

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

The Bridges that Carried Us Over Collection

Special Collections & University Archives

3-15-2021

Clarence Butler

Wilmer Amina Carter Foundation

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/bridges>

Recommended Citation

Wilmer Amina Carter Foundation, "Clarence Butler" (2021). *The Bridges that Carried Us Over Collection*. 10.

<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/bridges/10>

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Collections & University Archives at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Bridges that Carried Us Over Collection by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

The Bridges that Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:

Clarence Butler

Interviewers:

Julia Mayhew

Bishop Jackie Green

Interview Date:

March 15, 2021

Interview Location:

Remotely via Zoom

Length:

01:05:25

Media format:

Digital Video (mp4)

Interview Summary completed by:

Julia Mayhew, 2022

Description:

Clarence Butler talks about his childhood memories growing up in Redlands, the community dynamic during his adolescence, and important spaces that have contributed to the Black community. He tells specific stories about the center of Black community life around Second Baptist Street Church on Stuart, and how this community was displaced by redevelopment and moved to Lugonia Terrace in the 1950s. Clarence Butler recounts the many people and small businesses that have contributed to his upbringing in Redlands, his high school extracurriculars and family dynamic, and provides important advice for youth.

Keywords:

- Redlands High School
- Stuart St.
- Second Baptist Church
- Blue Flemings
- Racial diversity
- Redlands (Calif.)
- Benchwarmers

- Robert Burton's grocery store
- Redlands High School Black Student Union

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
Clarence Butler's Childhood Home	513 6 th Street, Redlands, CA 92374
Second Baptist Church	420 E Stuart Ave, Redlands, CA 92374
Redlands High School	840 E Citrus Ave, Redlands, CA 92374
Packing Houses	6 th Street, 7 th Street, Stuart Street (The packinghouse on Foothill – still operating)

Temporal Coverage:

- 1940s - 1960s

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	[00:00:51]	Clarence Butler recounts some of his early childhood memories growing up in Redlands, and adventures he had with his best friend John Taylor.
Digital Video	[00:08:44]	Mr. Butler's describes his large family and how his house became the gathering hole of the community. He also includes spatial descriptions of his childhood block.
Digital Video	[00:09:36]	Mr. Butler describes how his sister Lorraine was a pianist at their church for 52 years and how his mother participated in the choir. His father had a two-car garage and was a mechanic by trade which had many people at their house. His family also had a garden where they would share fruits and vegetables with the neighborhood.
Digital Video	[00:11:45]	Spatial coverage of Mr. Butler's neighbors, as well as the families, businesses, and the Second Baptist Church in his neighborhood.
Digital Video	[00:13:44]	The Foothill Packinghouse located in Redlands, was located on Mr. Butler's street. He goes on to discuss how many of the packinghouses began disappearing once the orange industry died down and how businessmen began to come to their neighborhood to try and buy their property.

