

Speaker 1:

Well, let me start by asking you what is your full name and why were you named it?

Abraham Hoffman:

My name is Abraham Hoffman and I was named for my maternal grandfather. It was just shortened to Abe by the time I got to high school. Abraham was not just the only boy named Abraham in your class at school, probably in the whole neighborhood or for all I knew all of Los Angeles and the only other person I ever knew who was named Abraham was Lincoln and my grandfather, who I never knew. So yeah, it just became a little more social maybe to be Abe and I just don't believe in pulling rank very much. So Abe is a lot easier than Dr. Hoffman or Professor Hoffman or anything like that. I was born in 1938 in the Lincoln Hospital at the corner of Brooklyn... Not Brooklyn. What am I saying? Fourth and Soto Street in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles.

Speaker 1:

Do you know what's there now?

Abraham Hoffman:

As far as I know, the hospital's still there. It's a small little hospital there. My family lived just about a half a block away, so my parents had it all arranged just to zip over there. And that's where I came into the world. Had no idea that much of my life would be centered in that particular area because Hollenbeck Junior High is about two blocks away from it. Roosevelt High about two blocks away. So for about the first 18 years or so, I wasn't going anywhere, same general area.

Speaker 1:

That's a really great time to have been in Boyle Heights. It's been written about so famously.

Abraham Hoffman:

It seems to be a very hot topic these days and there's some interesting research being done and I'm making some modest efforts in that direction myself. Only I have the advantage of having been born and raised there, so I know where some of the bodies are buried, so to speak, figuratively.

Speaker 1:

Exactly. Do you remember your grandparents? And if you do, do you remember them discussing their lives?

Abraham Hoffman:

No, I never knew my grandparents. My mother's family was back east in New York and the joke was that somehow I was related to half of the people in Brooklyn, although I never really got to know very many of them. And it wasn't until I was an adult that I actually did meet many of the uncles. My mother was one of seven, so I didn't know the uncles or the aunts or the cousins except for a very small number who did come out here and I never really knew them. There's a photograph of me with my grandmother, but I was an infant, so then she went back to New York and that was that. As far as my paternal grandparents are concerned, they were killed in the Holocaust. They never came to America.

Speaker 1:

Where were they in Europe?

Abraham Hoffman:

In Poland.

Speaker 1:

In Poland. Who is the oldest person that you remember growing up as a child?

Abraham Hoffman:

Apart from my parents?

Speaker 1:

Yes. But there was someone older than your parents?

Abraham Hoffman:

No, I really couldn't tell you. That's one that I haven't thought about. My parents had a circle of friends, but they all were just my parents' friends.

Speaker 1:

Well, tell me about your parents. When did they come out to California?

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, my parents had some interesting backgrounds. We have a photograph and if you want to shoot the photograph, we can certainly do that. I don't mind at all. But around 1925, my mother's parents and all of the members of the family assembled for a studio portrait and it's really quite striking. There's seven children and the oldest four were married at that point, and then there's small children sitting there on the carpet in front and one of those about four years old is still around. He's about 85 and he's into genealogy and he's had a great career and all of that. But my mother's father came to America about 1910 and he left his family behind. And it's one of those stories that you get from... It sounds so untypical until you realize probably how typical it was of so many people who came to America.

And he came for a better life and found it. And one by one started bringing the family over and my mother and her two younger brothers and their mother couldn't come over once World War I started. And so they were separated for something like seven years and finally came over in 1920 and everybody got together again and it must have been rather interesting. And of course all this is told to me, I don't really know anything about it firsthand, but the youngest boy was only one. And here he comes to America and he's 10 meeting his father for literally the first time. So there must have been a lot of sacrifice in that sort of thing. My father had an adventure coming here. He was older than my mother and did not know my mother until he had come to America. But arrived in the same year where after World War I, Poland became an independent nation and they were drafting people in the Polish Army and it was a very anti-Semitic government and he wanted no part of being in an army like that.

And so he took off and he had any number of adventures going to cross Europe and got to Holland without papers and had to stay there for many months while his status was being regularized by the Dutch government and finally got a visa so he could come to the United States. And what I found interesting, my father liked to plant things, secret things, I guess, and he passed away in 1987 and I still

keep running into stuff that he just sort of scrolled away. I got to live to be 150 to find all this stuff, but it was rather interesting. He was hardly in America, not three months, when he wrote a huge letter to the Daily Forwards, which was the Yiddish newspaper. It covered two columns. It's a very long letter. And I said, "Oh boy, how am I going to figure this out? I don't read Yiddish."

So somewhere else I was poking around. I found where he had translated it like he knew I was going to get stuck on that. So he translated it and it was a spirited defense of a halfway house where he had stayed in Amsterdam while waiting for his papers to be regularized because someone had criticized the place for exploiting immigrants. And he just wrote this tremendous defense that it was nothing of the kind, and it did all kinds of assistance to people. And this was just a very short period of time after he came to America, he's got a publication credit like that, and not a letter, but this huge article. I was very fascinated by it. And one of these days I'll try and figure out something more to do with it. I made lots of copies. I don't want it to... I want got nieces, nephews, my sons.

I don't want them to lose track of the fact that he had this kind of a contribution in immigration. But anyway, he came to America, his brother was here. And he became an American citizen really quickly, studied very hard and did some traveling, interestingly enough, back to Europe, went to Palestine for a visit with relatives who had gone there from Poland. And I never know what they talked about. It would've been fascinating. Comes back to America, finally gets together with my mother. They get married and goes into the business of manufacturing men's neckwear. I found this curious because it's the Great Depression and they were doing well at it, especially in holiday season.

And the Christmas of, what was it? About 1933, gangsters came up and said he had to pay protection on his inventory and he refused to do it. Next thing he knew, the inventory was gone, stolen out of the warehouse. So he had to come out to California where his brother was and start all over and that's why I'm here instead of New York or someplace. My mother's relatives never forgave him for kidnapping their daughter and bringing her 3,000 miles out here. Now we don't think about it, pick up a cell phone, call somebody anywhere. But back then it was the other end of the world. I grew up a native Californian because of that.

Speaker 1:

What are your parents' names?

Abraham Hoffman:

My mother's name was Hilda. My father's name was Harry.

Speaker 1:

Hilda. What was her maiden name?

Abraham Hoffman:

Sofian. That was another interesting thing for anybody who's into genealogy, the family spells it, S-O-F-I-A-N, but the immigration officials spelled it S-A-F. And that was really hard once we got the internet and you're going on ellisland.org trying to track stuff down until somebody said, you got to think a lot more flexibly on the spelling of people's names who come over on it like that. And so that was how I was able to find her. The passenger manifest and there's her name, her mother's name, and her brother's name from 1920.

Speaker 1:

Well, you mentioned having nieces and nephews, so that means you might have had siblings. Did you siblings?

Abraham Hoffman:

I have two brothers. Yeah, I'm in the middle.

Speaker 1:

Okay. And what are their names?

Abraham Hoffman:

My older brother's names Herman. My younger brother's name is Jerry.

Speaker 1:

And what do they do?

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, my older brother's retired and he was into... Well, not computers, he worked for a variety of companies involving technology and whatnot. And my younger brother was a teacher.

Speaker 1:

What does he teach?

Abraham Hoffman:

Was. He's retired too. We're older than we look, right? He taught elementary and junior high in the LA school district.

Speaker 1:

Do you remember your family discussing world events and politics?

Abraham Hoffman:

Not when I was little. When I was older, my father was quite the champion of Israel and it was easier to talk to him on a close to adult level on things like that than anything else.

Speaker 1:

Was there a chore that you hated doing?

Abraham Hoffman:

How about all of them? I can't recall any individual thing having done, unless it was yard work, maybe. I have somebody here who does the yard. I'd rather live in a condo than have to worry about it at all.

Speaker 1:

Do you remember having a favorite nursery rhyme or a bedtime story that your parents may have told you?

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, there's some stuff in Yiddish that's held my attention all these years. I don't know all of it. There was one song called [inaudible 00:11:43].

Speaker 1:

Can you sing part of it?

Abraham Hoffman:

I don't want to break your camera.

Speaker 1:

Well, we'll find it.

Abraham Hoffman:

It was in the fireplace there burns a fire. (Singing). And the fire is hot and the rabbi is teaching small children the alphabet. That's how it roughly translates out. I remember that one. If I had to pick one, I'd pick that.

Speaker 1:

Do you remember ever not having enough food to eat as a child?

Abraham Hoffman:

This is the funny thing. I was in Boyle Heights and the difference between who had some money and who didn't have some money really wasn't very great. Everybody seemed to be in the same general grouping, and I don't ever remember anything like that growing up. But what I do remember that my favorite food, which to this day, were lamb chops. And we had lamb chops once a week and it couldn't have cost very much at that time. So something went on in the world economy, the domestic lamb chop industry declined, so that now if you want it, it's \$9 a pound for the stuff that we were getting. And it comes from Australia or New Zealand and it's frozen. There's a whole... Bless you.

Speaker 1:

Excuse me.

Abraham Hoffman:

But no. Also, my uncle had a bakery on Brooklyn Avenue and that's my father's brother. And my father had cousins with whom he had stayed in New York when he first came to America, who came out to California and they had a bakery on Brooklyn Avenue as well. So no one ever went hungry because my uncle, my cousins never charged us for bread, get a free loaf of bread once a week or something like that. When I got older, we thought that was like charity and got resentful about it. But now looking back on it, why not? It's all in the family.

Speaker 1:

It's fresh bread.

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, yes, that too. Plus it was Russian rye bread. I didn't know from Wonder Bread until I was an adult and my father and mother did a good job of brainwashing me into thinking that it was rotten, wasn't worth eating. They called it chewing gum bread. I hope that the Wonder people aren't one of your sponsors. They said you could take a piece of Wonder Bread and go like this and turn it into a little ball about the size of a marble. And he was absolutely right. And of course today everybody... If you go for healthy bread, it's wheat bread and pumpernickel and like that and not the white flour bread. So I had good training that way.

Speaker 1:

What was the name of your uncle's bakery?

Abraham Hoffman:

The Warsaw Bakery, Brooklyn and St. Louis. Now it's Cesar Chavez Avenue.

Speaker 1:

Where was your family home?

Abraham Hoffman:

We had several homes. There was the first house right by the Fourth and Soto. And when my younger brother came along, it was a kind of arrangement where my father had the store in the front where he made neckwear and the residence in the back. And then as far as I know, the building's still there. And so he moved to a similar arrangement at 1952 1/4 Brooklyn Avenue where there were some retail stores. And he rented one where he was working there a while. And we were living in the back along with several other houses that were kind of identical, which is why we had the fraction on that. And they were there until I was about 10 years old, about 1949 we moved to 1023 1/2 Sentinel Avenue near Wabash and Evergreen, which isn't exactly Boyle Heights, but everybody called it that anyways. It's part of East Los Angeles. And that's where I stayed until I moved out, became an adult.

Speaker 1:

Going back to your childhood, were there any favorite childhood games or activities you liked to do?

Abraham Hoffman:

I remember they were crazes, so that there was a while everybody played marbles. And I remember once a year these Filipino guys would come and do a demonstration at the elementary school. I remember this at Sheridan Street school with yo-yos. And everybody had to go out and buy a yo-yo and they organize contests and stuff like that. And some guys got really good at it. They could go walk the dog and all these other tricks with yo-yos and stuff like that. And you played marbles, you'd do it for keeps or not for keeps as it were. And when I got about junior high age, bubblegum cards, they were the sports ones, but there were also others, the Korean War was on so they had several bubblegum card series with soldiers on them, marines. And then Hopalong Cassidy was very, very popular and there were a series of bubblegum cards on Hopalong Cassidy where they took scenes from the old Hopalong Cassidy movies and put them on the cards.

So they're like two dozen cards and you had the whole movie plot and we got very good at those. And of course one of the great regrets of life is why didn't we keep them and why didn't we keep them in great

condition? Because on eBay now, you make a lot of money with that. Those are fun to have. So those were a lot of fun to do after school. You play cards and if it landed face up, you win. If it landed face down, the other guy... Oh yeah, kids figure out how to do that stuff without anybody really teaching them how. Came natural.

Speaker 1:

You make your own fun.

Abraham Hoffman:

Yeah, we had our own rules.

Speaker 1:

What schools did you attend?

Abraham Hoffman:

The first school I attended was Sheridan Street School, and then when we moved to the Wabash Avenue area, I went to Evergreen for fifth and sixth grade. Then I went to Hollenbeck Junior High and then Roosevelt High.

Speaker 1:

Tell me about your schools.

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, they're all still there, somewhat changed. This last summer I went down into that area for the specific purpose of taking pictures of buildings and Sheridan Street School has been enlarged because the population there has grown and it looks pretty much the same. I didn't go inside. And the same for Evergreen. Evergreen's enlarged. And as far as Hollenbeck Junior High is concerned, not only did I go, there as a student, but when I began teaching, I went back there and I taught there for six years. And Roosevelt has been very much changed again because when I went to Roosevelt, the population was going down in numbers and now it's one of the largest high schools. It's got like 4,000 and it's some insane numbers of students there. So there were some changes in architecture, but at the same time, I don't think there were necessarily changes for the better, especially Hollenbeck Junior High School, which was badly hit by the Long Beach earthquake of 1933.

