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The Bridges that Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewees:

Henry L. Hooks

Interviewer:

Giana Mitchell

Interview Date:

March 09, 2021

Interview Location:

Remotely via Zoom

Length:

00:32:11

Media format:

Digital Video (mp4)

Interview Summary completed by:

Giana Mitchell, 2021

Description:

Mr. Hooks talks about his childhood in Shreveport, Louisiana, his introduction to photography, his very first camera, and his first job working for local newspapers. He describes his time in the Air Force, which is what brought him to work at San Bernardino's Norton Air Force Base and later to work in missile defense programs and the moon shot. Mr. Hooks later became a photographer taking photos of many politicians and social events for local newspapers. He describes some memories of San Bernardino in the 1940s, the importance of the region's Black newspapers. Finally, Mr. Hooks talks about current day struggles such as Black Lives Matter and living through COVID-19.

Keywords:

- Photography
- Joy's Toothpaste
- Shreveport Sun
- Army
- Norton Air Force Base
- Projectionist
- San Bernardino Valley College

- Aircraft Tester
- Crew Chief
- Missile Inspector
- NASA
- Defense Contract
- Administrative Service
- Congressman George Brown
- Colton (Calif.)
- Politicians
- Wilmer Amina Carter
- Politicians
- Westside San Bernardino

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
Sweet Shop (or Ida Mae's Grocery)	1220 Park Avenue, Eastside, Riverside, CA

Temporal Coverage:

1930 - 2021

Key Organizations:

- Precinct Reporter
- Black Voice News
- San Bernardino Sun

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	0:00:48	Growing up Shreveport Louisiana & learning Photography
Digital Video	0:03:07	Bringing camera to army deployment
Digital Video	0:04:31	Becoming a projectionist and moving to San Bernardino, studying at San Bernardino Valley College

Digital Video	0:05:30	Aircraft tester & missile program & working on the moon shot
Digital Video	0:06:55	Pursuing photography career & working for Congressman Brown
Digital Video	0:09:51	Memories of San Bernardino & Norton Airforce Base in 1940s.
Digital Video	0:11:29	Westside, racial divides & becoming a photographer for all the papers
Digital Video	0:13:56	Sharing photos (Pat Morris & Vernon Bragg, Women's Tea)
Digital Video	0:18:08	Black businesses, 4 Black newspapers
Digital Video	0:22:15	His response to racism in San Bernardino & stories of his parents in Louisiana
Digital Video	0:23:45	Limitations on participating in Civil Rights movement because of position as federal employee
Digital Video	0:25:07	Living through Covid-19
Digital Video	0:27:20	Memories of Stewart Photography, Hardy Brown, Meeting Gordon Parks
Digital Video	0:29:25	Thoughts on Black Lives Matter
Digital Video	0:30:20	Advice to younger generation

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Start of Interview

[00:00:00]

GIANA MITCHELL: We are here today doing an interview for the Bridges that carried us over archive of Black history in the Inland Empire. Could you please spell your full name?

HENRY HOOKS: I'm Henry L. Hooks and I'm willing to cooperate. You can ask me anything you want to. I can give you approximate many years of good history. What I like, my accomplishments, and the many wonderful people I've met.

GIANA MITCHELL: Beautiful. Could you spell your full name please?

HENRY HOOKS: I'm Henry L. Hooks, and it's spelled H-E-N-R-Y, middle initial L stands for Lefleet, last name is Hooks, H-O-O-K-S.

Born in Shreveport, Louisiana and Greenwoods, Louisiana. Raised in that area, schooled in that area, started working early, learned the value of 10 cents. And I believe that if you have your own money, you can control your destiny. And I worked at that. And I decided I would do my best to emulate the people that we thought was very nice in the community,

Now, as you know, I really was interested in photography. There was a gentleman that had a studio in area, and he would allow me to come in and look at him work. It always thrilled me to see how you bring the picture up in the developer and this kind of thing.

So, I was working at a drugstore at that time and Joy Toothpaste had a program that if you filled out a coupon, and then if you mailed it in you have a chance to win a camera. I did that, and I won a camera. And from that day on I was a photographer.