Digital Video	[00:17:19]	Mr. Butler provides a description of the once residential area surrounding Pearl Street and High Street in Redlands, which is now below the 10 freeway and a strip mall.
Digital Video	[00:18:30]	Robert Burton's grocery store on High Street. Mr. Butler discusses how he patterned his life after Mr. Burton, an early Black real estate broker in Redlands.
Digital Video	[00:19:24]	Mr. Butler recalls how there weren't that many black families in the city of Redlands, roughly thirty to thirty-five. Most of his neighborhood was Black, Spanish and a few white families between Stuart, High, Fifth, and Lemon street.
Digital Video	[00:20:02]	Mr. Butler recalls his family's neighborhood parties and dances in his junior high years.
Digital Video	[00:21:43]	Jackie Green asks Mr. Butler about segregation at Hillside Cemetery.
Digital Video	[00:22:53]	Mr. Butler discusses his experiences with racism in the city of Redlands, most of which he recalls from the segregation of the community swimming pool.
Digital Video	[00:26:30]	Racial diversity in Mr. Butler's neighborhood. He notes that other families may not have experienced racism the same way in Redlands.
Digital Video	[00:29:04]	Mr. Butler recounts memories of Redlands High School and his extracurriculars, being one of the only three black seniors at the time of graduation.
Digital Video	[00:34:21]	Redlands High School had limited clubs for Blacks, so Mr. Butler and his friends formed the Blue Flemings.
Digital Video	[00:37:02]	Mr. Butler recalls the events the Blue Flemings would host.
Digital Video	[00:41:29]	Jackie Green asks Mr. Butler if he recalls the Ku Klux Klan's presence in Redlands
Digital Video	[00:44:24]	Mr. Butler talks about the three businesses that he and his best friend Johnny would go to fix their bikes, and the white owners that would help them out. One of them being Eugene Runkel, a member of the Bench Warmers club that raised money for kids to play sports.
Digital Video	[00:49:13]	Mr. Butler discusses his wife Cheryl's role in the founding of Redlands High School's Black Student Union. Cheryl Butler was the first Black female sheriff's deputy.
Digital Video	[00:54:50]	Clarence Butler gives advice to the next generation of youth, and describes how he had worked to become the district manager at Bekins A-1 Movers, in the same office he started in.

Related Materials:

See Attached Images and Notes after transcript. Mr. Butler provided images of the Blue Flemings and a newspaper clipping regarding the Butler family.

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

Julia Mayhew: We should be good. All right. The date is March 15th, 2021. And this morning I am accompanied by Bishop Jackie Green to interview Mr. Clarence Butler for the Bridges That Carried us Over Archive of the Black History of Empire. So Mr. Butler, can I have you spell your full name for us before we get started?

Clarence Butler: Yes, Clarence C-L-A-R-E-N-C-E, middle initial, L, last name Butler, B-U-T-L-E-R.

Julia Mayhew: Perfect, so I am going to put you into the spotlight. All right. So we'll go ahead and get started. Can you begin by telling us some of your earliest childhood memories growing up in Redlands?

Or, if you didn't grow up in Redlands, then a little bit about that?

Clarence Butler: [00:00:51] Well, I did grow up in Redlands, actually. I was born in 1942, and 513 Sixth Street is the only address that I remember as a young kid growing up. And there was nine of us, just a few of us, five boys and four girls. And we were members of Second Baptist Church, even though there was a church right across the street from us, which was St. Paul AME Methodist Church. It was a black church. There weren't a lot of young kids going there, there were mostly adults who were Methodists, and they did have a bell tower on that particular church that they would ring in the morning when it was time for Sunday school. And we actually had a lot of fun growing up in 513 6th Street. Lots of memories there, we did. My best friend, John Taylor, he and I did many, many things. We would invite the other boys to join us, but they just didn't have the ambition, I guess that we did. So, we'd build things like airplanes, we built wooden tanks with iron wheels and we built our own skateboards. We had a tunnel that we built. It was an underground tunnel. And we built it on the property that was across the alley from us on the south side. And it was also our playground. And I just remember after we had built the tunnel, one of the older girls wanted to go underneath and see what we had in there at night. We said, "you're too big! you can't get in there!", and she said, "yes I can". We said no, you can't. So, she went and tried to get in there and she said, "Oh I'm stuck!" So we had to pull her out. And when my dad heard about it, he told us, "you boys cover that thing up!"

Julia Mayhew: Oh my gosh!

Clarence Butler: And when he said cover it up, I said to Johnny, "He didn't say fill it in he said cover it up." So we took some plywood and we put it over the whole then we put some dirt over the plywood and so we covered it up! Well, we didn't fill it in. And so, a little later, he and I got together and we said you know what, we want to build a house.

