.

W: So when the senators went back then, they voted for the treaty? So your friends felt that they were betrayed?

B: Exactly. I was living in the States at the time and people were asking me what do you think? I said look, I'm a pragmatist. If it works it works. I don't know what's going to happen, we really don't know what's going to happen. Let's hope for the best. I'm not against this. I'm not for it. I think it's gone rather well. When I go back, it's sufficient. Panama's doing a good job. They're now building that new set of locks to be done in [20]14 or something like that. It was a wise thing this treaty did, it made the operation of the Canal and its income separate from the Republic of Panama's budget because the Panamanians have a way of—well,

their history has been oligarchy. Which family takes over now and makes the money, which family now... So, they had to separate that so this Canal could do what it wanted to do. When they passed that referendum of six million or so they had no problem because they knew where the money was coming from. That was a wise thing, too.

W: I've only been in a couple of these interviews, or listened to some done previously, that seems to be the consensus it has turned out—

B: There are some of my friends who will refute what I'm saying.

W: They will?

B: Yeah.

W: Well maybe I'll talk to some of them.

B: [Laughs]

W: Did you ever personally work for the Canal Zone?

B: One summer when I went home. It was a recreation. Director of the gym, I ran the gym since I was a P.E. major. That's all I ever worked.

W: You were a P.E. major? As a college—

B: In college, yeah.

W: And was that what you taught then, when you taught?

B: For six years in Sacramento and then I went to San Diego County to El Cajon, an elementary district, and I became the supervisor, then a principal, and then my last eleven years I taught grades four, five, and six. I loved it.

W: I had another question and now I've completely forgotten what it was. Oh I know what I was going to say. My understanding is, and of course please always correct me, that it was toward the [19]50s when you started to see a lot more of the protests, the rioting, or more peaceful protests by the Panamanians. Were you there for any of that or were you gone?

B: No, I left in [19]50. [19]61. Once a year, I can't remember what time of year it was, the students at the University of Panama, which is just a few streets over from the Zone—the Fourth of July Avenue, Zone, Panama City, if you walked across the street you were in a foreign country. These kids, students, protested about their government. Sometimes they got close. Our army would put tanks and soldiers just to make sure they didn't come over. I'm gonna find out tomorrow night when I talk with my classmates more about this thing about them coming over to Balboa High School and shooting, and there's now a monument to the kids who fell, the Panamanians.

W: And what year was that?

B: [19]61, somewhere around there. Eisenhower, President. What they wanted was they wanted to put the American flag in front of my high school—no, the Panamanian flag, in front of our high school. Ike said, what's the big deal? Put

them up! So they did. Up at the administration building where we had our government—well what ran the Canal, too. Atop of Ancon Hill which looked into Panama on one side, it was quite an impressive hill. We had one, two. Now you go back, Panamanian, Panamanian. I was living in Sacramento at the time and I picked up a copy of *Look* magazine—can't find it anymore—and they had an article about the goings on... I read this one guy in an article, he was quite biased, I thought he was against us. He said, even the Canal Zone students don't study Spanish. (quickly clapped hands sound) It took me that long to pick up a piece of paper and write that man. Dear Sir, care of *Look* magazine, I am from the Canal Zone. In the seventh grade, in 1943 or [194]4, eighth grade, ninth grade, and tenth grade, I took Spanish at Canal Zone schools and sought Spanish afterwards. I had Panamanian students going to my school. You were wrong. He writes back, on a piece of paper like this, in his own handwriting, Dear Mr. Brevington, my wife has told me to go to the kitchen blackboard and write one hundred times, Spanish was taught in the Canal Zone schools. Okay, big deal. But they never came back in *Look* magazine to correct what he said. Made us look bad. I didn't like it.

W: I heard a previous group, that there was misinformation in the States about—

B: My sister was keeping me up, she would send articles from the papers and she would type them up and send them to me. That way I kept with it. But I want to

know more about how my friends felt about it when they lived there, I didn't get much of that.

W: We typically plan for these things to be about an hour, that's about all people can take talking.

B: Oh, really?

W: Well, sometimes if they get going they can last an hour and a half but everyone I've done everyone starts winding down. So we're getting to about the one hour mark.

B: I spent a lot of time in bed last night thinking about what to say to you.

W: Well what have you not said that you wanted to say?