And when they came around and rebuild it, they tore down most of the old school and got Richard Neutra, who was a very prominent architect to design the buildings and he did a really outstanding job, just a marvelous place to work in. You didn't need air conditioning and you had control of your own environment. They had those radiators that went along the wall, so it was a cold day, you had control in your classroom. You didn't have to depend on some central thermostat that probably wasn't going to work very well anyway. You could do it in your own room and these wonderful windows. So in your last class of the day, you had to have somebody who's a window monitor and this is the kid who got the big sticks that he could move the window up and down. And it was a very comfortable environment for classrooms.

I've been in classrooms ever since. And I don't think they were anywhere near as good as what Neutra designed, but in the 1960s when the school's population was growing, they had to add some buildings and the buildings they added basically looked like giant shoe boxes with exterior stairwells made out of

metal. And when the students go up and down, oh, you could hear it and they just sort of plopped them into an empty space on the school. And the Unified was doing that in the '60s and '70s and '80s for all I know. Hopefully, they're designing better schools now with the new high schools going in, but they did have some really good designs and they were interesting places, both as a student and coming back as a teacher.

Speaker 1:

What were your favorite subjects in school?

Abraham Hoffman:

Somehow, I liked history. I like to read. I got bit by a bug at a real early age of about reading. There was an episode where I don't think the place has been... The ancestor of Kmart was a place called Kress. And they had a department store downtown, I think on Broadway somewhere. And it didn't have the same glamour as the Broadway or May company or anything like that. It was sort of like... Well, like I say it's the ancestor of Kmart. But my mother went in there one time and I probably was about nine years old or 10 years old at the time. And they were selling books there, literally in a big bin for children, not exactly children's books, classic stuff that's supposed to be for children to read at 25 cents a copy. And she brought about four of them home, spent a dollar. Then she found out that they were reducing it to 10 cents a copy brought me along and to help carry... And that was my first... It was my beginnings of a library and I read every one of those things and there was no compromise.

I look back on it now and I say, "Wow, this isn't See Spot Run." These were Little Men. I didn't read Little Women. I read the sequel, Little Men. And Pinocchio by Collodi. Now that was a real book. It was like 300 pages. I didn't know any different. It was an interesting story and not the same as Walt Disney's Pinocchio. And so this was the core of my reading. And what got me excited about history was because I was a bad boy. I had committed some sort of infraction at Roosevelt when I was in the 11th grade and I was sent to sit outside the assistant principal's office and I had my books with me and he couldn't see me right away. He was busy punishing somebody else. And I sat there for two periods and I said, well, I might as well read.

And so I took the US history book that we were using in the class and I made a remarkable discovery. Mainly you don't have to read one chapter a week the way the school expects you to do it, you could sit there and read 50, 60, 70 pages, which is what I did. And I never looked back. So I was a bad boy and that's what got me into history. And some people still think I'm a bad boy in history.

Speaker 1:

What was the infraction? Do you recall?

Abraham Hoffman:

Who remembers? I probably said something or talked back or whatever it was. Whatever it was, was nothing like... You don't even get sent down for today. Let me put it to you that way. I remember when I started teaching, and I think I even did it for a semester or two before I realized how ridiculous it was.

And if you caught a kid chewing gum, you put a little "G" in his roll book like it was the world's worst sin. And now you look at that say, "My God, here they are bringing guns to school and doing all kinds of..." There's fighting going on at the lunchtime and this goes down in the junior high. And you look at that and say, "And they were worried about chewing gum?" But then I had my revenge because in doing

some of the research I enjoyed doing, I ran across an article in the Los Angeles Examiner in 1912 about how the schools were trying to do something about gum chewing.

So this is almost 100 years ago, and they're worried about gum chewing back then. But they even had a Special Department of Health in the LA Unified because they thought gum chewing was somehow bad for you. That it would rot your teeth out or whatever it was. And then there was the opposite side would argue, "Well, it promotes digestion." Some of the people in administrative offices really have too little to do. They have to invent things. I ran into that. That was fun.

Speaker 1:

Tell me about your favorite teacher and why was he or she special?

Abraham Hoffman:

I had several favorite teachers, but top of the list would be Ida Crum, C-R-U-M. She taught Spanish at Hollenbeck Junior High, and I had her when I was in high school. And I got an A both semesters in the ninth grade for Spanish 1 and Spanish 2. This was a marvelous teacher. And when I came back to teaching in 1962, [inaudible 00:25:37] finished college, she was still teaching there. So she went from teacher to colleague and that was really nice.

And when she retired in 1966, we gave her a really wild celebration. I was on the committee and at that particular time, I decided I would create a profile of her career at Hollenbeck. Now one of the less known, but very valuable resources for anybody who's interested in education or school history, are files of the school newspapers. And this is really underappreciated because in many cases these are reporting on news of the community, not just the school.

Speaker 1:

And multiple times they have several newspapers. I was looking at Los Angeles High School's history and they have three newspapers at one point.

Abraham Hoffman:

They had it coming out daily at LA High. Well, Hollenbeck's file went back to about 1917, a really, really long run. So I was able to track her career by just going through all the newspapers from 1925 all the way down in 1966. They had a good run there. And so every now and then there's an article about Ms. Crum in the newspaper and I was able to reconstruct much of her school career that way. And we printed this up and we gave it a huge retirement celebration. So this was part of it. And that's 1966, 40 years ago. Well, I was going through some papers looking for one thing and I have a theory that you always find what you're not looking for. So I didn't find what I was looking for, but I ran across the profile I had done on her back then.

I said this is interesting now because she had such a long career in one school and was able to influence so many lives. So I'm working on trying to do something with her career. Now, we may have gotten in touch with Whittier College. Then I find out that she was a founder of a society there that's still very much around and they're interested in her because she's a founder and they didn't know anything about her subsequent career. So it's been an interesting chase I'm still working on. But she was head and shoulders a very marvelous inspirational teacher with a great sense of humor. I think that sense of humor should be part of the job application for anybody going into teaching these days. That and a little bit of certified insanity. It's necessary if you're trying to survive in the schools. So she was very close, pretty much top of the list.

Speaker 1:

How many years of education have you completed?

Abraham Hoffman:

I got my PhD and I'm still learning. I got my PhD in UCLA 1970, but I am still learning. I may learn a little bit differently from students today, but I'm still in a learning process. But the way I do it is I do a lot of book reviewing and so I'm obligated to read the book as well as to think about it and then write a review on it. And I encourage my students to do the same thing because reading seems to be becoming rather endangered these days. But there is a reading audience out there and although I focus largely on history and the history that I do a lot of research and writing in, I'm pretty much interested in most aspects of history, most periods.

And so that's how I'm still learning. And I look back on when I got my BA and I realize how little I knew and it got a little bit better when I got the MA and I still was dissatisfied. That's what put me into going to UCLA, trying to get the PhD. And now looking back on that, I'm saying, "Oh God, I didn't know anything when I got that PhD." So I'm still learning.

Speaker 1:

What were your fields in for your PhD?

Abraham Hoffman:

Let's see, UCLA, okay. The West was one field, United States history, Latin American history, and then the oddball one was Tudor-Stuart England, which was, and still is, a rather fascinating area for me to look at.

As you mentioned before the interview, the Huntington Library's got these different groups meeting. They also published the Huntington Library Quarterly. Huntington Library is a strange library in some ways because it reflects to this day the interests of Henry Huntington, who started it. And he was interested in gathering material of a regional nature. So it has an extraordinarily rich collection of Southern California history, but he's also interested in 17th century British literature and history. So he has enormous amounts of stuff there. While the Huntington Library Quarterly doesn't say anything about regional history and hasn't done so in decades, but they're kind of snobbish because they're always doing these articles on British history, Stuart and-

PART 1 OF 5 ENDS [00:31:04]

Abraham Hoffman:

British history, the Stewart rule of Monarchs, all the way through the 17th century, a little bit of the 18th. Sometimes they'll get into that. Sometimes they'll back it up to the Tudors, with Elizabethan England, and a lot doing with the playwrights. They'll get some Shakespeare going, and poets I've never heard of, and the most minuscule articles imaginable. I cracked up one time, I thought, "I don't think there are five people on the planet who understand this article, and I'm not one of them."

Every once in a while, because they do that, they'll throw something in that just makes up for it all. This one guy did an extraordinarily scholarly article on someone who passed gas in Parliament in 1607, I think it was, where upon everyone in parliament got up and tried to out wit the next person by making jokes about it, and it was all written down. People started writing down these two line couplets about passing gas in parliament. This is Parliament, it's supposed to be a very serious thing, but this was the

stuff like you get on the internet. "Hey, here's the joke I've gotten, you send it to 20 of your friends." It just went around like wildfire. Every once in a while they'll put an article like that in, and I say, "All right, I'll keep reading them."

Speaker 1:

I want to ask you a few Southern California questions.

Abraham Hoffman:

Okay.

Speaker 1:

I'm going to ask you some early ones from the forties, and if you don't remember anything, that's fine.

Abraham Hoffman:

I'll give it a shot.

Speaker 1:

Do you remember internment?

Abraham Hoffman:

I didn't know anything about the internment at the time, but somewhere around 1951, '52, a Japanese American family moved onto our block. I don't know where they were before that. The three children were basically as American as apple pie. The parents were immigrant, and the father was a minister, I believe he was Buddhist. I know they were in the camps. When I was in high school, one of the guys I hung around with, because we shared a mutual talent or interest in cartooning, was Donald Hatta. After he graduate, he went his way, I went mine. It wasn't until years later I ran across his name in the literature. He'd got into history, he had gotten himself a PhD at SC, and was teaching at Cal State Dominguez Hills. He started publishing on Japanese American internment. I finally ran into him at a professional meeting, and got to know him and his wife.

He was very bitter about it, and still is, extraordinarily angry about what had happened. He was my age, and I know how old I was, and I wasn't out to sabotage America at the age of two and a half. There he was, a very small child, and had gone into the camps. Knowing this, and seeing some of the very fine scholarship that's come out, I've examined it myself. I've looked at it from the historian's point of view, rather than as somebody who was a child, who would've known anybody about that. I think the realization for children would've come later, since the people who were in the camps didn't really want to talk much about it at the time.

In Boyle Heights, it was a vacuum. When I was in Hollenbeck and Roosevelt, which is to say the 1950s, there was a sizable population of Japanese American kids there, and I don't think any of them ever mentioned it at all at that time. Since then, because of the interest in Boyle Heights, the Japanese American National Museum put out this marvelous exhibit on Boyle Heights.

Speaker 1:

The power of place. That was a great.

Abraham Hoffman:

The power of place. A book came out by Arcadia Publishing on Boyle Heights that had a number of photographs, and some really solid information. This was interesting to me, in looking at it, because I found that Roosevelt High School in 1940 had probably 1,000 Japanese American. A third of the school was Japanese American. In 1942, they were all gone, just out into the internment camps. I have a friend I met a couple of years ago who graduated from Roosevelt in the 1940s, and had some interesting things to say about that whole experience. He went into the Army Air Force in World War II, in 1942, but he had many friends like that.

You look at these photographs, especially in the Boyle Heights book, of people of different races, and you're saying, "They don't seem to have had too much fighting, or rivalry, or anything." Again, economically, you couldn't hold it over anybody else. You had to be in the same boat, pretty much, and everybody got along. I just think that they look at Boyle Heights as a golden age, or an age of innocence in the 1930s and forties, with that exception of the interment of it. Even there, was a sympathy, I think, within the community.

When I was doing the research on this, I came across Spring 1942, in the Hollenbeck Junior High School newspaper, the announcement that the student body president, vice president and secretary, three out of the four student body officers, were getting shipped out. The articles we're very sorry to see these students go. "We hope for good luck to them, and the best," and it was like that. These were student leaders. If that's going on, you can get an even greater sense of the injustice. Not just the idea that Japanese Americans were moved out and interned, but the trauma that it must have inflicted on children.

Speaker 1:

Yes. The next question, you wouldn't remember, it's the Battle of Los Angeles.

Abraham Hoffman:

I remember that very well. It's one of the first conscious memories I ever had.

Speaker 1:

It's five days-

Abraham Hoffman:

I didn't know about it at the time. I was about two and a half years old, and I remember noise going off. I remember my mother coming to the bedroom and saying, "Not to worry." I remember that vividly, and only later on did I find out what it was all about. February 25th, 1942, I even wrote a satirical article about it. Jack Smith, who was a columnist for the LA Times for many years, every now and then would run a column about the Battle of Los Angeles, and that there were people who were still around who swore on a stack of Bibles that Japanese airplanes had flown over ahead. They never did, but if you believe it did, it becomes your particular truth. I wrote a satirical article about the whole thing, where I said, "Yes, it did happen, and was a giant government coverup, to keep people from panicking at the time."

I had this full sized Los Angeles Examiner headline, front page, February 25th, 1942, which I laminated, and I use it in my college class. It says, "Air battle rages over Los Angeles." Of course the students say, "What?"

I say, "It's in the newspaper. I didn't make this up. It must be true. Here's this big article on the front." When you read the article, it says things like, "Unconfirmed reports that three Japanese airplanes were shot down. Unconfirmed reports that a bomb landed. Unconfirmed reports that the plane crashed at 180th and Vermont Avenue." I say, "This is Hearst journalism. Everything is unconfirmed. You could say anything about what you want to do at that point. Unconfirmed reports were, martians were flying the airplanes. You can say anything you want." That's the famous Battle of Los Angeles, and I had fun with that as historian because of that.

Speaker 1:

I like to teach it in conjunction with executive order 9066, and the Sleepy Lagoon.

