

Brig Owens:

Everyone calls me Brig, but my real name is Brigman, B-R-I-G-M-A-N. My mother and my wife and my sisters all call me Brigman. Everyone else calls me Brig.

Brig Owens:

Well, my father went out there first. He worked on the docks in Long Beach during the war, and at that time, it was really difficult for African-Americans to ... working the docks [inaudible 00:01:00] because there weren't very many out there. He and a friend of his went out to Texas together, and they worked on the docks. His friend ended up living in Santa Anna, and my dad moved to Fullerton because we had an aunt there. His sister was living in Fullerton. She had gone out there a year or two before.

Brig Owens:

My father was [Alford Lee 00:01:31] Owens, and my mother was Roxy Lee Owens, maiden name Love. My father went through, I think, 8th, 9th grade, but was very, very smart and really understood math. Kids would give him math problems in Algebra, and he could solve those problems. My mother went through the 7th grade. But my father always worked in construction, or in the area of plumbing and construction, those kinds of things.

Brig Owens:

Both from a little city called Linden, Texas, with population about 2500, and all might be related.

Brig Owens:

I think because at that time everyone was going west. There was opportunities there. And they ended up in Fullerton. I think Fullerton at that time was a small country town, and they came from [inaudible 00:02:55] which was a country town called Linden. My dad did not want to go to LA, although we had relatives there. He didn't want to live in Los Angeles. He was more interested in a country-type environment.

Brig Owens:

I was, I think, two years old when they moved to California. I don't know how my mother did it, and how my father did it, but she brought all us out there on the train. I think there was five or six of us, and she had her hands full. But we learned very young to take care of each other.

Brig Owens:

We lived on Truslow.

Brig Owens:

Part of that street is no longer there. It was a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood, and there were just a handful of blacks that lived in that neighborhood. But we were all a family, and we still stay in touch with each other after all these years. My older sister Larance, who's since passed away, ended up teaching there in Maple School, which was the elementary school. She was a teacher there.

Brig Owens:

I went to Maple Elementary, and I attended Wilshire Junior High School, and then Fullerton High School, and then I went to Fullerton Junior College for a year and a half. Then I transferred and went to the University of Cincinnati on a football scholarship.

Brig Owens:

I'm the middle child of 13 kids. My oldest brother Jewell, who died at the age of 30, 31, of cancer, was a great athlete and football and track. My next oldest brother was brother Leon, who was also a great athlete, and just recently died a few years ago of a heart attack. He spent time in the Navy. My brother Jewell spent time in the Army. He was one of the few athletes back then that the Rams wanted to sign him out of high school. That's how good he was. And my mother said, "No, you're going to school," so he ended up going to the junior college for a year and got drafted into the Army, and was there during the Korean War. He never really picked his career back up. When he came home from the war, he couldn't find a job. He ended up working at the ice house. I'll never forget that.

Brig Owens:

And then my brother David, many people know him by Sonny. He was a national record holder in track [inaudible 00:06:16] his hurdles. He held the record for about 20 years. His nickname was [Cinder 00:06:21], and everyone knew him by the name of Cinder. His achievement in the field of track, in hurdles, the top high-jumper in the nation was a guy by the name of Johnny Mathis. You know the name Johnny Mathis? He was the national record holder in the high jump. I happened to run into Johnny Mathis at a concert in Washington a couple years ago, and I had the pleasure of meeting him backstage, and I reminded him that he was the national record holder in track. He looked at me sort of surprised, and I said, "I'm from Fullerton. Fullerton, you ran track with my brother Sonny." "Oh," he said, "Sonny. Cinder."

Brig Owens:

You know, there was racism then. You didn't recognize these things until you got much older, and couldn't understand that his associates were getting jobs and he couldn't find one. Even though he was very smart, he ended up in the ice house.

Brig Owens:

Ice house was just off of Harbor Boulevard. They also had the fruit packing plants and the train stations over that area.

Brig Owens:

You had my sister Larance and brother David. They were twins. She went on to become a teacher, and some of the things that she did back then as a teacher, now people would get a master's in it. Importance of hygiene, importance of communication skills. She spent a lot of time with the parents, because we were in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood, and so we also had these kids, her students, had parents that were illegals. But she met with them and told how important it was for them to be involved in the school, and the opportunities for higher education. She was a very beloved teacher there in Fullerton. She's married and ended up in divorce, but she had diabetes and ended up with a stroke and passed away. My brother David is still living. Everyone's still there in the Fullerton area. I'm the one that left. Being the middle child, I was the one that was always strange and doing other things, and they would hope that I would be alive 'til at least 18.

Brig Owens:

I think the thing that was the saving grace for me and a lot of players, other young men there in Fullerton, was the opening of the Fullerton Boys Club. Today they call it the Boys and Girls Club. I got caught stealing bikes at the Boys Club by the athletic director, a guy by the name of Pete Liapis, who's a retired Marine and black belt in judo and so forth, he caught me stealing bikes and took me home and told my mom that either I join the Boys Club or he was going to take me down to juvie. Of course I joined the Boys Club, after my mom gave me a good whooping. Then my dad came home and had his way, so I think Pete paid my membership to the Boys Club.

Brig Owens:

That was life-changing for me, because it was the first time I got involved with organized sports, first time I got introduced to the importance of teamwork, discipline. Pete would make us clean up the gym after we practiced. Even after a game he would make us clean up, and never leave the locker room dirty. If you were ... he preached the importance of a sense of fair play. If you did something dirty, especially on the basketball court or on a flag football game, he would call you out and set you on the bench, and you wouldn't play the rest of the game. That was his teaching method. Well, Pete would also check on your grades. If you were not doing well in school, you had to come to Boys Club and you had to watch practice. You couldn't participate.