And he said, okay, well, let's do it. So we went to Dill Lumber Company and we borrowed some wood, and we told him what we're going to do. And we asked them if they had any scrap wood. And he said, yes, we've got some scrap wood. He said, "all that over there you can have that over there!" So we went and got what wood we could, and then we went to the packing houses, because there were eleven thriving packing houses in the city of Redlands, and most of them were on our street just south of us. So, we went down to one of the packing houses and we asked them if they had any nails and they said yes, and they gave us a whole keg. We're in grammar school where we're in sixth grade at this time, okay. So, they ask us, how many you need? And we said, well, we just need a few and they gave us a whole keg of nails. So we said, Well, do you have any well orange crates that you know? "Yeah. There's a whole pile out there" Everything over there you can have whatever you want. So we got some wood and we brought it all back and we built a two room house. And we know, it was at least five feet tall because we asked one of the older guys to stand in there so that we can make sure that they can walk in and and he could. So at that time, it was certainly taller than us, we can walk in and no problem. And then my dad had a door underneath one of our houses and we asked him if we could use it. So we put the door on, we had a church key with a lock and everything and we could lock it. We built furniture, screen windows and all that kind of stuff. So it was a great time growing up there in that place. We built the house over one of the tunnels. So that if we ever got locked in or something, we had an escape route. And that escape route was go in one of the tunnels and come outside.

Bishop Jackie Green: That's great You guys were brilliant.

Clarence Butler: Oh, we were but nobody told us that.

Bishop Jackie Green: Right.

Clarence Butler: So one evening, to finish this story off about this house, My sister, Dorothy and I were throwing the socks and it was from their room to my room and she threw it over my head and I had missed it and I had missed it and so, it hit the floor, and I went down and I picked it up and I was facing the window which was out towards the playground where we were. And I looked up and I said, "Oh, our house is on fire!" I said, "wow!" And so we called the fire department. It's downtown where it is right now, and they sent three fire engines down there. And so they were putting the fire out and they were throwing water down in the hole. "Who lives in his house?", "Who lives in his house?" You know? So we didn't say anything but then the older adults said "Oh the kids just built that house! Nobody lives in that house" So, they finally put the fire out. It was, you know, they were putting axes to it. Johnny and I we said, we didn't build that house at strong, did we? And so, they finally put it out. And so, the next Saturday, Johnny and I we said, well, what are going to do now? So, we went and said, well, let's build a lookout tower. And so, I said where are we going to build it? "Well let's build it off of your mom's garage in the alley" So we were down there, building this lookout tower and my sister came running up the alley, "Clarence and Johnny, the fire chief wants you". Well, what does the fire chief want with us? And so we, we came down the ladder

and we ran down over to the lot and the fire chief Bud, Frank Bud, we knew of him. And he says, "I came over here because I just wanted to tell you boys that we don't want you building anything else". And here we both got hammers in our hand. And we put the hammers behind our backs, and we said, "oh no, we're not building anything else!" So, he smiled at me. He went on, he obviously, knew we were building something because we had these hammers in our hand. So, we just did a lot of things that most of the kids didn't do. We just got involved in whatever came to our head. We said, let's do it and we did it!

Julia Mayhew: Wow, that's great. So, can you share some maybe family stories that can help us understand what it was like in Redlands, like when you were growing up? So maybe what you would see as you walked around or drove down the street. Just a little bit about what the town or neighborhood was like back in the day? Just so we can kind of paint a picture of what it looked like.

Clarence Butler: [00:08:44] Well, with our family being as large as it was, we kind of entertained ourselves in many cases, you know. Our house was kind of like the gathering hole of the community. All the kids would come over because we could go over to the lot and play basketball, which was just across the alley from our house. And that block was owned by a gentleman from New York. And he allowed us to play on it as long as we kept it clean. And he had also built a building, just a square building, that he would rent out to churches during the summer to have revivals and things of that nature. And that's all that was on that property, was our playground and that church.