Abraham Hoffman:

There's no question that triggered some more hysteria at the time. I found it of interest that the newspapers, which were the main source of information at that particular time, from Pearl Harbor down to February, we were winning the war. You can take a look at the front pages of the Times and the Examiner, especially the Hearst newspapers, and you'd think we were kicking the crap out of the Japanese. You start looking the headlines a little more carefully, and you realize, we're really not. What's going on is, the Hearst papers say, "We're really killing all the of Japanese, but we're also losing," and it becomes pretty clear. In that period, I can't see very much in the way of, "Let's get rid of the Japanese Americans," not until February, when it accelerates, and it's government instituted. I've done some research on that, on a special view of Mayor Fletcher Bowron of Los Angeles at the time.

Speaker 1:

What was his view?

Abraham Hoffman:

He panicked. He was absolutely convinced the Japanese were going to land over at Santa Monica Beach, and storm through. He was absolutely convinced that this was going to happen. He was also absolutely convinced that Japanese residents and their children were all potential subversives. He was all in favor of moving them out. He had a radio program at that time, and the Huntington Library has transcripts of his programs, and so does the LA City Archives. Every now and then he'd do a program on the Japanese, and he had all kinds of interesting suggestions. They could prove their loyalty by going out to Arizona and working on farms without pay, growing food for the war effort, stuff like that.

Yet, he's an interesting contrast to John Anson Ford, who was an LA County supervisor at the time, who knew the Japanese community far better than Bowron did. They had some interesting correspondence, where Ford is trying to convince Bowron that it isn't really like that. These people are not like that at all. Bowron believed that there could be an invasion or air attacks long after everybody else had given up on the idea that it was ever remotely possible, which it wasn't. He still thought that it might happen.

When he finally got the message that, no, it isn't like that, and Japanese American soldiers had gone into the military, and had performed tremendous heroism, at the end of the war, he's the only major public official who apologized publicly to the Japanese American community, and said that he was wrong. I give him credit for that, for having the courage to, in front of Japanese American veterans, as a convention here in Los Angeles, he said, "I was wrong."

Speaker 1:

It takes a big man to change his mind.

Abraham Hoffman:

I felt he was a big man in that regard. Earl Warren, as governor of California, for all the civil liberties that he championed as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, never really gave an apology to anybody when he was governor of California.

Speaker 1:

I talked to Kevin Starr about that, and he said that Earl Warren really struggled with it privately.

Abraham Hoffman:

He may have done that later, but he wasn't thinking that way in 1942.

Speaker 1:

When it counted.

Abraham Hoffman:

There are documents around that. He's having meetings with Bowron and with General Dewitt, and they're talking about, "When can we ship these people out? Set up the camps." That may be his reflection, that he struggled with it, but his struggle is really on the decision that he made, not the making of the decision. That's my feeling on that.

Speaker 1:

That's a good clarification. What about the Zoot Suit riots?

Abraham Hoffman:

Interesting event, and again, something that's come back, that we look at investigating. I think there are a lot of people in Los Angeles today who, because of Watts, and Los Angeles riots of 1992, are under the mistaken impression that when there's an urban riot in Los Angeles, it's because people of color are doing bad things. In the historical record, you have several interesting examples where the White people are the ones who start the riot, and do these things.

Speaker 1:

It's funny how police harassment's always a factor in those.

Abraham Hoffman:

It's just interesting. In 1871, there was this Chinese riot. The Chinese weren't rioting.

Speaker 1:

Chinese massacre.

Abraham Hoffman:

It was a massacre, it killed 20 Chinese. Then, you get into the Zoot Suit riots, there's a whole interesting story behind this. Mexico's an ally of the United States in World War II, and President Roosevelt sends

the word out, "Hey, these are our allies," trying to get Hearst to tone down. They never had articles in the LA Examiner like, "Mexican American youth wins college scholarship." Instead, it's, "Mexican American youth in knife fight," or, "Mexicans in saloon brawl."

Speaker 1:

Or, pachuco.

Abraham Hoffman:

What happens is that the Hearst papers, he says, "Stop badmouthing the Mexicans."

Speaker 1:

FDR says it to the Hearst Papers.

Abraham Hoffman:

Not personally, but it goes through channels that this is not good for the war effort. They stop using the word Mexican, and that's when they start using "Pachuco." If you live in LA, everybody knows pachuco equals Mexicans. Then you get, "That's Spanish, maybe you can get around that. Don't do that, because this is derogatory."

"How about Zoot Suiters?" You didn't have to be Hispanic to wear a zoot suit. There were Black guys, there were White guys. Mauricio Malzone of SC did an interesting book, where he looked to Little Abner, the famous cartoon strip, and there's a whole series in there where Little Abner became the person selected to model the zoot suit. It's just this hilarious satirical strip, and it came out around that time. If you think about it, the Andrews sisters, who were very famous singers in World War II, had a very popular song called "The Zoot Suit Song."

These things are out there, and young people will wear what young people will wear. I tell you today, I can't stand what I see some young people wear. I can't stand people with tattoos. I say, "Why would you do a tattoo?" I haven't figured that one out yet. I have to understand, that's me, not them. It's not their problem to worry about, because they don't worry about it. What's going on here is that association. "Zoot Suits, young people, Hearst newspaper, Mexicans." Suddenly, the Mexicans are zoot suiters. A lot of them wore zoot suits. I can remember vividly the fashion of the Zoot suit clothing lingered on even after the zoot suit itself was gone. When I was in junior high, which is 1950 to 1953, any boy who's going to junior high wore drapes, that's what they were called. What, you're looking? You can't believe it?

Speaker 2:

It's interesting to hear it so late, in the that year.

Abraham Hoffman:

The pants were baggy out to here, and narrow at the cuff. That's how you bought... time out with the camera.

Speaker 1:

Do you remember your first date, by chance?

Abraham Hoffman:

It segues from this group activity, and it'd be hard to pin it down that way. It wasn't anything all that spectacular, or special, because I was involved in this group. You meet some people, and there's the double dating, and all that. I can't say that I could pin one specific occasion down, not too well anyway. Sorry to be a party pooper on that.

Speaker 1:

It's okay. Very few people can answer that one.

Abraham Hoffman:

I'm sure people do. We have family and friends that got married as high school sweethearts, and they're still married. Talk about beating the odds. I'm sure they could tell you they were soulmates, and a special date, and all that stuff, but no.

Speaker 1:

Do you remember when you met your wife?

Abraham Hoffman:

I'm 10 years older than she is. I was doing youth counseling, and I was just starting out in junior high as a teacher, and I was also working as a counselor in youth groups. She was a teenager in one of the youth groups. We didn't get married. I had a first marriage that didn't work out, and the second time around, suddenly I'm 35 and she's 25. The second time around we started getting together, and hit it off, and here we are, together 33 years in the next month.

Speaker 1:

Congratulations.

Abraham Hoffman:

We made it this far. We had a few ups and downs. The problem today with marriages is that everybody who's getting married thinks it's all ups, and they don't want to deal with the downs. When it comes along, it's too easy to get a divorce rather than to work it out. Some people are extraordinarily stupid about marriage. I can't stand Dr. Phil, my wife's a fan, but yesterday there was a woman on the show who had three children by three different husbands. Dr. Phil wasn't too thrilled with her, as it happens, but he was picking on the one husband who showed up. He was arrears in alimony, and Dr. Phil was taking him apart. He was saying, "Hey, I showed up. What about the other two guys that you're not dealing with here, that she had kids with?"

The woman was 35 years old, that's a little too old to be acting. The third husband was just fairly recent. I said, "That's one of the reasons I don't like this idea that it's gotten too easy. You need a little hardship to test you, test your maturity, I think." Every family goes through crises, and nobody ever lives happily ever after. That's for fairy tales. We've survived it so far. We've got plans.

Speaker 1:

What was your wife's background, or education, when you married?

Abraham Hoffman:

She's a preschool teacher. She was then, she is now.

Speaker 1:

Describe your wedding proposal.

Abraham Hoffman:

It's hard to say. What do you mean proposal? That's sounds so formal, and it seems a lot more informal.

Speaker 1:

How did you ask her to marry you?

Abraham Hoffman:

I said, "Let's get married," or something like that.

Speaker 1:

What was your wedding ceremony like?

Abraham Hoffman:

We had a lot of fun. There were two things that were very clear on during the ceremony, one I wanted, which she agreed with, and the other we both wanted. What I wanted, since it was a Jewish ceremony, and as you know, can't live in LA and not go to Jewish weddings, there's some point where the rabbi is saying this Hebrew stuff. I'd been way too many weddings where the rabbi feeds the Hebrew words to both the bride and the groom one word at a time, like they're retarded. Then, he repeats it one word at a time. I said, "I don't want to do that. I want to memorize the whole damn sentence, so I sound like I'm intelligent." We did, we memorized the whole sentence rather than getting fed. I think people were, "Wow, they said the whole thing in Hebrew." It's only one sentence, but it sounded so much better than one sentence at a time.

The other thing had to do with the cake, and both my wife and I agreed on this. We're absolutely not going to have any fooling around with the cake. We're going to do the cutting of the cake, and she's going to take a nibble, and I'm going to take a nibble, and then we're going to kiss, and that's the routine. Ever since then, when we have been invited to weddings, and 32 years, gets you a lot of weddings, every so often there's a wedding where somebody decides how cute it would be to [inaudible 00:52:58]. Whenever that happens, my wife and I look at each other, and we make bets on how long the marriage is going to last, depending on the people as we know them, and how it goes over with the smushing. I'll say, 13 months, my wife will say 15 months, and one of us is usually right.

I don't see why you can't have fun at a wedding, but you don't have to act like a kid. It's a responsibility. People have forgotten why people get married. I teach history, so I get to talk about that. People look at me, students, and say, "What?" Tom Leykis on the radio, he's controversial, but he'll tell you, marriage is a contract. You're signing a wedding contract that's witnessed by people. Hello? Aren't you supposed to say, "Wait a minute, that's serious. That's a contract." What other contracts are there? Business contracts, and if you're buying something on a credit card, that's a contract. All of that's serious stuff.

Speaker 1:

Thinking back-

Abraham Hoffman:

Why are you getting married? Because you have an estate, and you want to pass it on to the next generation. Little things like that, you start adding up this information, and maybe that's why. Otherwise, there's no reason they get married. You're not going to have kids? You're not interested in ever having kids? You want to travel around the world a lot, party? You don't want to own a home? You just want to pay rent, lease a car, live for the moment? Yeah, have fun. What's the point of getting married? All you're doing is tangling yourself up in all sorts of legal obligations. If you're not going to make the commitment, that's how I felt about it. That's how it certainly should be felt about now, but now I'm starting to sound like a curmudgeon, and an old fart.

Speaker 1:

How would you describe your spouse? What do you admire most about her?

Abraham Hoffman:

She's an extraordinarily nurturing person, which is why she enjoys working with the four year olds. They're totally innocent, and they can't lie. When they lie, it's so obvious that they're lying it's a joke. She has a really great time working with small children like that.

Speaker 1:

What is her name?

Abraham Hoffman:

Sue.

Speaker 1:

How did you find out that you were going to be a parent for the first time?

Abraham Hoffman:

We were in Berkeley, I was on a post-doctoral fellowship there. This was our first year of marriage, and 11 weeks after we were married, she was pregnant, and she started throwing up. Boy, did she throw up. She set world's records in throwing up, morning sicknesses. It was pretty clear right away. We went to Kaiser in Oakland, this is 1974, or the beginning of 1974. The nurse, I don't know how they do it, they give the test, or litmus paper. I don't know how they did it. They did the test, she's pregnant.

Speaker 1:

The rabbit dies.

Abraham Hoffman:

What?

Speaker 1:

The rabbit used to die.

Abraham Hoffman:

I don't think they killed rabbits anymore.

Speaker 1:

No, back then they did.

Abraham Hoffman:

They come out, they say, "Okay, your wife's pregnant." The nurse said it so matter-of-factly. I guess my wife was with me at the time. She says, "You're pregnant. Do you wish to terminate the fetus?" Remember, this is 1973/74, in the Berkeley area. Abortions were not as common, as you can imagine, and a lot of it was going on at the time. Roe versus Wade was about to say to everybody, "Hey," and California's always led on stuff like this. Kaiser certainly said it, just like that. We said, "No, we'll keep it." Boy, was that a mistake. No, I'm just joking.

Speaker 1:

You have two sons, correct?

Abraham Hoffman:

That's right.

Speaker 1:

What are their names?

Abraham Hoffman:

Joshua and Gregory.

Speaker 1:

Was there anything that your sons did that amazed you as a parent, growing up?

Abraham Hoffman:

The first thing I learned... I had worked in day camp while I was going to college, in summers. I got the impression that children started talking at about age four and a half, that you could actually communicate with them. When my older son came along, it was somewhat surprising to find out I could have conversations with him when he was two. I didn't have a frame of reference on that before. He talked early anyway, so by two and a half, we were having conversations. That was interesting to find out, that it was that young. I didn't realize that.

The second thing is that my older son had absolutely no interest in toys, he wanted the real thing. He wasn't going to play with a toy record player, he had to have a real record player. Everything about him was real. He broke a lot of real things, radios, record players around the house, tape recorders. He was very happy about tape recorders. I finally worked on an agreement, and I said, "You can have it as long as you don't try and figure out how to make it work." He never looked back on that.

He can put things together, but I guess he's gone beyond that level, if he's teaching systems now.

Speaker 1:

And programming, definitely.

Abraham Hoffman:

Yeah, programming. There's a continuum on that. When he was about nine years old, something like that, we bought an entertainment center. Not this one, an earlier version of it. We had to hook up all of these things. This is about 1981, so he'd have been about eight years old at the time. I guess he was closer to 10 or 11. I don't want to give him too much credit.