Brig Owens:

Anyway, I stayed close to him up 'til the time that he passed away a few years ago. I'm very close with his family. Alberta and their sons Pete and Rocky still live in California. I think Peter is a movie producer there in Hollywood, and Rocky is a minister in the prison systems up around Redwood City area. We'll stay in touch with each other. I ended up going to his funeral in Utah. But he was special.

Brig Owens:

Gary Carter, [inaudible 00:12:23]. You remember Gary Carter was a baseball player Hall-of-Famer. He went through the Boys Club. A lot of guys came through the Boys Club, and Pete squared them all away. Being in the Boys Club was the first time I had been on a bus and traveled outside the city of Fullerton, playing tournaments and things of that nature, so it was quite educational. Went to my first pro football game at the Coliseum.

Brig Owens:

When you go into that great big stadium, it's like ... the Rams and the Redskins, right? Charles McCoy got lost. He went to the bathroom and he got lost and couldn't find his way back, so we were all waiting in the bus for Pete to go find Charles. And he found him.

Brig Owens:

It's right there on Commonwealth, right next to Amerige Park.

Brig Owens:

Making a shoeshine box there in the wood-shop there at the Boys Club. [inaudible 00:13:39] that shoe polish and brush, which I stole out of the drugstore, and started shining shoes in the pool halls. There was a place on Truslow, a little pool hall, and maybe the pool hall and bar, and then there was another one up right on Harbor. You're helpful, shining shoes and so forth. Back then there [inaudible 00:14:10].

Mexican nationals used to come over and they'd pick fruit. They had a complex back there in the neighborhood where they stayed, but they used to hang out at the bar. And so you'd go there and make your [inaudible 00:14:23] shining shoes, and play a little pool.

Brig Owens:

In the middle of Truslow. It's no longer there. It's now Lemon and Harbor.

Brig Owens:

And they were very, very close. Then next is my brother Al. Everyone calls him Junior. He was Alford Lee Junior. He was also a great athlete, and a great, great baseball player who ended up getting signed by the White Sox out of high school. Then he went to the Minor Leagues and ended up going down to Florida to play. Was doing extremely well, but ran into a lot of racism down there. He decided he didn't want to put up with it and left and came home. He said, "The black players had to wait in line in the rain to get their paychecks, while the other guys, white players, were inside." So he said, "I'm never going to do that." So he left, and he never played baseball again.

Brig Owens:

Yeah. Never picked up a glove or baseball bat again. You can have the chance to be able to succeed or fail on merit, yeah.

Brig Owens:

After my brother Junior, there was me. There was my brother Teddy. Great athlete, great baseball player. Ended up signing with the Oakland Athletics and was doing very well. Was being compared to Willie Mays. Ended up hurting his shoulder, and because of the wrong treatment on his shoulder, they burned his muscles in his shoulder and his career was over with. He ended up being in charge of the recreation department there in Fullerton for a number of years.

Brig Owens:

After Teddy is my sister Dorothy. She ended up being in charge of accounting for Fullerton Junior College, and just retired not too many years ago. And then there's my brother Marvin. Marvin also great athlete, great quarterback, and went to San Diego State and then got signed by the Minnesota Vikings. He was in the NFL for three years. I think three years. Then there is my brother Jessie, who was [inaudible 00:17:36] athletics at all, I think because there was so much pressure on all his older brothers having been good athletes and MVP-type athletes. He didn't want to be involved. Very smart, but he was probably the best athlete of us all. And he was young. He died of cancer.

Brig Owens:

Then there's my baby sister Shirley, who always reminded us that she is the baby. Much admired, and she's always in touch, and you can't say no to her. We had one sister, Mary Louise, who was born just after me, and who died after a year.

Brig Owens:

I was at the Super Bowl in Florida, and at that time I was the assistant executive director and associate staff counselor for the NFL Players' Union. They represent all the professional football players. My wife and I went across to the restaurant, and the food didn't taste right. It was kind of souring on my

stomach. Then I ordered some sherbet hoping that could calm things down, and the sherbet was very bitter. So I told my wife that "I don't feel well. I'm going to just go back to the room." There was a light flashing on my room phone, and Gene Upshaw, who was the president at the time, he'd left a message. "Call home now. Call home now." I knew something was not right. I called home, and that's when I found out that my mother had passed. And later on I found out that the time that she was passed was the time that I had the bitter taste of the food. That's something, huh?

Brig Owens:

[inaudible 00:20:09]. She used to spoil me. I think she was working to keep me in line. But whenever I would come home from college, she always had a coconut cake that she'd make for me. It was always special. I looked forward to it. Dad said, "She doesn't do that for anybody. You're spoiled," and so forth. But just fond memories of her. I remember I had a number of scholarships from around the country, and when I decided to go to the University of Cincinnati ... because it was one of the few schools who guaranteed they'd let me play quarterback. Back then there were very few black quarterbacks in the country, other than the HBCUs.

Brig Owens:

They guaranteed they'd let me play quarterback, and so the head coach came to visit for a third time. My mom said, "I want you to promise me one thing. My son here, Brigman, is a very smart young man, talented athlete. He's a good leader, but he's going to be the first in this neighborhood to go a four-year school at that time, and it's going to be very important for him to graduate. He'll be one of the first people in our neighborhood to graduate from a four-year school, so he can't come home unless he has his degree." And the coach said, "Yes, Ma'am." So I went to University of Cincinnati and ended up graduating on time, and I'm still involved with the university very heavily. So, they kept their word.

Brig Owens:

Double major in education and biology. I went thinking I was going to be a dentist, and found out that the labs were at night and we practice at night. So I changed my major, thinking I would maybe be a coach.