Anyway, had an editor of a newspaper in the area and that he would hang around the drugstore. And that was the Shreveport Sun. One day he came in and I wore that camera like a badge.

And he asked "what did I have in the camera?" I told him I had a roll of film that I had shot and he asked me to see it so I gave him the roll.

He developed it, and I still wondered if he put it in the paper or he just did a sheet for me, but anyway he gave me a byline. And from that day on I wanted a byline, so I began to shoot everything in the neighborhood. And I was fortunate enough to live across the street at the time from the high school so I had a lot of subjects to shoot.

And after being drafted, my kept my camera with me.

In those days, you had to send everything back home but I didn't send my camera. In those days, you had to send everything back home but I didn't send my camera. And when I got into the unit that I was assigned to which was Army Air Force, and I began to shoot the other service men, send the pictures back home, in that time you had a Verichrome film, 24 prints on a film, and I would shoot 2 shots of my friends, other soldiers.

Then everybody wanted to send pictures back home to mother. And that turned out to be real real nice. And I got kind of accustomed to using the sun in the evening before it went down. I could do a pretty good shot with that. So anyway, they assigned me in a photography unit, and I thought that was real nice, real lucky.

So then, I, I was lucky enough to be in the Air Force. And I was lucky enough also to be able to become a projectionist there.

And after I was separated from the service, I practiced photography, went to the San Bernardino Valley College to improve my technique.

And since I was a projectionist in the service, and I had opportunity to have a little lecture and show a film to 20,000 people that was working at Norton at that time so that gave me a tremendous contact with the public.

And since they was aware that I was an excellent projectionist, and I love talking, I mean just say hello to me and I take you the rest of the day. So, I used that to help me pursue my profession.

So, after I was separated, I became an employee of {???} Aerospace so I was kind of familiar with aircraft and I became an aircraft tester. And I went through the progression from an aircraft tester. I became a crew chief and from that, that went into missile, and I became a missile inspector.

Then I toured the country for the Air Force. I worked for NASA and other branches of the service. So, after finishing the missile tour of service which lasted about six years. And then I went to Defense Contract Administrative Service in Los Angeles.

And I was assigned to a unit that was developing parts for the moon shot. And I was lucky enough to be in the area that they was doing engines to put on the lander and the orbiter.

And I was quite a hero, until the boys got back and then they said I did an excellent job.

And I continued to pursue my photography career. And as you did view the pictures at the museum. And you know that they have a variety of photos there.

And one of the lucky things, Congressman George Brown was having a meeting in Colton in his office. I noticed in the paper so I thought I'd go out there and see what he's been doing

And I had my camera. And I knew that politicians love to be seen face forward so I covered him real good. In those days we had six papers in San Bernardino, and I passed the prints around.

Next time he had a meeting I showed up and passed the prints around, and he told his secretary which is Assembly member Wilmer Carter to find that photographer and hire him.

So, I became an associate of his. And then, he introduced me to, at least he gave my name to the RNC and DNC. And when something was happening in this area, they would call me to cover. So, with that kind of a contact I got a chance to shoot the Speaker of the House, a couple of Presidents. I covered President Clinton, Mrs. Clinton at different times in the local area.

And they called me once to cover Vice President Gore and that went off real good.

And that kind of thing gave me access to a wonderful array of people in the area. And most of those films you see there, they contacted me to cover what was going on, be it a social event, a political event. And it allowed me to continue doing what I love to do, and I did that until I got a little bit aged and I decided it's time to listen to my lady, my wife, this is Opal Hooks, said it was time for me to put the camera down. And I did.

Can you think of something else that would be interesting? If so, ask.

GIANA MITCHELL: Well thank you so much for all of that, that's amazing work that you've done. I have a question here for you. Can you tell me a bit more about what your town or neighborhood was like back in the day? What do you remember about the neighborhood. And what would you see as you walk or drove around town, and who are some of your neighbors.

HENRY HOOKS: Well, when I arrived in San Bernardino the population was very low, somewhere around 25 or 30,000. And it was completely a military operation.