Here we had, think about this now, a TV and a VCR. We got one of the first ones, because I fell into some money at the time. We had TV, a VCR, a turntable, and an AM/FM tuner, and speakers. All of these have cords attached, and wires, and you're supposed to put all this together. I didn't do that, he did. He had smaller hands then, so he's reaching behind and screwing things into components and whatnot, and attaching the whole thing. I asked him after, "How can you figure this? How do you conceive of this?" I couldn't figure out what wire went into where, I was totally lost. He says, "I think of it like a freeway, with exit ramps and on-ramps. This goes this way, and that comes off like that, and goes over there."

I said, "That makes some sense, I guess." He put it all together for us. As a matter of fact, he came out here when we got this thing and set this one up for us. I sure wouldn't know how to do any of that. VCRs eventually became disposable, and the earlier ones had to be programmed. Now, they're automatic. I bring him to the store with me. "We've got to buy a new VCR," and the clerk would usually talk down to him, because he's just a little kid. I said, "Don't talk down to him. He knows more than I do about this. Just tell him what has to be done."

When he was in high school near here, Taft High, where I happened to be teaching as well, I found out what happened from the audio/visual coordinator. He wasn't the best student in the school, but Taft High put a new sound system into its multipurpose room, where they have the stage, and this thing cost \$80,000. They were going to have a meeting with the AV coordinator and all the administrators in the school, on how this system worked. The AV coordinator had enough sense to call Josh out of class to sit in on the meeting. The guy gives this big explanation, and all these administrators are going, "Yeah, yeah," and you knew they didn't have a clue what was going on. It's time to leave, and this guy is going to leave, and everybody's on their own with this system. The coordinator said to Josh, "Do you understand how all this works?"

He says, "Yeah." I said to the coordinator afterwards, "What are you going to do when he graduates?"

He says, "Hopefully I'll retire by then, and it's not my problem."

PART 2 OF 5 ENDS [01:02:04]

Abraham Hoffman:

He says, "Hopefully I'll retire by then. It's not my problem." So he always has been good at that sort of thing.

Speaker 1:

Were you a strict or lenient parent?

Abraham Hoffman:

We made lots of mistakes and then learned by doing. And the hardest time of all is when they were teenagers. And I think we were very, very lucky because we know other families that weren't lucky and the temptations out there are really, really hard. I think one of the reasons we were successful to the degree that we were was that we were a two-parent family. I'm very much unhappy with the way society has gone into the single parent situation. I think one of the worst things imaginable is a single

mother with a teenage son. I just don't know how they can have any kind of guidance and I'm very sorry about it. That's the way I believe.

I think it's really unfortunate if the father's not present there to set limits and say what's good and what's bad. And I'll tell you a funny story about it, about what kind of influence he's going to have is that when my kids were little... And I like to do the marketing because I like to read labels and I put them in the shopping cart. So he's sitting in the shop and going down there, going to get breakfast cereal. Oops. And there's this entire rows of breakfast cereal. If you notice that all the stuff for the old people is at the top and all the stuff for the young people, little kids is at the bottom. So the sugar this and the cocoa that, that's all in the bottom. And then all the stuff from constipated old people is...

Speaker 1:

Puffed rice.

Abraham Hoffman:

... Shredded wheat, whatever are higher up. And we'd go down there and he's already watching some of the stuff on the ads on TV and whatnot. But I go through this and I take a box of cereal. I'm not going to identify names of cereal, but the kinds that have loaded with sugar and frosted this and whatnot.

I said, "This is garbage." And then I take the shredded wheat, which is zero fat and all that. I said, "This is good stuff." Not the sugar shredded wheat, but bite size stuff, which I still eat. And Cheerios, regular Cheerios. I said, "These are good. That's garbage." And I just did that every week when they were little. I didn't do it necessarily to teach him, but the both boys told me years later they said, "You know dad, I still don't like sugary cereals." So you can have an influence. You not even have to think about it as if you're teaching them, if you're doing what really is the right thing. And so we were lucky that way. I think we probably ultimately made more right decisions than wrong ones. So they're not in prison and they're not on drugs.

Speaker 1:

What was your first job?

Abraham Hoffman:

Not counting an abortive effort at two weeks in a meat market, which I don't really think of as much of a first job.

Speaker 1:

What happened there?

Abraham Hoffman:

This work was very in-demanding and very underpaid and really not very good for a young person to do. So it only went on for about two weeks. And that was that. So the first real job I had was as a senior in high school. No, that's not the first job I had. First job I had was selling newspapers at the corner of 7th and Broadway, downtown Los Angeles. I had it from about the 10th and 11th grade, about two, two and a half years. And that was only on Saturdays. Saturdays and holidays. So I got a little bit of money that way.

Speaker 1:

What newspaper did you sell?

Abraham Hoffman:

All of them. This is roughly 1953 to '50... Beginning of '55, something like that. There was the Times, The Examiner, there was a daily news until December, about 1954 when they went out of business. That's not the today's Daily News, the old Daily News. And they emerged with the Mirror, became The Mirror News and that was about it. Yeah, the metropolitan newspapers.

Speaker 1:

How much did they cost?

Abraham Hoffman:

Nickel. I think that was about right.

Speaker 1:

What did you spend your money on?

Abraham Hoffman:

I don't know. Not much to spend it on, I guess. I'm fascinated by the tremendous number of choices that consumers have today as opposed to 50 years ago.

Speaker 1:

Just not in the news, though.

Abraham Hoffman:

It's not in the news. What's going on here is when I was, say 10, 11, 12 years old, if you wanted to buy a bag of potato chips, I'm not concerned about the price. You bought a bag of potato chips. That was it. Potato chips. And then somebody, I don't know who, Lays, or Frito, whoever it is, came up with barbecue flavored potato chips. Like, "Wow, it's choice." Now you go there, you got sour cream and onion, you got the ruffled kind versus the other kind and it just goes on and on. And there's this whole wall at the market of choices that didn't exist. Yet at the same time, bottom line is they're all variations of the same thing. It's just giving you the choices that you spend more of your consumer dollar on this stuff. So I see that we didn't have those kinds of choices, therefore you didn't have a lot of money to, didn't need a lot of money because there weren't a lot of choices.

But the number one thing that I did with my money is when... Certainly when I was selling newspapers, buying comic books. I was very big on comic books. I discovered EC comics. The same company puts on Mad magazine to this day. And I knew I was onto something with them because those were superior to the other comic books and really well done. And I got involved with the... That was my first taste of politics was when Los Angeles City Council proposed banning the sale of comic books in the city limits of Los Angeles. The idea was they were promoting juvenile delinquency. There were congressional hearings on this. There was a fellow, a psychiatrist named Fredric Wertham, who wrote a book called Seduction of the Innocent. And using some very bad science came to the conclusion that comic books caused juvenile delinquency, which is what they used to call it when kids went out and did crimes. Of course now they call it murder and rape and gang banging and things like that.

But this was supposedly if you read comic books, these lurid kinds of things inspired you to a life of crime. This sounds stupid, but they, that's what they were doing. So on this was that city council. Of course, any businessman could have taken that to court and had it thrown out as unconstitutional, it's First Amendment rights. But this is the Cold Wars, the McCarthy era. It's one of conformism-ing and things like that. So I think that's where probably a lot of my money went. Interestingly enough, we never did candy much, my family. Because it was an item by omission. My parents never had candy in the home. The only thing they had was marble cake. I grew up on marble cake and that came from the bakery where my uncle was. He'd say, "Hey, test it out with the rye bread." So we'd have that in the house all the time, but it was a treat kind of thing. I grew up on raw carrots and veggies and I'm glad I did. I don't have any cavities. Nobody starved in the Hoffman family.

Speaker 1:

Well, your first job was selling papers. What was your first job...

Abraham Hoffman:

The first real job?

Speaker 1:

Yes.

Abraham Hoffman:

Yeah, that's one month out of high school. Well, no, actually... My senior year in high school I worked at a specialized garage called a headlight station, which dealt with electronic things concerning cars, ignition systems and stuff like that. That was just a cleanup of the place Gopher, I didn't do anything really on the cars. It was a one man operation. He's a very nice guy and his establishment, it's a block from Roosevelt. So after I get out of school, I just walk over there and I put some time in over there and I worked there for several months and it was very nice and all that. But I was going to go to college. So when I graduated it wouldn't be practical to have stayed there and it wasn't where I worked that many hours.

So after that, the first real, real job occurs a month after I started college. A friend of mine who is in Los Angeles City College... So I started there. He says, "Hey, a month ago I got a job at the Los Angeles Central Library." And he says, "They have an opening in the department, why don't you go apply?" So I said, "Okay."

So a month after he got the job, I went down there and I applied and I got a job down there. He was there about six months and moved on. I was there five and a half years. I had no idea when I started that I would go all the way through college working at the L.A. Central Library and I think in many ways it shaped what my subsequent life was going to be like. It was paradise on earth to be there. It was truly a wonderful place. It was a different world in many ways from, well, the libraries are always libraries, but the environment around the libraries so dramatically changed with urban redevelopment and everything. It was just a fascinating world back then. And I caught it and I got in at the right time and it was the right place and it channeled me. I think it civilized me a little bit, too. So it was a really great place to work.

Speaker 1:

What did you do there?

Abraham Hoffman:

I was a messenger clerk, which is the lowest of the low. Not quite. The lowest, lowest of the low was to be a library messenger clerk because you didn't get any benefits. You just worked at the library. You didn't get any holidays, you didn't get any illness. But after I started there for a very short time afterwards I found out that you could do the exact same work if you file for a civil service rating. All I had to do was do an application and all the librarians encouraged this.

So I applied for it and got it. So a couple of months after I started the library, I was a civil service messenger clerk. So I'm getting holidays and illness days and I'm able to work 20 hours a week. And that sustained me all the way through college. I even bought a car with saving up my money on it. It was \$20 a week, about \$80 a month, 20 hours. It was about 80 to \$100 a month. Something like that in the '50s was it was enough to get you through college. I lived at home, so I didn't have too many expenses that way.

Speaker 1:

What kind of car did buy?

Abraham Hoffman:

My very first car was a 1947 Dodge Business Coupe. There's a picture of me sitting on it. And then what I found how interesting, I see so many other photographs of people sitting on their cars. It was like, "This is my prize possession," and it was a piece of junk. But it got me going for a while. And then in 1958 I had saved enough money from working at the library. I think it was about February of '58, to buy a 1955 Chevrolet 210 4-Door Sedan. Not a sport model, but this was a good one. \$1,200 it cost. And that was my dating car, I'd say. Business Coupe got you to college and back, but this was a real social car and I wish I had it today.

Speaker 1:

A chick magnet?

Abraham Hoffman:

It was, and not quite as much as a sports model, but it was a nice car. It was a good-looking car. One of the first things I did was I put a Vibrasonic sound system in. Nobody remembers Vibrasonic anymore.

Speaker 1:

Tell me about that.

Abraham Hoffman:

Vibrasonic was this switch that you put under the dashboard. Well, somebody's putting in the speaker system. And what it did was the speaker in the back was a split second behind the speakers in the dashboard. So you got this echoing sound. It was really neat, let me tell you. I don't even know if they still do Vibrasonic because with all the quadraphonic and stereo systems around, but it was, everybody had to have one. And I had mine in that car and I had that car from '58... About six years I drove that car.

Speaker 1:

What color was it?

Abraham Hoffman:

It's blue.

Speaker 1:

When did you know you wanted to be a teacher?

Abraham Hoffman:

I didn't. When I left high school, the last thing in the world I would expect to be was a teacher. And if you'd have told me that I was going to be a teacher, I thought you were crazy. But working in the library really aroused my interest in reading, actually. And it's there. I mean, all this neat stuff was there. I guess when I went upper-division of Cal State LA and they started assigning you stuff, it was so easy to get these materials because I knew where it all was.

And when I became a graduate student at Cal State LA, which is a teacher training institution, it made it very, very easy to get a teaching credential. Even if you weren't going to be a teacher. It was just really easy. Because if you're going to go to grad school, you got to take a certain number of units in the major heading towards your degree. And mine was going to be history, although I wasn't clear what I was going to do with it, but you had to fill up your schedule with other courses. And I wasn't particularly interested in my English minor for the BA. So I just said, "Well," and they said, "Here, you take these Ed classes," and so you can be a full-time graduate student working towards your master's degree, but at the same time you're just taking these other classes that would get you towards a teaching credential. So that's how I got the teaching credential.

Well, in June of '61, it was time to leave the library because I'm already basically an adult. I was pushing 23 and it was time to go. So there I am. I'm trying to find out, "Well, what am I going to do?" And the easiest thing to do, because I didn't have the master's degree yet, was to substitute teach in ELA Unified. I did student teaching and that was easy to do, it was all part of the schedule. And I feel to this day that the student teaching I did was far better than what they have now. I don't think they prepare teachers enough, although they have all kinds of programs now.

But I walked into Hollenbeck Junior High for my student teaching and I got the class the second day. Sink or swim, you're in. And of course the mentor is there in case you're sinking a little bit too rapidly. But it was real nuts and bolts and that was a good way to do it. And again, not necessarily going to be a teacher. So I'm working on the master's degree and it's... Studying is... Got to do a lot of reading. Yet at the same time, it's got to have some money coming in. I feel that some payback is necessary. My parents been supporting me and all of that. So I signed on to be a day-to-day substitute with the L.A. Unified.