Brig Owens:

I see that even to today. Even when I was at the Players' Union, we found a number of players that couldn't read. You say, "How'd they make it through?"

Brig Owens:

I went to UCLA and met with one of the coaches [inaudible 00:23:10] meeting room and I saw my name listed as a running back, number four quarterback, wide receiver, and defensive back. I had just won the NBC award at the North/South All-star Game. I think I still hold a couple records there [inaudible 00:23:37]. We played against a guy by the name of John [Howard 00:23:41] who ended up going to Notre Dame [inaudible 00:23:43] trophy. They were highly favored, and we beat them, handedly. So I had numerous additional scholarships coming.

Brig Owens:

Anyway, I realized that I wasn't going to be given a chance to play quarterback there at UCLA. I left, and I went to the Junior College, Fullerton Junior College, and played for Coach Hal Sherbeck. Probably know

the name Hal Sherbeck. I think he won 49 straight games. That will never, ever be challenged. And I got a chance to play quarterback. We won the championship. We were on a national championship track team. Jim Bush was the track coach. My direct track coach at the JC was a guy by the name of Tom Tellez. Tom Tellez went on to be a Olympic coach. Same thing with Jim Bush, so I had the great fortune to have Olympic coaches.

Brig Owens:

And even in high school I had a great coach by the name of Gil Tucker. Gil Tucker taught you the fundamentals, and I can remember being a sophomore and he got me a job. He made me go get my lifeguard certification, and got me a job at the pool so he could keep an eye on me. I had to be there at 6:00, 6:30, to clean the pool every morning, and he'd come by at noon and he'd have these flashcards. He would flash the offense, and what are the best plays from this offense. What are the best ways against this defense? So I called my plays when I was coming through high school. It's now like it is now, the coach is calling from the sidelines. Well, I called my own plays, and called my audibles, and so forth.

Brig Owens:

So I had quite a few scholarships coming out of Fullerton. I can remember a coach from Texas coming to visit, and I walked in the room and got there ahead of time. He said, "The coach from Texas is coming. Listen to what he's got to say." The coach came in and he looked at me and he says, "We didn't know he was a Negro." Because we had black and white film, so you couldn't tell what we were, and we wore stockings at the time. It was a pretty good-size stadium at that time, 10,000-seat stadium, and everything was in black and white. So with a name like Brigman ... they said my name is Brigman. They didn't know ...

Brig Owens:

Anyway, when he came in, he said they would like to meet Brigman, and Coach Tucker said, "This is Brigman here, Brigman Owens, and we call him the Brig O." Anyway, the coach said, "We'd like to have him, but we're not sure how well he would fit in, but we'll do what we can to make him feel comfortable." And so when he left, Coach Tucker said, "Brig, you don't want to go there. Don't ever let anyone tell you you can't play that position. You're a hell of a quarterback. You're smart, and you've got a lot of savvy in terms of how to lead a team, so don't worry about that." That always got instilled whenever I went to visit schools, that I still had the smarts to play quarterback, because obviously I ended up going to the University of Cincinnati and ended up starting my first year there, and won two championships there and [inaudible 00:28:10] on the ring of honor there. And also, there are some major things there that recognized my success at the University of Cincinnati.

Brig Owens:

At the University, I was the [inaudible 00:28:25]. Every 20 years, they select five people that have done excellence in terms of commitment to country, university, and community. There are only five. Those five people at the time was President Reagan, Roger [Solblack 00:28:49], Dr. ... he was a [inaudible 00:28:58] scholar. Can't think of the name. Anyway, he was a [inaudible 00:29:02] scholar. And my university president was going to present me with my award.

Brig Owens:

Back up. When Mrs. Reagan did her "Just Say No" campaign, there were people that really didn't want her to do it because they said "Drugs is a negative." I was in charge of bringing the commissioners in

from the different sports. When we first had the meetings, she had me sitting next to her. After everyone left, they were working trying to pull the program out from under her. Reagan said, "You've got to leave her alone, because when Nancy ... when she wants to do something, she's going to do it." Well, I was one of the people that stayed behind to help her do her "Just Say No" program. It made her one of the most recognized and beloved first ladies we've ever, ever had.

Brig Owens:

Anyway, we go to Houston, Texas, and there's this huge facility, NCAA was having their big banquet there, there's 12,000 people in this banquet room, so we had to go into this little holding room. There was President Reagan in the corner. I walked in with my president, and he said, Reagan says, "Brig. Brig, come over." And my president of my university, "You know the president?" I said, "I know the first lady better."

Brig Owens:

So I went over and I introduced him to my president, and he said, "[inaudible 00:30:57], congratulations, he's very proud of you," and so forth. And I said, "Thank you, Mr. President. This is my president, Dr. Steger. He said to introduce me," and so forth. He shakes my hand and says, "Well, you got a fine young man here. You've got to get him involved in your school. If not, you've got to do it. I'm going to clear it through the governor." The president of my university, I thought he was going to wet his pants, he was so excited.

Brig Owens:

A week later, I got a call, and they wanted me to be on their special committee of the board. They had everything cleared, and that was because of Reagan. That was ... I'm still involved with the school now. I was on the committee to select the most recent president for the university. I always encourage the athletes that if you had a bad experience there, get involved. Make changes so those following you won't experience the same kind of problems that you had.