And, you know, Norton grew real fast, up around 20,000 people, since it was an aircraft center. Everything centered towards the aircraft.

And I was lucky enough to be signed to personnel. And I was an ad hoc employee there being the Colonel's Sergeant, and I was able to fill in, whenever there was someone off, you need a counselor, I was a counselor. You need an insurance executive I was an insurance executive

And if the Colonel had a special program he wanted to push, I was the boy to do that. So, we had a case where we wanted to increase the attendance of the employees. So, I

was assigned to give a little lecture. If an individual had been on the job for six months without being off, I'd pick someone and make a big deal of it, give them wings to hang on their work outfit... And for that kind of thing.

The city was growing quite a bit. And it was about the same then as it is now the city was pretty well separated from the west side, but it being a small population of blacks here. We always kind of centered in one area. And most of the blacks here, were kind of the progressive types. They were buying their own homes and this kind of thing. And it worked out real good for me because about all I had was a name. I wanted to get into ownership so my wife and I bought a little piece of property then, had built the house on it, and became a part of the community.

And we kind of went along with whatever was going on. And since and I was a photographer, I got a chance to meet the aristocracy of the area, and Mrs. Brown had her Black Voice paper, Wilmer Carter was a secretary to Congressman Brown. And there was a Precinct Reporter that I got assigned with I was on the staff there.

And I was kind of free with my photos, I'd have give them to anybody that had a paper if I could get something published. So, it wasn't too long before Mr. Townsend said you were supposed to be working for me and you working for everybody. So, he pulled my name off of the paper, but we still had a very good relationship.

I give as much to Mrs. Brown as she wanted. And the same way with the other papers.

And I had a good relationship with San Bernardino Sun. One of the engravers there was a good friend of mine, we went to photography school together. And one of the photographers was a very good friend and between the three of us, we've covered just about everything, going up, and I really enjoyed working with the group, working with the citizens.

And as you did notice there, I covered a lot of stuff and you didn't have to call me, if it was in the paper I just showed up, worked out really good.

I have a couple of pictures that I like, I like to show them to you. I have one picture here that was, I did with a guy named Vernon Bragg and Mayor Pat Morris and myself. And we was lucky enough to get him elected.

And then another picture that I like to brag about. This is one here is Colin Powell. He was here doing a book signing and he would done at four o'clock to go through all that clearance and stuff. And we had a very good session that day. And I think we sold over 2000 books there.

Then I have a sister, Rosie Parks. She was in the area. And I really enjoyed that, I see Cheryl Brown name popped up here.

CHERYL BROWN: I'm on, I'm so sorry. I got that shot yesterday and I just feel terrible. This morning I couldn't even move it was just my muscles, everything is sore, but it's getting better.

HENRY HOOKS: Alright, now here's another shot here are one of the local things that was going on. I don't know if Cheryl got a picture of that or not, but in those days if something like that was happening, I would spread it around. These were some of the prominent people in the area.

And we had a tea. And that was one of the social things we did and the ladies there would have affairs like that and it was a pleasure for me to cover.

Cheryl you know you covered a lot of things together.

CHERYL BROWN: Right.

HENRY HOOKS: And when we had people to come in, whether it was Maya Angelou or whatever Cheryl was right there. And if I had something that she could use, she got it

CHERYL BROWN: Mr. Hooks, you've always been a person that shared. And that's what makes you so revered in the community especially by myself, and those who had the privilege of working with you.

I could go to Mr. Hooks and go whenever he's shooting something, and he would teach me how to shoot it, if I didn't know how. And he could see the way that I was standing that maybe you need to do something else.

So, Mr. Hooks has always just been one of the revered people in my, in my, in our community. And I know you probably have every picture of every event during those years.

HENRY HOOKS: Yes, if you published something's going on I'd show up.

CHERYL BROWN: That's right.

HENRY HOOKS: And that's so nice of you to take a part in this Cheryl, you're still looking good. Tell Hardy, I say Hello and keep up the good work, I still read your paper and do his column.

GIANA MITCHELL: Okay, beautiful, I do have a couple more questions, so I'm just going to go ahead and ask the next one. Were there any specific black businesses that you remember serving the needs of the community and can you tell me a bit about them.