And then I went about eight weeks without a call because I was at the bottom of the list. And the way I had figured out was, well if they don't call me, I'll just do all this assigned reading for the master's exams that I was going to be taking. And one day at about 11 in the morning, I got a phone call from the substitute desk long after I'd given up on it and they said, "We need you at Jefferson High to substitute in auto shop." I said, "What's going on?" "The auto shop teacher had an accident. They had to take him out, you got to be there, we'll pay for the full day even though you're only going to be there two or three periods." I says, "I'll take the job, but you got to promise. You got to call me. Because this is the first call I've gotten." He says, "You take this job, you'll be called."

So I went down to Jefferson High and I got there about noon and I was babysitting, basically. That's all they needed was a warm body certificated to be there. And sure enough they honored it. I started getting a lot of calls and I worked at a lot of different junior and senior high schools. I was at Bell High

and South Gate High, and of course, Hollenbeck and all kinds of schools in the L.A. area. Berendo, Fairfax, I mean everywhere. Because why not?

Then one of the schools I was getting a lot of calls was Hollenbeck. Of course I'd gone there as a student and a lot of the teachers were still there. It was funny, some of those teachers said, "Hey, what are you doing without a hall pass?" "Well, I'm a teacher now." "Oh, when did you leave?" I said, "I left nine years ago." "Nine years ago?" It was all a joke. Us teachers try to make-believe like it was not nine years or whatever. So I said, "Okay." They offered me a position there as a probationary teacher. And I said, "Well, that's easy enough." I got that first paycheck and it wasn't all that much money, but it was a lot more than I'd ever been earning before. So I said, "Okay." And I stayed at Hollenbeck Junior High for six years and it was a good experience.

But back then... Everybody's, "Oh, back in the day..." All this stuff. "When I was starting out..." I hear all this stuff, but it really was qualitatively different. You had respect from the students. Hollenbeck Junior High had a reputation being one of the worst junior high schools in L.A. I think it was prejudiced more than anything else because, "How dare all of those Mexican and Japanese and Jewish and Black kids be going to a school together?" You got to remember, this is even before the big lawsuit for the L.A. Unified being segregated. And here's Hollenbeck, which is clearly not a segregated school in the sense that what kept everybody there of the different groups was a lack of diversity in their economic level.

Speaker 1:

That's class.

Abraham Hoffman:

Yeah. Didn't have any upper-class people to worry about their darling children, or for that matter, the middle classes. Working class area. And I fit in in that regard because I wasn't any different and I just had a really good time. I did some of them most... I had a lot of fun being a teacher there. I did things there that, I don't know if you get away with it now, but I did.

Speaker 1:

Like what?

Abraham Hoffman:

Oh, I did my license plate one, that was interesting. I was teaching U.S. History, eighth grade, and I said to the students, "Let's see who can bring in the oldest historical thing possible." I said, "thing," not artifact. Said, "You can bring in some stuff from history." And people started hitting their garages and whatnot, old stuff. A kid brought in an old radio, which I still have. I said, "Here it is." It-almost-works kind of thing.

But a lot of kids were bringing in license plates. Now you have to understand this about license plates in California. Up until 1955, the Department of Motor Vehicles issued a new license plate each year with a different number on it and didn't have the simple numbers they do now. It was like 1NXN... And they start bringing these in... After 1955, they went to stickers. And we've been that way ever since. And then sometime after they started doing that, they came up with vanity plates, which is I think is a great idea. But that's a whole nother story when the tape is off because it's X-rated. What happened is they start bringing these in and I said, "Where are you kids getting these license plates from?" Because they were really old. And by the time we had it done, I had a continuous run from something like 1919 to 1955,

which was the cutoff because then at that point they put the stickers on and I had just put them above the chalkboard all the way around the room like that. 1919, all...

And we had blank spots for, "Hey, we need a 1933," and some kid's, "I know where is one." And I said, "Where are you getting them?" And the answer was very interesting. They were getting them from residential garages and I worked that one out. I said, "Why are these license plates hanging in people's garages?" And the answer was because every year you got a new one and there was nothing wrong with the old one. I mean, it's not rusty or anything. And people rather than throw it away because of the L.A. love affair with cars, I don't know how you'd say it, they would take a hammer and a couple of nails and they nail it to the wall inside the garage. And some of these garages had a lot of them.

Now, so here's somebody does this in 1927 in a house, and Boyle Heights is an old neighborhood. So here's some kid living in there in the 1960s and they're renting. So they're renting a house that's been there a long time, has had how many previous owners and they knew where all the bodies are buried. They go into that house and they're looking around for old stuff. They go in the garage here, "License plates." So they brought them all in. That was just one of the things.

And then of course we had... Kids were making the little plastic cars. Well in the heyday of this, in the 1960s, they were making things like Model T Fords. So we would have a 1932 Chevrolet, and then here's a 1932 license plate. So we were able to put that together and really make some good teaching and learning out of that kind of thing because kids could see what the car was like and hold the license plate that would've gone on that. I still have a couple of them.

Speaker 1:

Wonderful.

Abraham Hoffman:

And so we did that and we had some radios and then I got a bunch of history pictures from, I think it was the National Archive, was major events. So kids started bringing in very large picture frames. God knows where they got this from. One kid crawled under his house, that's where he said he found it, and gave me a 1932 Olympic souvenir, which I have on the wall over there. Just plaster of a shield, Olympic shield, it says, "12th Olympics." So we had a lot of fun doing things like that and I really enjoyed it. But again, you reach a certain point where you got to keep moving. Some people were happy being where they are the whole time. By 1965, I felt that something was lacking in what I had been doing. And that was to see if I can go further with my study of history. And so when I signed on at UCLA, I didn't know if I was going to come out, if anything, it took five years. In 1970 I had a degree.

Speaker 1:

Have you ever witnessed or been a victim to what we would now call sexual harassment?

Abraham Hoffman:

Yeah, as a matter of fact, by a teacher in front of 15 other people. Now, how can you sexually harass somebody in front of 15 other people? It was at one of those workshops that they have for teachers. We all have to have breakout groups. So we're all sitting in a circle and there's an administrator who's the facilitator and all of that. And we're discussing discipline problems in the school. And of course if a kid's acting up in class, you write a referral, you kick them out, you send them to the dean.

And I was feeling the way most veteran teachers are about these stupid workshops, which waste time and you get nothing out of it anyway. I mean, come on, it's this... They usually have some guest person

who's going to teach us all about how to be teachers who hasn't been inside a real classroom since they were in college, or something like that. It's all theory. So we're a bunch of cynical people. Anyway, so the question comes up about this and I said, "Well, it seems to me that you can chart the menstrual cycles of female teachers by the number of referrals they write in a given month."

Well, just your PMS, you're going to be kicking kids out of your class. That seemed to make sense to me. This one woman teacher was absolutely outraged. She called me a pervert. This is in front of 15 other people and all of that. And she went and started yelling. She came in the principal's office and I'm sexually harassing her, da, da... He said, "What did he say?" Well, the assistant principal was the facilitator there and he said to him, "Handle this." You can't call that sexual harassment. But she was yelling and went to make a fuss and all that. He handled it very well considering he was an idiot. But I thought he handled this case very well. He says to me, "Look," He says, "Do you have any research to back up what you said?" And in all honesty, I says, "No, I do not have any statistical evidence to back up what I said."

But if I wanted to, it would be an interesting research project to look at the referrals that come in any given month and then match it up against a teacher's menstrual cycle, assuming that a female teacher would be willing to tell you when she's on the rag. At which point he said something like, "Well, since you don't have the research to back it up, you really have to retract your statement. Don't have to exactly apologize, but just say you can't back up the statement." So he called her into the office. I said, "I really don't have the information to make that assertion." And so I withdraw what I had said and that was the end of that. But that was the closest I ever came sexual harassment.

Oh, I'll give you one from junior high school. This is this true story. I don't make this stuff up because I had such fun with it and all of that, but I'm in the classroom and a girl comes up, says, "Could I have a pass to the health office?" And the deal is you really don't question that. And in a school that has a lot of Catholic kids, Catholic girls tend to be very shy about their sexual... In junior high, they don't necessarily know what's going on all the time. This kid comes, "Could have a pass the health office?"

So I write it out and they go to the health office and one girl who was, as I recall, a rather overweight Black girl, comes up, says, "Could I have a pass the health office?" And I made the mistake at that point, since maybe there was one referral to many being written that day. But I made the mistake as saying to her, "Why?" And she proceeded to explain why in the most graphic terms that I never questioned it again. Well...

Speaker 1:

That's a power women hold.

Abraham Hoffman:

Yes. Or in the case, this 12-year-old girl. The referral's got a carve-in. So one goes in the girl's file or whatever student file, the other comes back to the teacher. So I get these things back and there's a word scribbled. There's one word, it's scribbled on the referral and a teacher's signature. And I can't read her writing. I don't know what the heck it is. So finally after this happened half a dozen times I went over to the nurse and I had the referral. Last one she wrote, I says, "I can't read that word. What is it?" And she looks at me and she goes, "Dysmenorrhea." And I said, "What's that?" And she said, "You don't have any sisters, do you?" I says, "How'd you know?" Apparently that's the nurse word for menstrual cramps. And that's what all these girls are having because they're just beginning their periods.

I didn't know anything about that. Why would I? I got brothers. I didn't have any sisters. My mother wasn't about to explain it. Why should she? What relevance would there have been at that point? So I had a lot of learning to do when I was... I'm still growing up.

Speaker 1:

We all are.

Abraham Hoffman:

But that was just interesting that things like that come across that they don't tell you about in the college Ed classes. That you're going to run across a 12-year-old girl who's got a problem that she's not 100% clear on why it's happening to her. And if you're a young male, clueless teacher, you're not going to know it either.

Speaker 1:

Or not know how to respond.

Abraham Hoffman:

Or how. I had no idea. Well, you know what? After a while I learned how to survive. And what I found out was... And I try to tell younger teachers this, is that you've never...

PART 3 OF 5 ENDS [01:33:04]

Abraham Hoffman:

I tried to tell younger teachers this is that you never have confrontations. Confrontations are going to give you stress and high blood pressure and it's going to make the students turn off from their learning. What you do is you avoid it at all costs. How do you avoid confrontation? [inaudible 01:33:18], this is very simple solution. Everything has to be in the third person. You never tell a student, "I want you to do this," you just don't do that, because they'll say, "Why do you want me to do it?" I depersonalize [inaudible 01:33:34] turn out to be a very effective teaching tool where you can say, students says, "Why am I getting an F in this class?" I get to say things like, "Well, if it was up to me, I'd give you an A. I like you, but this roll book that's over here, this roll book has a lot of really bad grades in it by your name, so if you want to argue about your grade, you really have to talk to the roll book."

I never had any problem with students once I learned all this, and it took a long time to really master this, these kinds of teaching skills, I never had any problem with students, their grades. I also came to the conclusion that every student has a right to know where they stand in class at any given point in the semester, and you don't have to wait for report cards, so every four weeks I would subtotal and all grades are number of grades, you don't put an A or a B because how can you evaluate a letter grade on the strength of an assignment? I knew teachers who would give you a pop quiz, 10 items, and you got to B on that, because you got nine out 10 to write, then the same teacher would give you a book report to do where it takes you 10 hours to read the book and then you got to write it up and then you got to be on that.

Well, the two Bs look the same in there, that's crazy. That's that's not fair to the student, so what you have to do is you have to quantify how much is a book review worth, how much is a pop quiz, well, book review's worth 100 points, pop quiz is worth 10 points, that makes much more sense in terms of teaching, and I don't think there's enough of that going on, that's nuts and bolts kind of stuff that

teachers have to know about, but I would subtotal it and I'd tell the students to keep track of their own scores, and I said, "If there's a discrepancy, when I read you your subtotal," and I call them up, I kept it private so they don't have to know other people's scores. If there's a discrepancy, that's when you tell me, then I say you got 512, and you say you got 523.

Well, we got to check the math, maybe I'm wrong, it can happen, but I run into many teachers who complained that somewhere in the 18th week the parents are coming in, they're not happy, they've gotten that 15 week progress report that says the kid is going to get a bad grade and they always have the same question, "What extra credit can my kid do to get a higher grade?" The answer has to be, "None," because extra credit is icing on a cake, your kid hasn't been baking a cake, why would they want to give good grade for the icing? It doesn't work that way so I always built extra credit into the assignments themselves. I also believe very strongly in a syllabus long before the LA Unified started saying syllabuses were required because you have to keep the parent, you have to have it on paper.

Let the parents know-

Speaker 1:

It's a contract.

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, yes, and you have to get a reply from the parent. I had some very interesting open house meetings with over the years where parents would come in on open house and they always say, "How's my kid doing in your class?" You're not supposed to discuss grades and besides, nine out of 10 parents who came in and ask that their kids are getting As, the parents of the kids who are getting Fs are sitting home watching TV or drinking beer or whatever they're doing, but how then you hit the jackpot, you get a kid whose parent comes in and the kid's not doing well, and you're able to say, "Well, according to the roll book, he's not doing this," "Well, what about extra credit?" "Well, you know what? You can do extra credit after you do the regular work."

"Your kid didn't do the regular work." "Well, he never knew about it. He never knew he had to do this or that," I say, "Well, I have here this paper signed by you that says you are aware that these are the assignments he's going to be doing in there every now and then, blue moon, they rarely, but it did happen apparently. I said, "That's not my signature," he says, "Well, then you want to talk to your kid about it, because that's what he brought in, and if they wanted to take it down to the dean and discuss it, that's interesting because it means he forged your name," and then if you're really lucky, the and the father's there and the kid happens to be there, then they go out in the hall, you can hear the father beating up the kid, serve him right. That vindicates yourself.