Brig Owens:

I remember playing Huntington Beach. We were in Fullerton playing. I scrambled, and got knocked out of bounds on the Huntington Beach side. The coach said, "Kill that little savage. Kill that little savage." I was shocked. I looked up at him, and he just had that snarl on his face. I didn't make the first sound, and so I went back to our side of the field to the bench and Coach Tucker said, "What's wrong?" He could tell I was not right. My eyes were probably the size of the club box. I said, "That coach called me a savage." He pulled me by my shirt and said, "Brig, get your head in the game. You've got to kill them with performance. Forget about that. You've got to kill them with performance. That's what you're in charge of, and that's what you can do. Your team depends on you." So anyway, we went back and we beat them by two touchdowns. I think that was one of my first shocks. So ... other than being recruited because people wanted me to do something other than play quarterback.

Brig Owens:

I can remember coming home after my first year in the pros and my wife and I wanted to move into this new high rise condo on Commonwealth. I had called to see if they had any apartments available. They had two, so I went to the manager and she opened up the door and I said, "I'm Brig Owens. I called you about the two vacant apartments." She looked at me and she says, "I'm sorry, but we're not allowed to

rent to Negroes." I was so heartbroken, because here I'm coming home, and we have a lot of friends in the city and so forth. So we ended up in an apartment in [inaudible 00:34:42].

Brig Owens:

I remember Mr. [Gregory 00:34:47], who was the president of Fullerton Statements and Loans, they owned the bank there and he had been mayor of Fullerton. But they're very influential. He wanted to know if I had gotten settled. I had known him since I was 12, because I used to cut his grass for him, so we were very close and we stayed in touch with each other my entire career in college. Anyway, I told him what happened. He was angry. He says, "I'm not going to stand for that. I'm going to see if I can't buy off that mortgage." I still worry about that. When we got a place he said, "I'm not going to put [inaudible 00:35:34]."

Brig Owens:

[Merrill 00:35:42] Gregory. There was some history there. Mr. Gregory, he was angry. And I said, "No, we'll be all right." I had always admired him. He was almost like a second father, really. I remember hurting my ankle after my freshman year at the JC. I tore my ankle up and they said I'd never be able to play sports again, and I'd probably walk with a limp. I remember going home and I was on crutches, and I had the soft cast on. I walked in the door with the crutches.

Brig Owens:

You know, if you have eight boys ... my mom said, "What's wrong with you?" I was just another injury coming in the door. "They say I'm not going to be able to play sports again, and I might have a limp." And she said, "You can go back there and get on your knees and pray to God that He will heal you and allow you to continue playing sports." I said, "Mom, the doctor just took X-rays and said I'm not going to be able to play sports anymore." She said, "Young man, you go back there and get on your knees and you pray to God that He will let you continue your dream of playing sports." So I went back there, tears in my eyes, and after two weeks, I was up and running.

Brig Owens:

Had a guy by the name of Bill Chambers. He was a great athletic trainer. He worked and he also lived within [inaudible 00:37:17]. But Mr. Gregory said, "You're going to go to school. You're going to go to college. And I'm going to see that you ... if you don't get any scholarships, I'm going to see that you go to ..." he was chairman of the Stanford Board. "I'm going to send you to Stanford." I said, "I don't think I can get in there." He said, "You're smart. You're smarter than you think you are, and I'm going to make arrangements for you to go to Stanford." Then I got the offer from the University of Cincinnati, and [inaudible 00:37:54] Cincinnati was on my own terms, so to speak.

Brig Owens:

When I got ready to go away to school, he came by and he handed me a full set of Samsonite luggage, gray. I still have the one little ... I think I have the one little gray small suitcase. But he was just perfect, and he taught me, "You've got to speak up. Thing's not right? You speak up."

Brig Owens:

I'm trying to remember, because there was a farm down there that we worked at, that some guys worked at. That's how we earned some of our money. It was run by a Vernon Jim Brown, and we called

him [Billy 00:38:44]. He planted a lot of the corn and other vegetables. He was the first man to grow cotton in Orange County. Unheard of. I learned how to drive at the age of 13, because we learned how to drive a truck and tractor. I think he used to plow with a mule. He had this big mule, and my brother and I, we'd plow with that mule. The mule's name was [Sir 00:39:11], and he was a big mule. When Sir got tired, he would sit down, and that was it. We brought him water and his oats, and he would go straight to the barn. But that's fundamentals of working and bringing in money.

Brig Owens:

Why do you think they had them when they traveled around the mountains and things of that nature, because they will not hurt themselves. Horses will panic. A mule will not panic. But yeah, I think that's ... they were part of [inaudible 00:39:57] farm, I think, maybe. It was almost close to Bueno Park.

Brig Owens:

I remember when they had the cattle in the stables and stuff like that.

Brig Owens:

Still close with the Bridgforths. We were almost like family, really. My father was there. My father was a do-it-all contractor there. He did the plumbing and the construction. Anything that could go wrong with the structure of that building and the facilities of that building, he knew how to fix it. Like I said, my father was very intelligent and could do a lot of things, and I think he learned a lot of that working on the docks as well. So he could fix anything.

Brig Owens:

Longshoreman. I remember having him come to Washington, DC, where we were living, and we went by one of the office buildings, the Building and Construction Trade Building. It's located where you can look at the Capitol. He was more impressed with seeing that union building than he was looking at the Capitol. He says, "Look at that building, son." He says, "That's power. When you're with a union, you're always going to have a job."

Brig Owens:

I just felt that we were going to go. We had a great team, and Georgie Allen was our coach, and we had a lot of characters on that team, and some misfits. But we were all connected. I just decided, "I'm going to keep a diary, see what happens." And lo and behold, we went to Super Bowl. So we got beaten by Miami. They were the better team that day, but we had played each other in exhibition and we didn't play everybody, and we beat them with no problem. So going into the game, we were 14 points favorite. We ended up with some injuries, and we had rested some of our players, and so we lost our last game. Had we not rested those players earlier, we would have had two undefeated teams playing the Super Bowl. But we got beat by Miami 14 to 7. I did that book, and it ended up being a bestseller.