B: And then I've gone over this reunion that I'm having tomorrow night, spent over a year getting things together to go through with it. I'm writing a memoir, Canal Zone memoir 1932 to 1950, which is when I left. I'd meet somebody, even today I could meet somebody, don't know me, I don't know them. Oh hi, I'm Boyd Brevington, you're Harry. Where you from? Um... I'm from the Canal Zone. Look like, where in the heck is that? So now I don't say that, I say I'm from the Panama Canal Zone. Oh! Your folks were in the military? (quickly clapped hands sound) I say to myself, how much education about where I grew up did you ever get? Because I know more about where you got it because I studied the same

book as you did. Zilch. I said no, I think you need to know that the operation of the Canal was by civilians, totally. Military were there for defense, only, that's it. So I'm writing a memoir for my kids and grandkids and anybody else who wants to read it. A lot of my friends are writing things. I started this on the computer and I get back to it now and again. I've got pictures, I did my genealogy, I've got books of knowing about why was I there, who were my people? I think I've told you quite a bit about who they were. All the way back to the American Revolution and this kind of thing.

W: Wow. Let me just back track to something that you mentioned, the Panamanians did go to your high school. Was it a strictly Canal Zone school for just Canal Zone?

B: We paid nothing. If they wanted to come over, which they did, they paid a tuition. I don't know what it was. So there might have been in my class twenty or thirty. Now these were not (knocks wood) how shall I say...The Republic is run by European oriented—that's the proper way to say it—and the workers are local workers, many of them we brought over and they lived in Panama. From Barbados and so on, and the local Indians there, they do the manual labor for the Panama. We hired them at forty or sixty cents an hour to do the hard work.

W: So the kids who came to your high school, that would be the—

B: They would go on to the States. Many of them became lawyers. All their doctors in Panama went to our schools. I think now the University of Panama offers medical, I think. They have an excellent, as I understand it, social security system. They take care of their people. They've improved their working conditions for the people. Many of the kids, the Panamanians, are still working in the Zone. They're working on the locks. You know, the mules that pull the ships through. Those operators are all Panamanian now. In [19]79, I went back (hits wood) A high school classmate, ol' George Earl McArthur, he had become a supervisor of the Miraflores Locks, the first locks you come to and he made arrangements for me to come out with my wife and daughter. We went across-- there's a walkway over the gates and there was a tourist walk where they could watch, they never went across. We walked across. The guy had just come back from vacation and he said, this fella, Boydy, is gonna take you and your wife and daughter places people are not permitted to go. You're going down. I'd never been down in there. Saw all of the big tunnels where the water goes, no pump puts water in and out of the lake, it's all centrifugal. Gravity. We saw these huge weirs wheels that would open the gates. A forty pound electric motor, excuse me, forty horsepower, started one and then they did the others. Then we went up into the operation. There's a building over the Canal, we stood on the side and we were invited to go inside. In the middle of this room is the operation of each lock and there are handles that go like this that turn. The guy said to me, would you like to open that lock? I'm getting goose pimples even right now thinking

about it. Would I ever! So he said, a ship is coming through, I'll tell you when to do it. Okay, flip it! I flipped it, walked out, and I watched the gate open.

W: And that's the first time you had ever seen the actual workings of the—

B: No, no, first time I'd ever been in the control tower and operated one. I've seen them many times. So that was one of the thrills of my life was to be able to do that. It's like going up the Empire State Building. I never went through the Canal until [19]79. The Canal there where I lived in 1941, before the war broke out and look at those ships go by. I wonder where he's coming from, I wonder where he's going. I'd wave at the sailors.

W: So like I asked you before, is there anything else that you thought of last night or a story you wanted to tell? An anecdote that you think might illustrate your life in the Canal?

B: In the Republic, they had no army, no police force. They had what were called la guardia, their national guard, which was used by Torrijos and Noriega. They became commanders in this outfit and if you became a commander you could overthrow the government and take over. Which those two guys did. We were told don't fool around with la guardia. They would see the gringos coming over, you know, don't fool around with la guardia. So I was very respectful of their authority. It's not my country, it's theirs and you did not want to get picked up and taken to the hoosegow [slang for jail] for whatever reason. So we were very careful when we walked into a shop, or to a dance, or to eat, or whatever. Which you could do quite often.

W: Did you do it often?