The parent is coming in there to argue with you, and it turns out his kid's been lying to him all semester. I try to deal with that, I would send out bulletins, in fact, I have some stuff on the Internet trying to let people know that you have to have it all on paper now. You have to have it documented that a teacher who just says, I'm your friend. Call me George, at 15th week, suddenly you're not their friend anymore, you're going to give him a D in the class and the kid thinks, "You were my friend, why are you giving me a D?" I had it one time where somebody went crazy in class. I had two problems where this guy wasn't actually, his turnout wasn't even enrolled, he was on a waiting list and he was nuts, and there were several students getting really nervous about it.

I was thinking, "Do I call the security on this guy?" I found out he was on the waiting list, I said to him, this was first night, he says, "Excuse me, but it doesn't matter where you are on the waiting list. You're not getting in this class. You can leave now or I can call the security people to take you out," and he left.

That was the end of that. The other interesting one was a man comes into my classroom. I was a teaching a night class at LA City College at the time. He says, "I'm looking for my wife, Nicole Padilla," no, I'm joking, "Mary Garcia," whatever it was, "I'm looking for my wife," I said, "Well, I'm looking at my roster and I says, well, she's not here," he says, "What do you mean she's not here?" I say, "Well, according to the roll sheet, I haven't seen her in five weeks. This is the eighth week of the semester. She hasn't been here for the last five weeks,"

"She says she's coming to class on Thursday night," and I'm saying, "Boy, I know exactly what that means. She's stepping out on him," and I never heard the solution to that one but that was scary where you know this, she was doing it. She was using the college classroom as an excuse. It only happened that one time, fortunately.

Speaker 1:

How is your work divided in your house? The household [inaudible 01:40:17]?

Abraham Hoffman:

I have one of those people who believes, believe it or not, I'm probably coming across as a sexist in so much of this, especially on that harassment discussion, but I'm one of the people who believes there's no such thing as women's work in the house. There's work, that's it. It's work and it has to be done, and it's not gender oriented. Now, there's some things my wife can do better than I can, so when it comes to laundry, I'll do the whites and the towels because it's a no-brainer, and I'll do my own t-shirt because that's all cold water stuff. The permanent press I get mixed up by, so she does that, so it's a division on skill rather than gender if you want to look at it like that.

Speaker 1:

Who does the dishes?

Abraham Hoffman:

That's never a problem. Whoever's home and sees there's dishes to be done, but we have a dishwasher. However, I put the dishes in the dishwasher because I'm good at it. She puts three dishes in the dishwasher, it looks full. Now we can have fun discussing this, and I can say women are incapable of properly loading a dishwasher, but I'm sure that there are some women in the world who are, however, her job is taking the dishes out of the dishwasher because she knows where they all go better than I do, I know where they all go more or less, but sometimes there's a pot or pan that's really a question mark. We don't have any problems with stuff like that. I already told you about the cat and how that would be divided up, but that's just a case of that's not gender-oriented either, that's who's going to take care of the disagreeable task of emptying the litter box, doesn't matter, boy or girl, male or female.

Speaker 1:

You mentioned that you decided to go to get your PhD in 1965, which is the same year as the Watts Riots. What do you-

Abraham Hoffman:

A month after that.

Speaker 1:

Remember? A month after that?

Abraham Hoffman:

I started UCLA September, 1965. Well, I wasn't in the area, where did I live at the time? I was living out in South Pasadena or someplace at an apartment, so in many ways, I think if you weren't directly involved, it was what you were watching on TV, and as the news of it came out, as it began to be better reported, you became aware there was a lot of injustice in Los Angeles at that time, and just a few years later was teaching in the community college, realized this, that if you were a black person living in South Central Los Angeles, the way the bus systems was set up at that time was more east-west than north-south, so it was difficult to leave that area to seek employment elsewhere in the city unless you took three buses and three hours to get someplace one way, which is untenable, so the city wasn't doing much in that regard.

I think that Mayor Yorty, who was the mayor at the time, was rather a racist. I think there was a lot of prejudice at that time in California that people don't recall. This was a year after the whole episode over Proposition 14 which was an initiative, so people signed petitions to defeat a fair housing law, and then of course, when it got in the courts, the initiative was thrown out as being unconstitutional, but this shows you, there's a majority of the voters in California who are perfectly fine with the idea of having discrimination in housing, private sales houses. Also, "My house is my castle. I'll sell it to whoever I want. I don't want to sell it to somebody else," and things like that. It's 1963 that you get the beginnings of what ultimately became the Crawford decision, accusing the Los Angeles Unified of being segregated, and we don't have time to tell you all the stories I could tell you about segregation in the school that I experienced firsthand.

Speaker 1:

Tell me a few of them.

Abraham Hoffman:

First of all, the LA Unified claim that it was colorblind. They don't have any statistics on who's who and what's in the school, therefore, they're not prejudiced, but de facto segregation is going on, and it's certainly going on in areas where minorities live and they're living where they live because there had been a lot of restrictions on the houses where you could buy a house, if you're being told by a counselor, "Well, you're a black or you're a Mexican and you shouldn't go to college," that's wrong, there's no question about it, and there should be an equality of opportunity.

Speaker 1:

Most definitely.

Abraham Hoffman:

But to say instead, well, it's somehow demeaning to have wood shop and auto shop and these industrial arts programs, so we're going to track you all to college and you're going to, in order to graduate, you've got to have this algebra and this, how many times I've used algebra since I left school 50 years ago? How about none? Zero, zip. I've lived very well without algebra, thank you very much.

Speaker 1:

Now, I completely agree with you that we also have lost a whole set of skills, generations [inaudible 01:45:50].

Abraham Hoffman:

You know where those skills are now, in the occupation centers, so you have to say to a kid, "Well, we can't really accommodate you at this high school so I know you want to be a baker and make cookies and bread and all that and it's a skill and there's a union that that do this and you can't outsource bread making to India, it's got to be made here. You're going to have to go to the occupational center to do that. High school can't do that because we're closing down home economics classes because we want to have more algebra for you." Now, that's terrible.

Speaker 1:

Well, I also hate the fact that it demeans work. It puts-

Abraham Hoffman:

There's no question. We had a family friend who was a plumber. Boy, he made money. He owned his business. He had a truck and he did very well, but socially, it was a low status job. I thought that was ridiculous that that would be set up like that. He had a great poster in his house. It said something like, "A civilization that tolerates sloppy philosophy and denigrates high class plumbing is a civilization in decay," or something like that. That's a great line. I've always been strong on that. At the same time, I think it's wrong to have tracking on a basis of race that [inaudible 01:47:07].

Speaker 1:

Well, I know that with the East LA blowouts, a lot of the students said that they were told because they were Mexican, that could only be maids.

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, I don't know who told them that.

Speaker 1:

Well-

Abraham Hoffman:

I'd have to track that down. Who did the telling? You did that in passive voice just now, they were told, you need to know who's doing the telling.

Speaker 1:

Well, if you look at... This is where I got it, I got it from the six part documentary series called Chicano.

Abraham Hoffman:

That's TV documentary.

Speaker 1:

No, these were people who were there, so Castro's in there.

This transcript was exported on Mar 06, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

Abraham Hoffman:

You've got to try a little harder. I have to do it a little harder.

Speaker 1:

No, this isn't TV recording.

Abraham Hoffman:

This is somebody on TV who's saying it.

Speaker 1:

This is a 12-hour documentary of people who are in it.

Abraham Hoffman:

I know about the documentary.

Speaker 1:

Who were in it.

Abraham Hoffman:

The question is that the person who's saying that on TV indicate who told them that. They say, "Mr. So-and-So, who was a high school counselor at Roosevelt High told me that all I'd ever be was a maid, that I went on and got my doctorate in political science," or something like that.

Speaker 1:

These weren't people who went on to become doctorates, these were people who were in the East LA walkouts.

Abraham Hoffman:

But these are high school students. The high school student...

Speaker 1:

These were done...

Abraham Hoffman:

These people 40 years later.

Speaker 1:

No, this was done, this was footage of the time. This footage during the time where you have pictures of Sal Castro talking about it.

Abraham Hoffman:

He is retired.

Speaker 1:

In front of Garfield. This is footage of the time. These are people talking about the time they have the Brown Berets on it, all of this stuff.

Abraham Hoffman:

All right, it's a period of militancy, but again, I knew teachers at Roosevelt High because I was at Hollenbeck at the same time.

Speaker 1:

That were wonderful.

Abraham Hoffman:

That were not like that, so the question has to come down to which administrators or counselors or people were doing this. Now, here we have a mayor of Los Angeles, [inaudible 01:48:49], who frequently credits the fact that he was able to become what he becomes to Herman Katz, who was a counselor, Roosevelt High. Well, Herman Katz before he was a counselor of Roosevelt High, he was a counselor at Hollenbeck so I knew him very well and he was a wonderful person.

Speaker 1:

No-

Abraham Hoffman:

The question is, was there a counselor in an office next door to Herman Katz who was saying this sort of thing?

Speaker 1:

Well, I also think that Boyle Heights, all of that area is also known for some amazing people that created an amazing people who were there who were committed to it. I think there's lots of different histories happening. People who didn't have the great experience and people who had the amazing experience, the foundational experience that made you who you are.

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, I'm going to put it to you this way. I got two weeks from now. Two weeks, 50th anniversary and I'm going to be... Because they're finally doing it right as the earlier booklets were just awful, but this one is very high-tech, very Internet-oriented, and you've put your own biography in and puff yourself up if you want.

Speaker 1:

That's awesome.

Abraham Hoffman:

It's a little different, and I wouldn't care less if it was my 49th, but it is the 50th. It's a nice round number and you can reflect on so much, and I'm not really interested in renewing friendships that you never saw the person again, but I am interested in seeing perspective and trying to get answers to the differences

between then and now. There are certain people I did go to high school with that I really want to talk to, especially certain female people because they were very intelligent, and I want to know-

Speaker 1:

When-

Abraham Hoffman:

They got out in 1956, what they faced, and a girl I dated when I was in college, who was not in Boyle Heights, she was actually in Burbank, who went on to a career in broadcasting, now she graduated from college about 1966, and I did not see her.

We went our separate ways, but we had a reunion. We were camp counselors in a day camp about five years ago, and she told us stories about what she had to go through into the... We called the days before Tricia Toyota, remember her, or Christine Lund, these female anchor people and broadcasters and reporters, what she had to go through in the mid to late 1960s with curlier hair, just terrible prejudice. See, I had no idea. I picked up on it in the 1970s because it became much more publicly active, and I thought that Betty Fredan was right on target, and I'd used that book in class, and when I was teaching high school, I tell girls, I say, "Read this book and when you're finished reading it, if you got a boyfriend, tell him to read it, and if he won't read it, get a different boyfriend."

That's how I said to him, I said, "Because some guy's controlling you and he wants you barefoot and pregnant for the rest of your life, think about that, the rest of your life." I said, "This is something that's like a Bible that you should live by, that you get out there and you do what you want to do for yourself," and I was very strong on that. It was a history professor education, I think she's retiring now at UCLA named Professor Crabtree, and she was doing teacher workshops, told a fascinating story about she got her degree and it was in the 1960s and opportunities, colleges are expanding in the 1960s, and she was invited to go to the university, I believe it was University of Minnesota, and they were seriously recruiting her for a position there, so they fly her at their expense, put her in housing, everything.

They pick her up and they say, "We have a special treat for you today," she says, "What is it?" Because she's taking a tour of the campus, they say, "Well, we're going to have lunch at the faculty club," and she says, "That sounds very nice, but why is it a special treat?" They said, "Well, because you're going to be there," she says, "Well, that's not that special, I'm being interviewed here," they say, "No, because women are not ordinarily allowed at the faculty club," and she said, "Does that mean if I accept the job here, I'm not allowed at the faculty club?" "That's for men only," "Well, aren't I on the faculty?" "Yes, but you're a woman faculty member." This was the University of Minnesota in the 1960s. She took the job at UCLA where they didn't have these distinctions because you run into these kinds of insane stories.

Speaker 1:

Well, when you were talking about the Huntington...

Abraham Hoffman:

What were they thinking signs starts flashing.

Speaker 1:

Well, let me ask you about, if you recall the Manson murders and the later trial.

Abraham Hoffman:

I remember that.

Speaker 1:

What do you recall?

Abraham Hoffman:

That was scary stuff. It was a shock, and there was a window at that time in criminal justice where there was no death penalty in California, so two people ever since then had been perpetually up for parole, one is Sirhan Sirhan who killed Robert Kennedy, point-blank, and the other is Charles Manson, and everybody gives the sigh of release that Manson is his own worst enemy and he comes in with the swastika carved on his forehead, nobody's going to give him parole or anything like that. It's basically a life sentence, but I think everyone will breathe easier when he finally dies of old age or young age.

Speaker 1:

The women who helped him.

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, it's part of the craziness of that era, and it was such a mixed up period in the 1960s between the drug culture and the increasingly unpopular Vietnam War and all the things going on at that time.

Speaker 1:

Well, and then you have Yorty and Tom Bradley.

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, their first contest was 1969, so that'd be after the Manson business I think, or it was an all [inaudible 01:55:20] run around that period. It's all part of all the peace, but as I was saying before, the LA Unified was segregated and wouldn't admit it, and you had asked me how I could experience it firsthand, I think it was a federal court in Junction saying you have to have this information, so they came up with a racial and ethnic survey, which was a data process punch card or something like that, that students were... No, that wasn't the right card. This first survey they were going to do was as follows, the homeroom teacher, and I was a junior high homeroom teacher, is to count the number of children in homeroom on a given day, on a specified day, and how many of them are black.