Brig Owens:

It was called Over the Hill to the Super Bowl.

Brig Owens:

It was great, go home and have Brig Owens Day, and have Brig Owens Day at the Boys Club. It was quite an occasion. They had a big reception at the Boys Club. It was interesting that about 10 years ago I was

on the committee to select the Boys and Girls Club of the year nationwide, and this presentation was going to be in Washington, DC. Well, I was on that committee, and one of the kids that was a candidate was a guy by the name of Guy Perez. Guy Perez was the son of a close friend of mine by the name of Norman Perez, who also lived on Truslow. He walked in, and he said he was Guy Perez. I said, "Is your daddy Norman?" Sure enough. Shows you how small the world is. He ended up winning it. Naturally I voted [inaudible 00:44:52]. But he ended up being selected Boys Club Person of the Year. Pete changed a lot of lives there.

Brig Owens:

Gary Carter was playing in the playoffs, and they were playing for the championship [inaudible 00:45:16] World Series. Gary was having a struggle. He wasn't hitting his ball. Pete called him, and had gotten hold of the trainer, and said he wanted to talk to Gary Carter. The trainer told him that Gary isn't talking to anybody. Pete said, "Tell him that Pete Liapis is on the phone." And so Gary comes to the phone. Pete said, "You're chopping at the ball. Swing at the damn ball. Swing at the damn ball, quit chopping. You're not chopping wood." And Gary said, "Yes, sir." Gary goes on, he ends up being the MVP of the World Series.

Brig Owens:

In the bars. [inaudible 00:46:11] Park playing basketball and football.

Brig Owens:

I became very savvy very early.

Brig Owens:

I had a big surprise. I was nominated homecoming king. The queen was Charlene Wilson, tall, blond girl, big blue eyes. I was shocked that they put my name up, and I won. So I ended up going to the homecoming with a young lady by the name of [Linda Zackanino 00:47:00]. Charlene went with someone else, I forget. I think it's in the yearbook. I think they have a picture of us together. That was unheard of. We stayed in touch with each other. Our senior class, we all stayed in touch with each other. There's a lady by the name of [Jan 00:47:22] Miller. At that time was Jan Jenkins, but she was a head of the cheerleading group, but ended up going to become an athletic director at [inaudible 00:47:38] College, and so we always have a strong reunion because of that. We had ... I think it was 750 in our graduation class, senior class. That was big, back then. So we had a pretty big class. And every time we've had a reunion, we've always had a big turn-out. It's a very close group.

Brig Owens:

I'll never forget that the police brought my older brother home one time, and told my mom, "Other than school, you just keep him on this side of the tracks." My mom said, "That's not going to happen. He has the freedom to travel wherever he wants to travel when he's done with school up there, and he has the same rights as everyone else." My mom always spoke out, and there's something not right, she'd tell you to speak up. She'd allow you ... speak bad about anyone, and respect them in the same way you want them to respect you.

Brig Owens:

I can remember ... we have eight boys in the family, and in certain times of the year, the Hispanic guys would go up north to pick the fruit, make money, and they would pull out of school and then come back, they'd be high. I guess my dad was being influenced by some of the other fathers that he had all those boys. "You could make a lot of money if you took them up north to pick the fruit." My mom stood her ground. She said, "We're not going up north. The kids are going to stay here and stay in school." We were always very thankful towards our mom that she stood her ground. We all ended up graduating from high school, we all ended up going to college and getting our degrees. I don't know how my parents did it with all us kids. Not only did they feed us, they fed other kids in the neighborhood. They always knew that they could come by and get something to eat.

Brig Owens:

I remember ... I won't use his name, but we had a major drug dealer that got busted and went into jail. Ended up getting out, and getting his doctorate at Cal State Fullerton in chemistry. He wrote a book, and he said when he first got out, one of the first places he stopped was to go see Mrs. Owens, "because I know if I stopped there, she wasn't going to judge me, but she also was going to feed me." That was his first stop.

Brig Owens:

Joe Lopez. I used to hang out with him, and my mom would always tell me, "You're going to get in trouble. You stay away from him." I remember riding around, as they say, cruising, back then. He was going to go make a drop, and he said, "I've got to take Brig home." The other guy in the front seat said, "Nah, he'll be all right." Joe said, "Nah, he's the pride of the neighborhood, and I'm going to take him home first." He dropped me off. He always told me, "Don't ever get involved with drugs. If you get involved with drugs, it'll kill you." Anyway, I came home one day and he was on the front page of the newspaper, known as one of the largest drug dealers in southern California. I think Joe was only 19 years old. He moved on to [inaudible 00:51:30], but typical in that neighborhood. We never turned our back on each other in the neighborhood.

Brig Owens:

As a matter of fact, when my mother passed away, a couple guys were allowed to leave from being incarcerated, were allowed to come to the funeral. We were outside standing around, and the one said, "Anyone have the key to the door so we can lock the door?" To my mother's house. One of the guys says, "What are you talking about? No one's going in Mrs. Owens' house." But she was very respected. She fed everybody. And like I said, she never allowed you to talk bad about anyone. There was a couple guys that were gay in the neighborhood, "Don't make fun of them. They're human beings."

Brig Owens:

I learned to cook in the neighborhood, Mexican foods. [inaudible 00:52:28] pretty good chef when it comes to Mexican foods. There was a lady in the neighborhood by the name of Mrs. [Florez 00:52:34]. Michael and Jewell were in the same class. I would go by there and go in the back where they had the little shed, and they would make the tortillas and so forth. I learned how to do it. They'd do their chilis in the concrete bowl. Our neighbors, they used to call me [Spanish 00:53:01]. That was Brigman in Spanish. My wife [inaudible 00:53:07]. She thought I was telling lies. And so when I first had her come home with me and I took her to visit Mrs. Florez, and she says, "[Spanish 00:53:17], you're here."