B: My folks, my mom and dad, loved dancing and there were three beer gardens. Which I think were open air restaurants and dancing floors with live music. They loved to go over there and dance and would occasionally take us over there to eat. That was that. Otherwise you went to the Hotel Tivoli on the American side. So, that was a lot of fun. We'd go there after dinner and they would put a tray on your window and put the beer there. I'd get a little pony up which was a jigger of beer, that was kind of fun. Then when I was living in San Diego and working there, my sister's youngest child had just gotten out of the Air Force and he was living up near Riverside, California. He and his buddy had gone down, parked the car at the border and gone over. They were at a bar, according to their story, just standing there with a beer in their hands (swoosh of air) off to the hoosegow. Well I treated the Mexican Federales (Federales is a short term for the Mexican Federal Police) and police the same way I did the Panamanians, I respected them. So he calls me on the phone, Uncle Boyd I'm in the jail down here I don't know what I'm gonna do, I'll try to tough it out. Well it was a great big—if you wanted to pee you did it on the floor, if you wanted a blanket you had to pay a buck for it or whatever. He calls me a few hours later and says Uncle Boyd I can't take this. Okay, where are you? He says I'm in the downtown jail. Okay, so I go down, I buy my insurance, some nice policeman tells me where to go, we went there. It's this big jail—it's not the main jail in Tiajuana, it's one on the side—and there are all these people gathered around this gate and I don't know what they were doing. So one guy looked at me and in English said, sir, you got somebody back there? I said yeah, he said go up there and tell that

guy his name. He says there's no such thing as a line here in Mexico. So I did and eventually his name was called and Steve came out. He said Uncle Boyd my buddy is still back there. I had gone to find where I could pay the fine. No sir, you've gotta go back into the main jail. Well, I did and paid the fine up there and then had to get back to the other jail. I asked a policeman there, how am I gonna get there and he says, sir I'm going back there get in my car. He gets in his car, puts his red light on top, goes down the center of Tijuana. (swoosh of air) Went through every red light. I'm so alive! And I paid the money for the kid and got him out. Now, it's not my way to say what in the heck did you do, blah blah blah. I said, Steve, what did we learn in Panama? Respect for the local authorities. He said, Uncle Boyd I wasn't— Not the point, and that's all I said. I didn't bawl him out. Then I put him in the car. This is Sunday. The Americans going back into California on a Sunday, it's a two hour wait just to get up to the border in the car. So I said, Steve, you and your guy get out. You can walk up to the border, you'll get there faster than me. Uncle Boyd, we don't have any money. I gave them forty bucks. I'll pay you back. So they made it up to the front, got in their car and drove back. That's an aside from my bringing up, and he was brought up in the same way.

W: I was gonna ask you, did he grow up in the Canal Zone?

B: Yup. My sister stayed there and all of her kids graduated school there, went to the same school. But her schooling of her kids was different from my schooling, apparently.

W: Was that reflected in how he grew up there? Were he and his cohort maybe less respectful of the Panamanian authorities?

B: You know, my poor sister, it just drove her almost to death. She did not want to call me, she did not want her big brother to have to do this for me. She finally got up enough courage to say, thank you, thank you. Thank you for what you did for my son. So I don't want to put anything on him or anything. The way of a lot of kids in California is to go down there. Get borracho (Spanish slang for drunk) and come back, you know. Whereas my Dad said to me, you want a beer? Tell me, we'll sit down here and you can have a beer. But don't go into Panama and drink.

W: Now, I don't even know how to ask the question except to ask, as you were growing up then did that reflect you and your friends and your family's attitude toward the Panamanians in general? That line? Was there a respectful distance between the two or how did you interact with the Panama people?

B: We were the Yankees, we were the gringos. We had money. We had a nice place to live. I never felt that I needed police living in the Zone. I never had a key to our house, never had a key, it was never locked. The Panamanians respected the fact that you don't come into our territory. Well, you can't carry that attitude into—it's a foreign country! They have their own rules, their own laws. So I was taught to respect it and not to take advantage. But to some Americans they are, I hate to use the word, but they were spics, which is a derogatory term. My dad would not use the word and I didn't either.

W: Going back to that story about your nephew, did your friends use that attitude or is that something you saw coming in from later generations?

B: See, I was gone twenty or thirty years. It wasn't until I was in college and went home that summer where my buddies and I would go to a bar and have a couple of beers. It was right on the border and we went to a place that was not too involved with the city, and we didn't do a great deal of it. But I never wanted to get picked up and have my parents disgraced. So that's it.

W: Okay, well thank you. Again, one more chance, one more story you want to get out of your system?