How many there were... There were boxes to check off, the usual, one Hispanic, one White, whatever, you're supposed to check them off, and the teacher makes the determination, comes the designated day, and I'm telling you the rain came down like you cannot believe, only in LA did we get rain like that when it does rain, and it was doing that at 7:30 in the morning, so you knew that half the school is going to be absent because it always is and the question came up, "Do we do the survey today?" You know that half the... Do we count kids who you know that kid's Hispanic, but he's absent today because so many kids are going to be absent, what do we do? They call downtown and got the answer back, you do the survey today, you do it on the faces you see, well, how much validity is there going to be with half the students absent?

Speaker 1:

There's probably a class factor, those who have cars-

Abraham Hoffman:

Well-

Speaker 1:

Those who get dropped off, I don't know.

Abraham Hoffman:

I don't know. It was just totally inaccurate. That was how they were doing their foot dragging on things like that, so there was no question in my mind that there was a lot of segregation going on and there were just a very high dropout rates from Roosevelt. I knew that some of the teachers weren't very good over there because some of them that I'd had were still over there and I didn't have a good time with them. It was a very difficult time, so I'm sorry it couldn't have been better.

Speaker 1:

No, it's important to talk about all of it. Do you remember when Tom Bradley was elected Mayor?

Abraham Hoffman:

1973.

Speaker 1:

Do you recall what that campaign was like? I know he ran first...

Abraham Hoffman:

He was pretty... Actually I can't because I wasn't in California at the time so I got it secondhand, [inaudible 01:58:01].

Speaker 1:

Where were you?

Abraham Hoffman:

I was in Oklahoma for three years, and so I was out of Los Angeles. I wasn't involved in it in any way, I couldn't give you a close description. However, he is up again in 1977 and I was here and I voted for him, so he was an interesting mayor because he could bring many different groups together, but I wasn't happy with him initially because one of the first things he did when he was mayor was to cut the library budget. Can you believe that? I was angry about that, and then the politicians got into the... My wife will pick that up.

The politicians get in on it, so here's a Bradley wing of the LA public library downtown, and I thought that was a terrible thing to do. I thought, "Why in the world would they," because the politicians did that, and then they changed the name of the library for Reardon. That was a hack political job because they had a proper name on it, although people didn't know him very well but nevertheless, it had an appropriate, it was a Rufus von KleinSmid library. Rufus von KleinSmid was a longtime president of USC and a member and president of the Board of the Library Commissioners, well, that's who you name it for. I have a view that no public monument or building should be named for a living politician or a living

anybody, and you wait until they're safely dead, and then the historical record is available to find out if the person's a crook or not.

Speaker 1:

After the...

Abraham Hoffman:

Look at that Walmart building that they named for that girl who was having her roommate do all her return papers for her and stuff like that.

Speaker 1:

Exactly.

Abraham Hoffman:

You don't need embarrassments like that, so there should be a moratorium for 10 years before naming a building after somebody but nobody listens to me.

Speaker 1:

Well, your observation leads me to a more questions about contemporary issues and how do we figure out someone's a crook, we look at the freedom of Information Act, we get documents that way. What do you think of the Bush presidency's clamping down on presidential records?

Abraham Hoffman:

That's a bad move. There's a lot of bad moves being made there, and if another administration comes in, they'll put an end to that. Democrats come in and probably reverse that because it's only a presidential order, it's not set in stone. It's bad policy, and part of the problem is there is a time lag involved. Now, I did some work with the Foreign Relations United States Publications, that's State Department stuff, and they have a 30-year lag and and of course, with the computers and Internet now or online access, things are gotten a little more complicated but I know that when I was doing my work at UCLA in the 1960s, they were only beginning to get declassified material in print form from World War II, so I figured they kept falling behind in the publications program on this, and theoretically when the volume comes out, it's supposed to declassify stuff in those files.

Now we're even further behind and now they're putting restrictions on it, as you say, with the Bush administration. When Johnson went out of office and they had the Johnson Library built, and there were all these wonderful document cases that were over there, most of them were empty. What there was was, well, if you wanted to find out about the Johnson administration in the Department of Interior on the agency that handles fish and game, well that's there because it's not exactly national secrets, so stuff like that can be there. The sensitive stuff is going to have to wait and in some cases, waits a long time. Now Korea's a very strange problem there because it never ended. It's been a truce for 53 years and now we got the North Korean setting off nuclear devices, so it's some of is frivolous, don't question about it.

Speaker 1:

One of the things we were talking about Chavez Ravine, one of the things I had my students learn about is Frank Wilkinson, who was head of the Public Housing Authority.

Abraham Hoffman:

Yes, he really was on a hot seat there.

Speaker 1:

Well, he declassified over 72,000 documents about himself in the 1970s.

Abraham Hoffman:

That's nice.

Speaker 1:

72,000 pages on him.

Abraham Hoffman:

You mean he accessed it?

Speaker 1:

He got them, slowly. First...

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, they thought he was a communist.

Speaker 1:

He was a communist.

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, it wasn't illegal to be a communist for a long time, and then suddenly-

Speaker 1:

It was.

Abraham Hoffman:

They changed the rules on it. I just reviewed a book on John Howard Lawson, who was Hollywood screenwriter, one of the Hollywood 10.

Speaker 1:

Exactly.

Abraham Hoffman:

He made no secret of the fact that he was a com, and they really didn't nail him because he was a communist, they nailed him because he was an influential person. They wanted to shut him down, so they nailed him on content and put him on a blacklist that he never got out of. Other people managed to get off and not him because he was too outspoken, so sometimes, you can talk about our free society but...

Speaker 1:

Now, I'm going to ask you a series of general questions.

Abraham Hoffman:

Sure.

Speaker 1:

Like what's your favorite flavor of ice cream.

Abraham Hoffman:

Chocolate, almond fudge.

Speaker 1:

Who was the person who had the most positive influence on your life?

Abraham Hoffman:

I can't name one, I'd have to name a whole bunch. At different points in my time, there have been people who were very helpful to me, and I appreciate what they were able to do in terms of guiding or influencing or teaching or something like that but it wouldn't just be one.

PART 4 OF 5 ENDS [02:04:04]

Abraham Hoffman:

You're influencing or teaching or something like that. But it wouldn't just be one person any more than one favorite song or anything like that.

Speaker 1:

It definitely, Mrs. Crumb.

Abraham Hoffman:

Miss.

Speaker 1:

Miss Crumb.

Abraham Hoffman:

Dedicated and never married.

Speaker 1:

When you see your people at your reunion, I would love to get a lot of different people's reactions to Mrs. Crumb or Ms. Crumb.

Abraham Hoffman:

What I'm trying to do, and I got to get my act together on it, is use classmates.com for Roosevelt graduates, because many Roosevelt graduates came through Hollenbeck. Towards the end, she was also ESL coordinator and she spoke Spanish fluently. And so there's people who would be, let's say, born... They're in their early fifties who still have Ms. Crump. So there's a huge span of time and all that, and I hope to be able to get something going on that, find out some... Going with classmates.com and I've got to... I'm behind on that. I really have to get going on, but when I get some reactions, I'll make sure you find out all about it.

Speaker 1:

What US president have you admired the most and why?

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, there haven't been too many to admire lately, and you can't give it an unqualified admiration. You can say that somebody was very successful in here, but not particularly in there. So I do give very high marks to Franklin Roosevelt. I give high marks to Harry Truman. I give some marks to Eisenhower. I give fewer marks than you would think for Kennedy, because a lot of what could have happened, didn't and you can't really give him a mark on what he could have happened. We don't know. I think that Johnson's domestic program was noble if somewhat misguided and his foreign policy was a disaster.

Richard Nixon fool's people in many ways, he resigns the presidency in disgrace, yet it's on his administration that we get the Environmental Protection Agency. And black and white this is. There's a lot of shades of gray in terms of presidential accomplishments. Gerald Ford's a non-entity. Jimmy Carter was somewhat of a disappointment, although I think he correctly sees himself as in promoting human rights and has done a lot in that regard. But he didn't really enjoy... He was not an inspiring leader. I think Reagan is highly overrated and I think you need a really long stretch of history. And then the realization that maybe we shouldn't name the freeway after him.

Speaker 1:

Well, yeah, I mean didn't he invite HUAC to Hollywood. I mean, he was the director of the screen.

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, he's president Screen Actors Guild, and I don't think he invited them.

Speaker 1:

Oh, he did.

Abraham Hoffman:

They were coming.

Speaker 1:

He was helpful.

Abraham Hoffman:

He was in this... He was helpful, but I don't think you would put it on him. He didn't invite them. They were looking for who they could find and their revolution...

Speaker 1:

Yeah, but as the president of the Screen Actors Guild he could...

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, the screen actors was very badly divided on a lot of this, and they were really looking for the screen writers because...

Speaker 1:

They were the lowest. They're the least power.

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, one of the things that Lawson pointed out is that the whole thing was a chimera. The whole thing was fraud because you're not going to find communist influence in movies or indeed in the screenplays they wrote. And Lawson was the first person to point out, he says, I write something and 15 other people are revising it. There were how am I going to sneak something in?

Speaker 1:

There were huge debates about it in the 40s between Lawson and Albert Maltz, who was also one of the 10. And they argued about whether they had a responsibility to do it as communists to inject political...

Abraham Hoffman:

Then they argued like crazy.

Speaker 1:

They did. But one scholar named Tom Anderson argues that if you look at the work produced by the Hollywood 10, they're not necessarily political, but they do challenge capitalism.

Abraham Hoffman:

Oh, they're socially challenging. But then again, if you look at a movie like Mr. Smith goes to Washington, which is before World War II even.

Speaker 1:

That's the same thing.

Abraham Hoffman:

It's just an indication of our free society and to shut everybody down. Well, I heard an interesting comment. Somebody said... Two people having an argument. A good example would be the teacher and the student. The teacher says to the student, you're always doing this and that and acting out and I want to know why do you want to be different? And the student responds to the teacher. Why would you want to be the same? I think that's an interesting philosophical point.

Speaker 1:

That is good.

Abraham Hoffman:

I'm all for the different, well, not too different.

Speaker 1:

No tattoos.

Abraham Hoffman:

No, [inaudible 02:09:14].

Speaker 1:

On you.

Abraham Hoffman:

No tattoos on me. No law that says I must have a tattoo. Okay, we'll do it that way.

Speaker 1:

As you see it, what are the biggest problems that face our nation and how do you think they could be solved?

Abraham Hoffman:

I can't solve everybody's problems. I don't have the answers. One of the things I have learned is to try and ask questions because I can't come up with answers. I think one of the questions has to be dealt with is global warming. We're really screwed up on that. A second question has to do with... Well, let me put it to you this way. I find a lot of hypocrisy in society and there is a lack of a clear, consistent moral standard. This bothers me. There's not much of a sense of honor anymore. It's considered old-fashioned. The idea of saying something and keeping your word because you step up to the plate for it. I think this is missing from our society. I think we need a sense of unity. I think one of the great hypocrisies that I see now is to be driving on the street and see somebody's car with a bumper sticker that says, I support the troops in Iraq.

And I think if you ask that person, how are you supporting the troops in Iraq? The answer might very well be, well, I have a bumper sticker on my car. And that's not really supporting the troops in Iraq. To support the troops in Iraq requires a definition of why they're there in the first place. Most people aren't even thinking about that at this point. Now they're there, therefore we have to support them. That doesn't do them any favor since they're getting shot at.

But in terms of something like World War II, I found it interesting that the way the money was raised to fight World War II was by selling what were called war bonds. The money to fight World War II did not come out of the domestic budget, it came out of the selling of bonds. So that people were told, tighten your belt. Spend \$18.75. I loan it to the US government, and in 10 years, we'll give you \$25 because that's the way the bonds were. We'll give you interest on it. And they sold billions of dollars in war bonds because everybody saw the necessity of this. And yeah, they were probably waste and mismanagement here and there, but there was that sense of unity.

Nobody's talking about war bonds and the administration is financing the war in Iraq by emergency appropriations that another generation's going to pay for. That's not how you finance the war. That's not how you support the war in Iraq. There's a lot of hypocrisy that really bothers me. So I can't really

solve the world's problems other than to try and say that. I think people have to have an ethical standard of existence and to say, this is right, that's not right. And maybe it isn't a black and white situation. I don't know that you can say it's okay to have everything as being relative because the next thing you know, somebody's going to say, well, Hitler wasn't a bad guy. He liked dogs. Well, okay, that's a little too relative.

Speaker 1:

What have you made that others have enjoyed?

Abraham Hoffman:

People tell me they like my writing, and I get a lot of pleasure out of that. I've learned not to be sarcastic when I'm told that. I just take the compliment for what it's worth. That's probably number one on my list.

Speaker 1:

Who is your favorite singer?

Abraham Hoffman:

I don't have a favorite singer. I have certain songs that I... Certain music that I play over and over again, but I couldn't identify a favorite singer.

Speaker 1:

What kind of music do you play over and over again?

Abraham Hoffman:

I like classical music mostly. And I very much enjoy Johann Sebastian Bach and Beethoven, but I'm not narrow on that. I like to like Johnny Cash. I enjoy him a lot. But then I enjoy the style of music that he plays. And I like the movie that he was in, that's recent. I like songs that have messages to them, see songs, for example, folk songs, politically oriented songs are far more listenable to me. Songs that tell a story. It's about a fierce highway, man. My story, I will tell. His name was Willie Brennan in Ireland he did dwell. See, that's a story tell song. Those are nice.