Brig Owens:

I met my wife when I transferred to University of Cincinnati. And mind you, I came from Fullerton, it was 75 degrees, and it was wintertime in Ohio. I had a little lightweight jacket on, and it was 18 below zero. The Ohio river had frozen over for the first time. I got out of the plane ... I'm giving you a little history now. I got out of the plane, and it was so cold that the moisture in your nose froze. There wasn't a tunnel. You got out on the tarmac. It wasn't the tunnel to go into the airport. And I had this little lightweight jacket on. I walked into the area there at the same time the coaches were there, and at the same time the [inaudible 00:54:22], the NBA basketball team was coming through, and there was a guy by the name of Oscar Robertson. He was first coming through. He walks right over to me, he says, "Brig, my name's Oscar Robertson. We're glad you made the decision to come to the University of Cincinnati. You're going to do great things here, and I'm going to be watching you." And so we've been friends up to this day.

Brig Owens:

If I had had a round-trip ticket, I probably would have come back to California because it was so cold. So, I had to go to register. I'm walking across campus, and there was this big long line of people lined up to register. I see this young lady, and she had really pretty legs, and long hair, and a she had a camel-type colored coat on, standing in line. She was the last one in the line at that time. I went over there and walked and got behind her, knowing that all I had to do was go to the field house. They had everything there registered for me, books and everything. You just pick up everything. Got married after I graduated, and went to Dallas and was there for a year, and then got traded to Washington.

Brig Owens:

I was accused of trying to start a boycott there, which was my speaking up. Back then, there was not a place that ... in Texas. There's still some places in Texas you can't go. But it's this little restaurant that goes, "No Negroes, dogs, or Mexicans." I came over to the locker room and told the guys, "Don't go to that place. We all can't go. We shouldn't patronize them." But I got called upstairs by the general manager, and he said, "Young man, you're not in California, and you're not in Ohio." I said, "What are you talking about?" "You're not in California and you're not in Ohio. You're in Texas, and you can't be starting any boycotts. I said, "What are you talking about?" "Well, you're telling people not to go to that restaurant over there." I said, "It's not a restaurant, it's a hole in the wall."

Brig Owens:

By the time I said ... Bob Hayes at the time was the Olympic 100-meter champion, world's fastest human being, and we were roommates. [inaudible 00:56:58] United States of America, and gold medal winner. There were places that his mother can't even go downtown to shop. There's fountains that she can't drink out of." I said, "And we're supposed to be the ambassadors to the state of Texas and the city of Dallas. We shouldn't be having these problems." I said, "I can't find a place to live. We've got a realtor that's showing us places that are real dangerous to live in, and I'm not going there." So I went downstairs to dress, and went up to practice, and had been demoted, and I was traded to Washington, DC, which was the best thing that ever happened to me.

Brig Owens:

But I didn't realize at the time we moved that Washington, DC was going through disintegration. Two years before they had just drafted or traded for a guy by the name of Bobby Mitchell who was the first African-American to be signed and play for the Redskins. It was an all white team at the time. It was a team of the South. Well, we moved into an area called Prince George's County. Prince George's County

was the last school in the district to integrate, and we moved there. We moved into a neighborhood that ... they just welcomed us. Didn't have any problems, other than ... if I wasn't home or anyone who pulled up in that driveway, we knew about it.

Brig Owens:

There was a family there by the name of Reedy, the Reedys, who had a family of 10 kids. Mrs. Reedy to this day, she used to refer to my daughters as her grandkids. But they'd babysit for us, the kids cut the grass for us. I'd come home after a game and half the neighborhood would be there greeting you, so it was a great environment. Very blessed.

Brig Owens:

I've run into some problems from the racial standpoint, but that's outside of Fullerton. That's part of it. I can remember I got selected into the State of California Junior College Hall of Fame. I noticed on the book, there were some names of guys that I didn't realize had gone to Junior College. And great names. And I was told that the reason for that is that they sent the black guys to Junior College because we couldn't play as a freshman, but they didn't want you hanging around the college chasing those white girls." So they had you there for two years, or one or three years, but they didn't want you there on the campus as a freshman. I didn't realize that. I was really shocked to see that, until the man told me that.

Brig Owens:

But visiting schools ... there was a reason that they were trying to groom me to play wide receiver, running back, and so forth. There were a couple of schools that had me a hostess, they were white. Girls with long hair. At that time, I understood what was happening, and so it upset me. I said, "I'm definitely not going to go there."

Brig Owens:

At the time, I became the player representative for the Redskins, now the Washington Team. Back then, they really looked at us as chattel. I was also on the negotiating committee. The guys who were selected as player reps were blacklisted out of the game. [inaudible 01:01:37] back then, we were not allowed to have lawyers in the room. We'd have to have a caucus and go out into the hallway to talk to our lawyers, and then come back into the room. They were using all these terms and cites and so forth, precedents, of why they were negotiating certain issues.

Brig Owens:

Well, I would go back to the law library and I'd pull out these cases just to try to find out what they were talking about. "This isn't that hard. These guys aren't that damn smart." They knew how to use good case law as it pertains to the issue at hand. So I ended up going to law school. I went to law school at night while I was playing. That's why I ended up with these glasses. I was one of the captains on the team, and George Allen found out that I was in law school. He called me in and said, "I've got to have you as one of my leaders. You're the one who calls the plays and so forth." I used to do all the researches on off season in terms of game planning. I would research tendencies of the teams we were going to play two years back, and then put in the schemes that would work best against that team. We didn't have computers then, so my report [inaudible 01:03:15].