B: I don't know, you know, the Canal Zone was a very special place. We had socialized medicine. We'd have to pay for a doctor; if I got hurt I'd walk into the dispensary and get fixed up. If I wanted to see a doctor I put my name in and saw the doctor, no bills. Nothing. We didn't have to paint our houses, we didn't have to mow our lawns, things were done for us. Actually, it was kind of a neat way to live. You didn't have to worry about politics. You had to worry about your job, I guess. But your schooling was done, it was stateside schooling. But, our teachers taught us Panamanian songs, but not much, I got that from reading McCulloch and other books that I just told you about. Even Zonians today, we have a Canal Zone dance here and one night is mostly Panamanian music. We love to be Panamanians in a certain way. We sing, and dance, and have a good time and to this day we still do. We like that. Some Panamanians would come across to watch our baseball games, American guys,

we'd go see theirs. If you wanted to do some shopping outside of our commissary, which didn't have much in way of variety, you could go into Panama and pay more. But, you would get something from France or whatever. You could rent furniture or you could go into Panama and buy from the Singhs, the Indian people, with their stores and Buddhas and all that kind of stuff. For the first few years even into World War II we had an icebox. An ice truck came by every day- gimme a chip!

W: You mentioned Indians, so it sounds like it was a very multicultural, international place, Panama.

B: Oh, Panama City was, very much so. A lot of Chinese. On December the first, I lived across the street from what was called a quarantine station where my Uncle Sam, who was the first to move down there, worked. It had a big tall fence and if a seaman had an illness he was taken off the ship and put in that quarantine station and he couldn't move. On the night of December seventh—here's the street, here's the quarantine station, here's our house, here's the street—we had a blackout that night. All night long we heard trucks go by and we looked out and they were troop carriers of the U.S. Army, all night long. In the morning, we got up, we walked down here, and they had already put up tents. These old brown tents and in it were Japanese. That night, the night of December seventh, our government knew, apparently, because they rounded them all up, where every Japanese living in Panama was. Panama said you can come over and get them.

W: And these were Panamanian citizens, or at least residents?

B: No, Japanese citizens.

W: They were Japanese citizens?

B: I think so. But they might have been...

W: But they were living in Panama City?

B: They were living in Panama working. And then later they added Germans and Italians and they made the thing bigger. And here's Fort Amador, right next to it. Well, the Fort Amador soldiers had nothing to do with this containment. They brought in more tents and brought in their own guards. There were (knocking on wood) four turrets built above the fence with machine guns and guards walked twenty-four hours a day. As I say, here's our house. One night, some soldiers, we later found out they were borracho, "drunk," climbed up to this turret—now, American soldiers who were stationed there—and this fence was probably ten feet high and our house was higher than that fence. But the turret was a bit higher. Anyway, I was just in bed and I stepped out on the porch area [sounds imitating machine gun]. They had climbed up there to that machine gun and were firing it. If they had turned it this way, I might not be sitting here.

W: Wow. Were they just firing it into an empty field or—

B: I guess they fired it this way, but we were told the next day that these guys were drunk. The guards had moved so they couldn't see them. I ducked down, my folks came in and said get out of bed and get down on the floor.

W: Did that camp stay there for the duration of World War II?

B: I don't rightly remember but I do recall that for the first two years it was. We went to the States in [19]42 it was still there. I think it became disbanded toward the end, before the war was over, and I think maybe they had shipped them up—I don't know. You know California had its—

W: Sure, they were all over the West.

B: I don't know what it was. You know, here's the Canal coming in and here's where the local Zonians kept their smart boats, and cruisers, and things. Then out here, these islands I told you about. Well right here we built a structure here on this side and over on this side on the Canal, and they put down a net to keep submarines out. So, every time a ship came, a little boat over here took this and opened it up. I could sit and watch this incoming. That was one of the ways in which we defended the Canal. The other ways, on the locks, they had these balloons that looked like a little Zeppelin kind of thing and they were just a few feet above to keep planes from getting in and dive-bombing the Canal. Our lights on our car were painted dark and there was just a little slit just about this size for the light to go through. We drove that way through the whole Canal during the war. That's it.

W: Did you notice any other intrusions into your life? Or changes in your life during the war? How about rationing? There was rationing here in the States of various materials.

B: We did not have a rationing card or rationing stamps or anything like that. All we had was, if it was there you bought it, if it wasn't there you didn't get it. So if you

wanted—like beer disappeared from our commissary. If you wanted a shirt, it may not be there. Milk turned into klim, which is milk spelled backwards, and that was the powdered milk. And we had very few--

W: You called it klim?