Clarence Butler: [00:09:36] But when it came down to how did we find fun, we always had a piano, and my oldest sister Lorraine was a pianist and she played for the Church. Matter of fact, she played for Second Baptist for 52 years before retiring. And we would just sing and enjoy ourselves. My mom was in the choir, she was in the choir even when we had a young adult choir. She was still in the choir singing. She would come, she would say "I'm going to choir rehearsal" when we were younger and she could go to church and at night when she was coming back, she would just be singing. We said, Oh, mom's coming! We could hear her singing as she'd be way down at the corner, but she'd just be singing walking on the way back home. My dad was a mechanic by trade. He had a two-car garage that if anybody wanted to exchange their engines, they could do it at our house. So obviously, all the boys were there. If they had to work on their cars they would come and work on their cars, and if they want to exchange the engine, they can take the engine out by just using the hoist and take the engine out of the car and fix it and they could do whatever they wanted to. We also had chickens, Rhode Island Reds, that you couldn't go in by yourself because the roosters would attack you. So, it took two people to go in and collect the eggs. And then my mom and I also put a garden together. And it was kind of a neighborhood garden because we had enough fruits and vegetables to share with everybody.

Bishop Jackie Green: Wow! that's awesome.

Clarence Butler: Yeah.

Bishop Jackie Green: Can I ask a question? So, who were your neighbors? I mean you remember who lived that street or even as neighbors were there businesses, small businesses that people ran?

Clarence Butler: [00:11:45] Yeah, well across the street from us of course was the church the Methodist Church.

Bishop Jackie Green: Methodist church.

Clarence Butler: Yes, and then they had a little, a small, immediately across the street from my house, was the parsonage, which was like maybe a three-bedroom, three room apartment, kind of just a small thing. And then there was the alley and then to the right of that alley, Reverend Minor was the minister. And he lived in a two-story house on the corner, which is now a college shoe store. And behind that, he had 1, 2, 3, 4 other houses that he rented out. And they shared a common out house if you believe that or not. Way up until at least '55, 1955 that I can remember, there was a common outhouse. Now, he had an inside toilet and a bathroom. And the other big house that he had inside toilets and bathrooms, but the other four homes, they had to share a common outhouse. Yeah, other than that, if you go further south of that was Johnson's Lumber and then you had all the packing houses. One of the packing houses there right now is the old pawnshop. That lot was the original portion where they would bring the oranges and put them on the conveyor belt and they would take them down in the basement and they would sort them and things of that nature. But once the uh, and then further down there was an icehouse. And then from the icehouse it was another packing house across the street and further south. So many of the packing houses were on Sixth Street and Stuart street and also on 7th Street.

Clarence Butler: [00:13:44] And of course, the only one left at this point that's operating is the Foothill packing house, which is on my street.

Bishop Jackie Green: Still there.

Clarence Butler: Yeah. Still there and still operating.

Bishop Jackie Green: And that's the only one?

Clarence Butler: That's the only one that is operating, the other one that was further away from us which in the West end of Redlands on Alabama is the Christian church there. And they converted it from a packinghouse to a Christian church. And it's a school. The school they're right there. And then the other ones, once the packing industry, the orange industry, kind of went down many of those packing houses mysteriously started burning down. I don't know why, but that was a good way to get rid of it. But I remember in 1955, old man Dill was coming around trying to buy everybody's property. Now, we had two houses on our property other than the ones that we lived in, and we rented it out to, you know, some renters. The Thomas's were behind us, Mr.

Tom, that was Coleman Thomas. He had four houses that he rented out. And then on 5th Street, which was across from Dill Lumber Company, the Garcia's had two houses and then you would go around the corner, the Mitchell's had three houses that they rented out. And across, also on 5th Street was Pledgers planning mill, which was next to the lumber company. All of that area, they said this whole area was going to be a shopping center.

Bishop Jackie Green:Right

Clarence Butler: No, they're not going to tear all these houses out and build no shopping center. And they said yes they are. So Dill Lumber Company was trying to come around, he was trying to buy the property and we said what's going on? Why is old man Dill trying to buy everybody's property? Some of the parents went down to the planning department, they said that they're going to build a shopping mall here. Oh, so he wanted to own everybody's property! So, when the contractors come, he would get all the money. So, nobody sold to him once they found out what was going on. But it took about 35 years before they actually built Vons shopping mall.

Bishop Jackie Green: And what was his first name? Dill?