HENRY HOOKS: Yes. One of them was those four newspapers that did an excellent job. And they were nice enough. And all those guys were able to make a living from the

Precinct Reporter, the Black Voice and the other two, the American and all those guys were friends of mine.

And we had guys like {???} was excellent real estate man.

And we had a person by the name of {???} had an excellent restaurant served the community very well.

And there were several others who had good businesses here. And these people were really a part of the community and we were able to exist without any, any bad publicity.

We really didn't have all of those bad stories being published because the San Bernardino Sun was very very liberal in their coverage. And I put a paper on their table, and they just about printed everything I put there

And, and we had some excellent religious organizations here, that took care of religion that stayed in that area.

And whenever there was something was going on that was nice. They took a part in it. And we had a very good relationship with San Bernardino, and I really love being here and being one of the people that was involved.

Next question.

GIANA MITCHELL: Next question would be, how would you describe the racial or ethnic diversity of the towns you lived in. And how did the different groups get along?

HENRY HOOKS: They got along very good, we didn't have a lot of the stuff, the bad publicity, any bad accidents with the Police department or anything like that.

It took a little while to get some of the people on the Police force. We had a young man, a Johnny Epps that was the first Policeman here. Then we had another few guys that came along, and so we was able to make that change real real easily, without a lot of protests and things like that.

We had excellent parades. And got along real good in the educational department.

And we had a principal at San Bernardino High who had came in here right out of the Marines or something like that with the bushy hair and the looks of the time. And he turned San Bernardino High around and we had an excellent relationship then. When he was getting up to run for other offices, it kind of disturbed me and I kind of chewed him out for leaving San Bernardino out {???}.

He said he didn't want to stay as a principal, he wanted to be superintendent, and he did become the superintendent so we had a real good relationship here.

GIANA MITCHELL: Beautiful. Did you see racism when you're growing up in the IE, can you tell us a bit more about that?

HENRY HOOKS: Wasn't too much here because I was always in a nice position, supervisor, something like that. And I never tolerated any pushes like that. If you push me a little bit, I pushback and I did it in a manner that I didn't disturb anybody. If you want to call me Henry and I'm going to call you Charlotte. So that went real good.

GIANA MITCHELL: Did you ever hear stories from parents or grandparents, of what things were like before you were born?

HENRY HOOKS: No, I wasn't too familiar with my grandparents at all right, my father happened to be a postman, and we ran about 20 miles every day. So, when I was about five years old I was such a disturbance around the house and my mother said, you're going to have to take this boy with you.

I went on the mail route with my daddy, and I really loved it. I got a chance to see new people every day and I had 20 miles a day. And I thought I was the mailman.

So, he was a mailman until 1933, And when President Roosevelt got elected he downsized the postal service.

And my father is one of those guys that was downsized. He happened to be the only person of color as a postman in that area.

Very rare, but as a person in a position like that he became very important in the neighborhood. Everybody wanted him to come over and make a speech and encourage the kids that kind of thing.

So, I kind of got stuck on that, I loved being with him

GIANA MITCHELL: I like that. Um, do you remember any specific civil rights struggles in schools or cities in the Inland Empire. What do you remember, what happened and who helped lead the fight to make changes?

HENRY HOOKS: I was a federal employee, and as a federal employee you are not allowed to participate in politics and get involved in that kind of stuff, since I had a top-secret clearance, and I traveled for the government, I'd never participate in that kind of thing. I'd read about it and this kind of thing but never take a part.

It was one of the things I enjoyed after I retired working for Congress for Brown, I was able to have input with someone on top of the heap. Congressman Brown was over in the Space Administration, and to discuss those kind of things with him was very good for me because I knew what limitators I had, being a ex federal employee.

So, I stayed where I was supposed to be, I didn't get into his business and he didn't get into mine.

GIANA MITCHELL: I see, Um, okay and then we'll move into our last portion of questions. Tell me a little bit about what this current moment living through COVID 19 has been for you.