Not stuff... I'm sorry ,I'm an old curmudgeon. I just can't see the music today. I can tell you that when there would be a slow day in school, high school and junior high, where there was a few minutes before the bell and everybody's done and everybody's putting the books away and it was raining usually. I break out into a song. What the hell, why not? That reminds me of a song and I do this. And every now and then some student would say, how do you remember all the words to those songs? And I said, well, first of all, you can understand the words. And second of all, they tell stories. Not really like what's going on now where you can't even hear it because the amps are so high. So I guess I like music that isn't too amped up.

Speaker 1:

Do you have a favorite book?

Abraham Hoffman:

Do I what?

Speaker 1:

Have a favorite book?

Abraham Hoffman:

I have a lot of favorite books. I like, in terms of books that had a long-lasting influence on me. Right at the top of the list, I'd have the writings of Alan Moorehead who wrote books on the Nile and historical incident, like Gallipoli, which was terrible campaign in World War I, which I read when I was in college and made me much more interested in history because they were so well done and so readable. History doesn't have to be boring. So I've enjoyed that. And right now I'm collecting Bernard Cornwell novels on the Sharpe series for the politic wars, because I like the TV. They have the mini-series that they had with him. And I said, wow, I want to read the books. So I'm getting those slowly with Shirley, collecting that.

Speaker 1:

Do you have a favorite tree?

Abraham Hoffman:

A tree? I like pine trees.

Speaker 1:

Favorite season?

Abraham Hoffman:

No, I wouldn't say I have a favorite season or something to be said every season.

Speaker 1:

Favorite color?

Abraham Hoffman:

I like green.

Speaker 1:

Do you have a favorite animal?

Abraham Hoffman:

I like cats.

Speaker 1:

A favorite meal? A food that you like to eat?

Abraham Hoffman:

You mean the one that got me the heart attack five years ago?

Speaker 1:

Oh, what was this?

Abraham Hoffman:

Barbecue beef ribs. I like them, but they didn't like me too much. But we still do that once in a blue moon. Figure once every couple of months isn't going to kill me yet. Yeah, those are good.

Speaker 1:

The last thing I want to ask you before I end it is, would you describe your religious beliefs for us? I know that your faith is important to you.

Abraham Hoffman:

My faith is important to me, but I am not into ritual very much. One of the reasons I enjoy the Jewish faith... Now, let me give you an example of this. I was on a camping trip a couple of weeks ago and it was up above San Luis Obispo. And so I'm driving up there in my RV and you lose the Los Angeles radio stations as you leave the area. So you start hitting the dial looking for other stations. And it struck me, there was an awful lot of evangelical Christian radio stations. And I started listening to some of what they had. And there were two kinds really. There was the preaching and then there was the rock, rock music. And if you're not paying attention to the rock music, it sounds just like rock music. But if you're listening to the lyrics, then you get the message that it's evangelical.

And one of the reasons why I enjoy the Jewish faith is because Jews ask questions. And evangelical Christians are providing answers. And it's not my cup of tea, and I hope I'm not offending anybody. It's not my cup of tea to be presented with an answer that requires no intellectual inquiry. So if Jesus is the answer, I need to know what the questions were. And Jews are always getting in trouble for asking questions. Like Socrates, and he wasn't even Jewish. But the sense of inquiry I think is very, very important to try to understand why is this? Why is that? Not to be provided. You don't have to think about it, just relax. You'll be saved and redeemed. All you have to do is take Jesus into your heart. Well, that's good. But what about taking something into your head? I think that's very important.

One of my favorite periods of history is the Enlightenment, particularly the 18th century Enlightenment where reason was really at the top of the list. People were doing an awful lot of thinking and inquiry. And I asked students in my class, how far back can you go in history, if you had a time machine where you could step out of that time machine, assuming you spoke the language of the people who were there to meet you and say who you were without being dragged off to the nearest tree and hanged from it or burned alive at the stake? And I get all kinds of answers all over the places, but for me, the answer has to be in and around the 1750s. What happens in the 1750s that makes the world familiar to us today? What is it in the last 250 years? The answer is it's in the 1750s that the encyclopedia is invented, which enabled people to look up information when they had questions in an easily accessible way.

And prior to that, it would've to be the invention of printing itself. Because if nobody's going to read any books, if nobody has to read, knows how to read, so you have mass literacy programs going on, people have to learn to read. Now, religious people have always had the contradiction, particularly Puritan types who say, well, you got to learn how to read so you can read the Bible, but if you learn how to read, so you can read the Bible, there's all that other stuff you get to read too and say, read this, but you can't read that. It's that great confrontation that's going off for the last 500 years over things like that.

And I don't know how well I've answered it, but the religious faith that I have is because it's a faith that allows me to raise questions. To go to somebody who is a rabbi and say, well, why is this like this? And there's an image of Jewish students, rabbinical students, and all they do is argue. Well, rabbi X said this and rabbi Y said that. Well, which one's right? Well, maybe they were both wrong and all that. I find that fascinating.

Speaker 1:

The few Jewish people I do know, I find that it's within families, well, at least families I know, developing a spiritual awareness and a philosophy that's tied to ethics and faith was very much part of that. And it was your responsibility, and it was something that was handed down. My friend had his grandfather's written philosophy. They decided to do it as a family, but very much they had been very explicit about inquiry and spirituality, that it was a combined thing.

Abraham Hoffman:

I think responsibility is something that has to be taught, and it isn't just taught at one point in life. It has to be absorbed and faced every day you live. And I had a failure of responsibility this summer that still bothers me because I didn't do it right. Where I was... I took the orange line to work this summer, it's perfect. And I'm waiting for the orange line, and this guy comes up to me and says, do you have some spare money that I can buy a ticket for? Well, I automatically shut down when [inaudible 02:22:46] says the word spare changes. You have money you can lend me or whatever panhandling. I just shut down and say no. But then I realized that what he had said was he wanted to get the ticket to go to a veteran's hospital, and I blew it. And I blew it bad.

I should have done it. And if I was worried that he was going to take the money I gave him to buy drugs with, I could have said, I'll buy you the ticket right now. Here's a ticket. I could have done that and I didn't. And the only thing that makes me feel good about it is that I felt bad about it. I feel, wow. I said, you know what? I recognize I should have done better. Next time I'm going to do better. And I think that's... Doesn't matter how old you are or old you're going to get, you have to have that sense of humanity and responsibility.

Speaker 1:

And humility and this idea that you're constantly learning and evolving.

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, that's what I'm here for. I'm constantly learning stuff.

Speaker 1:

Me too.

Abraham Hoffman:

And when I stop learning, it's because they're putting the nails in the coffin.

Speaker 1:

Well, is there anything that I should have asked you that I didn't ask you?

Abraham Hoffman:

Maybe the historical research I've enjoyed doing.

Speaker 1:

Well, let's hear about it.

Abraham Hoffman:

When I was at UCLA, I had an excellent professor in one of the seminars and he was involved in immigration history, and he knew I was from East LA just by conversations and whatnot. And when I did a seminar paper for him on Mexican immigration to the United States, he turned it around and said, why don't you do something on Mexican repatriation? And I said, oh, well that's interesting. He says, they got materials that UCLA and boy did they. And I was able to find good stuff in the National Archives, and I did my dissertation on Mexican repatriation and the Great Depression.

Speaker 1:

May I have a copy of your dissertation?

Abraham Hoffman:

I don't have copies of the dissertation. My God. No. It's published as a book, but I don't have copies. I got mine.

Speaker 1:

I'll get it of from there.

Abraham Hoffman:

It's a University of Arizona press my throw on that. But that thing was published years ago. It came out in 1974, so I don't even know if it's in print. And every now and then I do get a royalty statement, like \$3 or whatever. So if you want to get a hold of a copy of that, just let the University of Arizona press...

Speaker 1:

I will.

Abraham Hoffman:

But it came out at the right time because this was right at the beginning of Chicano studies and there weren't any books out there. And here I am, and I did this, and it went through three printing. So a lot of Chicano studies classes found it useful. And then every now and then I get the ego trip and somebody still finds it useful, although more recent work has been done, that's better than mine. But they've had access to materials I didn't know about like Balderrama's book, Decade of Betrayal. And Balderrama invited me to check his manuscript on his first book, which came out before Decade of Betrayal. So I know I was able to help him a little bit. And he's done very well with that. So that's one of the things I feel good about. And then the magnum opus I did was called Visions or Villainy: Origin of the Owens Valley-Los Angeles Water Controversy.

Speaker 1:

I was wondering why you had a [inaudible 02:26:15] on your refrigerator.

Abraham Hoffman:

That one took some years to write. And again, I was able to get into an area that hadn't been well covered. And so a lot of people have told me they like it. And it's still in print. That's Texas A&M University Press. And one of the reasons I like that book a lot is because they put the footnotes at the bottom of the page and nobody does that anymore. And that came out in 1981 with paper back in '93. And then I've done some other stuff. I've put out a lot of articles. And one of the things I enjoy doing now is doing book reviews for several publications. Los Angeles City Historical Society, Los Angeles Corral of Westerners, the Water and Power Associates. And that keeps my brain active. I do read for recreation, but I also read serious for the reviews because I have to be proactive.

I'm not just taking it in to read it. I have to get it out and evaluate it. And that requires a lot of thinking. And then since 1970, I have been doing abstracts for ABC-Clio, which is this big reference service, and I do about 35 journals for them. Most of them are quarterly. It all comes down to about one a morning, one article a day or something like that. And I have a lot of fun doing that because I've been doing it so long that I just have a real nice run on all of these articles and have a good time with that. I have an article which I co-authored with Tina Stern coming out next year on the [inaudible 02:28:07].

Speaker 1:

I love the [inaudible 02:28:09] and the fact that you can still see it.

Abraham Hoffman:

Well, that was the interesting thing is back in 1971 when they had the earthquake, the plaza area had damage, and when they were cleaning up the mess, they found a portion of the pipe. So they created a stairwell museum there in the back, behind the Avila Adobe. And there's that courtyard, and then there's some offices and there's a stairwell. And the DWP paid for that because the [inaudible 02:28:41] is down at the bottom, of the bottom of stairwells, the cutaway of this thing.

Speaker 1:

Well, I saw it at...

Abraham Hoffman:

And then there's one in the cornfields.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, that's where I saw it, of Bernard and Broadway.

Abraham Hoffman:

I saw that three, four years ago when we were taking a walk around the area. And that had just recently been discovered. And you stand over there and you look towards where Olvera street is, and it all makes sense, you could see this thing. And I think the reason why it wasn't vandalized or anything is that it looks like nothing you'd want to vandalize. This is the brick and all that. So yeah, we had some fun writing there. I've done a lot of writing of articles near major and minor stuff over the years. I've had a lot of fun doing them because they interested me to do them. It wasn't something that I would find a boring drudgery task kind of thing. But I did one on Einstein who was a visiting professor at Caltech in the 1930s. Now, when I was doing my dissertation on repatriation in the 1930s, I run across stuff on Einstein.

Well, Einstein's got nothing to do with Mexican repatriation, but it was interesting. So I just took notes on what it was, and then 25 years or so later, I said, it's time to do the Einstein article. So I was able to get some spinoff. I also got a really weird one. It turned out to have an afterlife. I've also learned that just because people are dead doesn't mean they don't come back to haunt you in history because you think, oh, well, everybody I'm writing about is dead and buried, so whatever. And then it turns out they may not all be dead and buried or if they are dead, nevertheless, they left something that you wish you used when you were doing your work. So while I was doing it, I came across student demonstrations at Roosevelt High School in 1931.

Speaker 1:

About repatriation?

Abraham Hoffman:

No, about Jewish students who were very unhappy for the exact same reasons that the Chicano students were unhappy at the same school in 1968. They were still complaining about the cafeteria food 37 years later.

Speaker 1:

Food. Exactly.

Abraham Hoffman:

Corporal punishment, freedom of speech, bad counselor, all that stuff was in there. And I said, wow. So I got a modest article out of it about 1976 and then along... And it was published in a very modest publication. And along comes the internet. And one of the things I'm doing at the internet is, every now and then I Google my name, not for ego purposes as it happens, but for copyright purposes. And indeed, I have found here and there somebody deciding that it'd be real nice to take my article and it was in such and such and put it on their website without bothering to let me know they're doing it. So you have to check on this now and then to do that. And I came across a reference and it turned out that somebody... It picked up a footnote to this article I had done. And the guy who wrote the article where this footnote was a sociologist that I think it was either Rutgers or Princeton, whose father was one of the students at Roosevelt High who demonstrated. Geez. I said, oh man.

Speaker 1:

What a small world.

Abraham Hoffman:

Yeah. So I wrote him a letter and he says, yeah, his father had the best revenge in the world. He got expelled from Roosevelt High for demonstrating. He had to graduate from some other school or whatever. So he wound up, I think he went to Berkeley and he became a psychologist and he wrote a textbook psychology work on famous people who did poorly in high school. Can you believe that? I mean, here he does... Is that the best... Revenge is a dish best served cold. And here's this guy, he got kicked out of high school and he writes a look about all these important people who didn't do well in high school.

Speaker 1:

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Oh, that's great.

Abraham Hoffman:

I thought that was [inaudible 02:32:50]. You never know when this stuff comes back and bites you on the rear end sometimes.

Speaker 1:

Yeah, your life goes on... Your work goes on.

Abraham Hoffman:

Yeah, it never stops. What the heck.

PART 5 OF 5 ENDS [02:32:59]