Brig Owens:

I said, "I'm not on scholarship, and they already have my money." He said, "Well, I can give you your money back, but I need you." I said, "My mom said anytime I started some [inaudible 01:03:29] education, I had to finish it." He said, "Oh, okay." So he set me on the bench for two weeks. The guys started complaining that we had to have Brig back in the game, because I was giving signals from the sidelines to the other guy who was captain Chris Hanburger, and calling the plays. [inaudible 01:03:54] put me back in. But I think the only reason I was not blackballed out of the league was because George Allen was a players' type coach. Then we had Edward Bennet Williams, who was the president and part-owner of the Redskins. Edward Bennett Williams was one of the preeminent lawyers in the world, and he represented labor unions, organized crime, movie stars, Joe DiMaggio, Joe Louis, those kinds of people, so I was kind of protected.

Brig Owens:

No matter where you are, understand what's going on around you. Don't go anywhere blind that you don't know about.

Brig Owens:

I was in the National Guard at the time. I was put on duty. I was the driver for the general of the National Guard. How I got that, I was ... back then, whenever you were drafted to the NFL, to protect their investment, they would put you into a reserve unit. I was put into a reserve unit, and then that went on to active duty during the Vietnam War. Then I came back, and then when I was traded to Washington I was put into this unit. The general found out that I had this training, but also, I could type 70 words per minute.

Brig Owens:

I decided I wanted to take a typing class in high school, and I took it, and I was good at it.

Brig Owens:

I ended up driving for the general, and going to all the meetings and checking everything around the Washington metropolitan area, and so I saw a lot. I tell people, "If you look at Kennedy's funeral, when he stopped in front of the Lincoln Memorial, there's two National Guard soldiers standing there. I'm one of those soldiers."

Brig Owens:

I remember I was ... after practice I had gone down to ... we had gone over to Harvard University, and all of sudden you saw this smoke billowing up, and cars driving down the road bumped their horns, so I had ... called my wife, who was working downtown for the phone company and I said, "There is a riot going on, and part of downtown is on fire. I'm going down ... I'm coming over to pick you up." She said, "Well, our supervisor won't let us out, and we have to stay in here." I said, "Put your supervisor on the phone." I told that supervisor, "I'm coming over to pick my wife up. She'd better be downstairs when I get there." She said, "Yes, sir."

Brig Owens:

I went over there, and it took me an hour to get there. [inaudible 01:07:28] normally 15 minutes away. I picked her up, and it took another two hours, two and a half hours, to get home. When I got home the phone rang, and it was the general's office. "Report to duty now." So anyway, I ended up going on duty.

Brig Owens:

A year before all of that, I had ... Jim Brown the football player had gathered a group of us to go do some voter registration in Holly Springs, Mississippi. We were followed around by guys with guns. Anyway, we went to a couple of schools and the church, speaking to the community. It was interesting, white and blacks came in to see us. But we were always followed around the neighborhood by these guys with trucks with guns in the gun rack. So, we got on the bus, and came back and turned the lights out so they can't see us. So we made it back to the hotel we stayed in. It was the St. Lorraine Hotel, which was the hotel that Martin Luther King had been shot. There was 20 of us on that bus.

Brig Owens:

That environment [inaudible 01:08:52] the way people live, and some of the houses, you could see right through the slats. I said to myself, "If there are people that allow their own to live this way," I'm talking about whites who live this way, "and blacks to live the same way." They had to ask the owner of the property if they could pick up the wood to build a fire. I said, "If they let their own live this way, they don't give a damn about black people." That was my opinion, the surface of my experience with racism.

Brig Owens:

And I came very close to going to Vietnam. Had it not been for the Cowboys getting me out, I would have gone to Vietnam.

Brig Owens:

It was really a confusing war, because they kept saying that it's not going to last very long, and America's strong, and all that kind of stuff, but it wasn't happening. I remember reading on time, America's not the only country that's ever gone in there. No one has ever won a war in Vietnam. Lost friends there, very close friends, a guy by the name of Steve [Joiner 01:10:28]. He played [inaudible 01:10:32], and he was a Marine, and he got shot going up a hill. And some other players and friends that were ... I lost maybe five close people in Vietnam.

Brig Owens:

I'm the only one in the family that's done a lot of visiting and has gone to Linden, Texas and spent time there. [inaudible 01:11:04] checking on property and all that kind of stuff. My wife is doing some genealogy now. But I'm the one who did a lot of running around. When I was young, growing up, they used to call me the young mayor. My mother always told me the education ... she taught all of us, "Education is something that no one can take away from you. You hurt your ankle, and you thought your career was going to be ended. But God, He brought you back for a reason."

Brig Owens:

Penny was a icon. Tough, and ... Aunt Penny used to clean doctor's offices and people's homes, and I used to help her in the doctor's offices, because I wanted this Schwinn bike. The Schwinn bike was \$90. She said, "I'll help you if you come to work with me, but you've got to earn your own money, and I'll help pay part of it. I'll help pay 20% of it, but you've got to earn the rest of it." So I bought that Schwinn bike. It had chrome fenders, and it was red. It was a ten-speed bike that I earned, and bought that bike. I didn't know how to ride the bike. This bike had brakes on the handlebars. I almost went over the front of the handlebars. Anyway, I rode that bike all the way home with a persistent grin on my face.