HENRY HOOKS: COVID 19 been very good for me being a disabled veteran, I was called to take my shot back on the 11th of February, my last one on the 8th. And I have been quarantined for two years now. I don't do any pictures anymore. And my wife doesn't get around any better than I do. And so, if I can't go with my wife, I'm not going. I've got accustomed to being quarantined. And I'm satisfied with it.

As it stands right now, my wife has had her shots and I have had my shots. And they say that you should still wear your mask that kind of thing and I've grown accustomed to that. I don't have a whole lot of activity here, I have a gentleman that comes by to check on me every day. And I have my nephew, the one that's assisting me here today, and his wife, which is my wife's niece.

So, that's enough for me.

I would love to go out and visit Cheryl Brown and Wilmer and this kind of stuff but I'm quarantined.

GIANA MITCHELL: Cheryl I think you're muted.

CHERYL BROWN: Yeah, I got my last shot yesterday, yeah been quarantined for over a year now. And I, however, am so happy that I got the shot. So now I can see my grandkids. To me that's the important thing.

Hardy wanted me to ask you about telling her about telling us about the story of Stu. The other photographer. What was Stu's last name?

Remember he had the photography studio down there on E Street?

He had the Kodak photography studio.

HENRY HOOKS: On E Street? Yes, I never got a chance to meet brother Stewart, brother Stewart. He was in my days when I was traveling.

I got a chance to meet him once at the wedding of Reverend Jackson's daughter. He showed up there, we had a very good conversation for a while.

And another person that I really enjoyed I forgot to mention was Gordon Park, I was covering his book signing, and I asked him about his son. He was surprised and I knew about the problem there. And he stopped signing his book and we took about 10 minutes just to converse, and he's signed one his books to give to me.

And I think you noticed that at the museum and I really enjoy meeting people like him.

There's another person I really enjoy talking with and had a lot of socializing with, which was Hardy Brown he was one of our special people here. He had a job where he had contact with many other people of this area. And he was in the school board and this kind of stuff. And we had people like Hardy and a few other people that did wonderful things for our community.

And you was talking about how we got along here ethnically? He is one of the people that helped with that kind of thing. Ask me something else.

CHERYL BROWN: He said Thank you. He made me turn it made me turn the volume up on the computer, because he heard it was you. "Is that Mr. Hooks?"

GIANA MITCHELL: I have a couple more questions and then we'll wrap it up. Next question is, as you've watched the growing protests for Black Lives Matter What have you been thinking and feeling?

HENRY HOOKS: Well, I think that was a wonderful thing that everybody got in on that, with the young man in the football player for taking this knee, starting that off. And the terrible thing with the Floyd boy and the girl that was shot in her home.

These kinds of things. We just hope that we can change those things a little bit. Now I don't believe we should cut back on the finance for the police department. We just got to use that in a different manner.

You have to change people, let them know that, you know, we're going to have to get along, so we just have to work on that kind of thing.

GIANA MITCHELL: Okay, and then final question, if you could give some advice to the next generation, what would you say?

I would say, Get as much education as you can. Learn how to cooperate with other people, and realize we all get together. It's just the fact that we can all get along and share what's on this planet.

We will advance civilization, quite a bit. Now I want to thank you and Cheryl and {???

GIANA MITCHELL: Well, I want to thank you once again for sharing your time with me and sharing your stories with me. I learned a lot and I'm really excited to, to keep working on this project, so thank you. And thank you Mrs. Brown.

HENRY HOOKS: Very good. Bill, say goodbye to my friends here.

MR. COMBS: Goodbye, everyone. Thank you. This is my uncle, 99 years old, he is doing so good, so we're so proud of him!

CHERYL BROWN: Wow. I hope I look good as you whenever I get to 99.

HENRY HOOKS: That is so nice of you, thank you very much.

CHERYL BROWN: Tell me do you can you get on Zoom. Whenever you don't have the relatives around or.

HENRY HOOKS: Oh, I'm quite sure I can, Bill here can connect me with anything out there, I just don't participate in it myself.

[We stopped the recording but Cheryl Brown invited him to the WAG meetings that occur over Zoom.]

End of Interview

[00:32:11]