B: It was called klim. I found a can a few years ago, milk spelled backwards, I loved it. We added water to the powdered milk. If it wasn't there— like I'd go in, Mom I need a new pair of shoes, okay meet me at the shoe store at four o'clock, she gets off. There were two pairs of shoes to choose from. I went wild the other day trying to find a birthday card for my son. Thousands of cards! Just show me six, would you please? When we came to the States, my mom and sisters went wild shopping. To this day she still likes to shop. So that was it. I've carried a lot of things into my seventy-eight years that are still my morals and customs. I find myself being more open minded about certain things, and some of my Zonians are not, they are very strict about what they— anyway, so be it.

W: Well, thank you very much for joining me. Again, one last time, any other stories? Every time I say that it sounds like the conversation starts to lull and then of course we take off again.

B: I could go on and on and on. As an adult, I was sorry that I never asked my dad and my grandfather and my uncles. My aunt, she was very helpful, she did remember a

few things, which helped me get started on my genealogy, which is very extensive with Brevingtons and my Bell side. It was very interesting because my mother brought Southerner, my father brought Northerner, but they still felt the same. I didn't feel my dad held any prejudice against Panamanians the way many people did. When I came back to the States-- my sister and mother and I and a lot of people left because of the strategic Canal. You know, in those days we only had one navy. It went back and forth. It could fit that 110 feet, thousand foot long thing. And we always knew when the fleet was in because the sailors were coming off and couldn't get through our town fast enough to get into Panama City. Well, after the war it became the two. So I always grew up with the one navy, and now our carriers and a lot of our big ships can't even get through the canal. There was one thing about that that I wanted to—Oh, when I went to the States and came home after five months I used the n word. My dad said, don't ever use that in front of me again. I had never used it before. The Panamanian blacks were bajans [Barbados slang word] they weren't even Negros. They were bajans. We called the workers that came to us from Barbados, bajans, (some accented language spoken) talk bajan talk. Well, they had English, because it was an English colony. When they came down, for example, somebody would say, it's funny, oh you grew up in Panama, are you bilingual? Yeah. You speak English and Spanish? I said no, English and bagan. It's a funny thing. We have bagan jokes, all about the bagans, they were neat people. They were nice to work with. But they didn't go to our schools. No black person ever went to my schools. They had their own.

W: Was it official, sort of like our Jim Crow South? Separated, segregated by law? They lived off the Zone? Or they lived on the Zone?

B: No, they lived in the Zone, had their own towns, had their own theater, own commissary. And they came to our commissary and served us. We didn't go into their commissary.

W: And they were Zonians?

B: They were not U.S. citizens; we did not hire Negroes from the U.S. to go there. Only whites. Their provisions were not as good as the U.S. In the early days, the U.S. employees were paid in gold, and all the other workers were paid in silver. When the pay train came up, you got in this way, they got in this way. After a few years it became local rate employees and U.S. rate. If you got on a train, the gold sat here, the silver sat here. If you went into the train station, this was the toilet and water for the golds, this was the...

W: Now how long did that continue? You know, Jim Crow started to break down around the [19]60s.

B: After I left, I understand that after the land was given back and they started integrating, I think some of the locals could go to what I used to call the U.S. schools. As I said, some Panamanians could pay, but nobody else. They had their own schools which were not as good as ours. Their teachers were not as good as ours, and that's kind of sad.

W: What about now in Panama? Do you keep up?

B: How do I keep up?

W: No, I mean, in American of course now there are integrated schools. Have they integrated more in Panama? Are they still a segregated society? Do you keep up on that?

B: Well, it's now the Republic of Panama, so my high school is still there, the building, but it's some kind of offices or other. Panamanians are pretty good about their education, it's mandatory. They're very literate. I don't know if they're using the schools—my elementary school is not used as a school. I don't think they're using what used to be the Canal Zone schools as schools. We gave them everything, you know. All the buildings, all the houses I lived in now have Panamanians living in there, but they have to buy them. Many U.S. former employees, Zonians, are moving back. And they are now buying the houses which we couldn't get, which the generals had and that kind of thing. As I said there is a good social security system there and a good health system going, so they are probably into that. And they like to get together with their buddies and do **old** things. No, there is nothing else I want to tell you.

W: Okay [laughs]. Well, thank you.

[End of interview]

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