Brig Owens:

Anyway, I remember, again, lessons in work ethic and respect. I can remember working with her in a doctor's office, and the doctor had come in that weekend and he was in a bad mood. He had been drinking. He raised his voice at my Aunt Penny, that she wasn't cleaning the floor properly and there were these smudges and build-up of wax and so forth. My Aunt Penny said, "Let me tell you something. You don't raise your voice at me." She says, "I work hard for you. Those smudges over there, those were here before I got here, and we've tried taking them up. I told you we needed certain such cleaner to get it done, and you still haven't brought it. I don't have to take that." He was very apologetic. Everywhere she went, she was respected.

Brig Owens:

[inaudible 01:13:54] was part of her creation that she did a lot of lobbying, and also, there's a light on Commonwealth just before you get to Harbor. You had to walk a long way to get to the light to cross the street, other side of Lemon, going farther down. She lobbied and ended up getting a light put in there. I remember going to the lobbying [inaudible 01:14:28] on Capitol Hill, but also I had to go by to see the senator from Texas. He said, "Owens." He says, "Are you related to Penny Owens?" I said, "Yes. She's my aunt." He said, "She's raising hell, man." He said, "If she were younger, she would be up here with us."

Brig Owens:

They built the ... we moved and lived on Rosslynn, across from the park. Notice all the streets are blocked off except there's one way out. When they first built that neighborhood, it was supposed to be ... they were hoping that whites would move into that area. Those little small houses if you crossed Lemon on Valencia, [inaudible 01:15:16] small was for Hispanic and black. They didn't anticipate that moving over. But anyway, when they were doing the area, Aunt Penny complained about the fact that they were trying to block us in. [inaudible 01:15:34] all they had to do was block one street off. You couldn't get out except for that one street. All the other streets were blocked. So they finally built an extension so you could come out on ... I think it's Truslow now. The other side of Truslow, you could come out. But she raised a lot of Cain there, and she got a lot of things ...

Brig Owens:

She taught physical fitness for senior citizens at the Boys Club. I remember being home one time and I saw her walking, and I was driving. I said, "Where are you going?" She said, "I'm going down to the Boys Club and teaching these old folks some exercises." I said, "Aunt Penny, you're on of those." She says, "No, I'm not." When she died, because she had always gone to ... she had developed a relationship with the city council, and they had given her her own business card, council's consultant. I teased her. I said, "You sold out." Each mayor that was elected in Fullerton, one of their first [inaudible 01:16:50] was to sit down with Aunt Penny.

Brig Owens:

Aunt Penny died. The mayor, I can't remember her name, but she gave a whole history of when she was elected mayor, one of the first people that called was Aunt Penny. She called her Aunt Penny. [inaudible 01:17:07] Penny. Aunt Penny came to the office. She had a whole list of things that Aunt Penny said that she was supposed to do when she died. The mayor read them off, and said all the things that they listed. [inaudible 01:17:25] Aunt Penny. She's in the ground, and she's still ordering people around. She was very influential. She dealt with the politicians in Anaheim, Santa Anna. Those senators and congressmen who represented those districts knew her.

Brig Owens:

If you [inaudible 01:17:49] know your history, and you don't know art, you don't exist.

Brig Owens:

Disneyland used to be all orange groves and strawberry fields. When they first built Disneyland before they opened, myself and another guy jumped the fence, we hot wired the Autopia Cars, and run them around. We were chased out on the other side of the park. And then ... interesting. One of the guys that was with us ... there were three of us ... Larry Nunez, and I think Larry has since passed away. I get a call one day and he says, "Brig, this is Larry. You know I've been in [inaudible 01:18:29] working for Disney, and now I'm in charge of the park here. Tell your brothers and sisters they got special passes. I'm in charge of the damn park here."

Brig Owens:

I asked my mother's brother who ran a ranch in Texas, 800-acre ranch I would say, "Uncle [Ted 01:18:57], how'd you get that 800 acres? You were only supposed to have 40 acres and a mule." "Don't ask any questions." Ted didn't have a college degree, very smart. I remember taking my daughters there to Linden, Texas so they could see where your father came from. I went to visit him one time. Texas, those little towns, when the sun goes down, there's not a whole lot of streetlights, and it's so dark you can [inaudible 01:19:29]. He was sitting in his house studying and writing a speech by a kerosene lamp. I took a picture of it, and then I had it ink-sketched. I have it in the library. His daughter was a educator and also strong leader in the neighborhood, so she said, "Dad, why are you taking time by writing that letter so late? I could have helped you write it."

Brig Owens:

He said, "Honey, you know we got a new preacher there, a young preacher in the church now. Every now and then, he likes to use some big words because he has a doctor in front of his name, and he uses some big words to try to let us know how smart he is and well-educated." She said, "Well, why did you drive all the way down to some city and get those two books on What Is Man?" He said, "I had to do it myself. It took me an hour and a half to drive to the city and back, but I had to do this myself. I'm going to ... I'll write my speech. I've got this dictionary here. I'm going to use a few big words, and I'm going to know what those big words are, and I'm going to know how to use those in my speech because I want that young preacher to know that there's other people in the congregation that has an education also." That's heavy, huh?

Brig Owens:

I called him from time to time to just get his energy over the phone. I developed relationships with these people. So I would call Uncle Ted from time to time just to get his wisdom. We were going through a real tough time with negotiations, and he said, "Brigman, you know you've had a great career. I'm very proud of you. You got a education, which is so important." He says, "You've been to the top of the mountain. But what happens sometimes at the top of the mountain, air gets thin and you can forget who you are and where you are. From time to time, you're going to fall down to the bottom of that mountain." He said, "But you can't be sad about being down at the bottom of the mountain. You just can't stay there too long. But down at the bottom of the mountain is where the ground is most fertile and you grow. Just don't stay down at the bottom of that mountain too long. You've got to continue to grow. Life is about growing and respecting others and having them respect you. But education's what it's all about, young man." He gave me those kinds of stories.

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