Clarence Butler: I don't remember, You know, because when we're kids growing up, You didn't call adults by their first name.

Bishop Jackie Green: Yeah, Yeah. You got that right

Clarence Butler: Yeah, It was Mr. Dill or Mr. Butler, or Mr. Mayhew or whoever it was, you just didn't call them by their first name. The only way you would find their first name out was if you know, if they were close friends and you ended up talking and you would call them by their name and then you would remember Oh that's Ally!, Oh that's John! Otherwise, I just don't remember. But he sold his property and then he moved down to Redlands Boulevard and continued selling lumber. And then now it's turned into an antique shop. It's no longer a lumber company.

Clarence Butler: [00:17:19] But that whole area all the way up to which you now see now is a freeway, but it was Pearl. It was all residential area all the way up to Pearl. And all the way down High Street, High Street went all the way through to Orange and Stuart Street went all the way through to Orange Street. But then they blocked those two off at Sixth Street and then built the strip mall there.

Julia Mayhew: That's great. It looks so different today from how you're describing it, but also so similar at the same time.

Clarence Butler: I say that the back end of the parking lot of Vons is our property.

Julia Mayhew: So many businesses, but so much history also there that's incredible yes.

Clarence Butler: Yes.

Julia Mayhew: Are there any specific businesses or hangouts in the downtown area that you remember? I remember we learned a lot about Robert Burton's grocery store, so,

Clarence Butler: [00:18:30] Yes, on High Street.

Julia Mayhew: Any stories about Mr. Burton or any hangouts? That would be amazing!

Clarence Butler: Yeah. That would be one of the places where we go buy two cent, five cent candy. You know? He lived in the back. The store was in front and he lived in the back. He and his wife, Callie, and he was also a member of Second Baptist church at that time as well. And then he went on to become the first black realtor. He actually was a broker, a broker realtor, operating out of his house and I always admired him because he was such a businessman. I wanted to be like Mr. Burton, you know, that's kind of how I patterned my life after him. I actually ended up going to work for Bekin's Moving and Storage and became a district manager and things of that nature. And it was all because of him because I said if he could do it, I can do it.

Clarence Butler: [00:19:24] There weren't a lot of hangouts that we could go to because there weren't that many black families in the city of Redlands. Probably somewhere in the neighborhood of 30 to 35. Most lived between Stuart and High and Fifth and Lemon Street. And then others were scattered throughout the city. But, most of the neighborhood was Black, Spanish and a few white in that particular area.

Clarence Butler: [00:20:02] One of the things that our family did, we had a large living room and dining room combined. And so my mom would allow us as kids, just so she would know where we were at, to have parties. We'd have a house party. So we would clear all of the furniture out of the two rooms and we would invite the neighborhood to come over. And we would have dances and everything and things of that nature. We'd have snacks and punch. And one year, as the girls got older, they were, I think in high school. We had a dance. A party at the house. And so my older brother Junior, of course, he was much older and he had a lot of friends from San Bernardino and Riverside places like that. So he let them know. Now they weren't supposed to be coming, but we had the whole house full and we had a great time. And then afterwards after the party was over and we started putting all the furniture and stuff back, my mom noticed that the girls pictures were gone. She said where are the pictures? We always left them out, nobody bothered them. And so the girl's pictures were gone so she said: that's it! No more parties, no more house parties. And that's the last time we had a house party. She said what she said and we just didn't have any more house parties after that, But people would still come over.

Bishop Jackie Green: [00:21:43] I have another question. I wrote down a couple of things. But can I ask, do you recall were African Americans at the Hillside Cemetery, were we buried in a black section in the cemetery?

Clarence Butler: No. As far as I can remember, they weren't. Because I've been up there and my mom and dad, of course, were buried close by. My nephew, is buried on the north east side. There's a Banons buried on the east side. I don't ever remember them specifically segregating the Blacks from the white, or anything. Wherever there was a plot and you wanted to buy it you can buy it.

Bishop Jackie Green: Okay.

Clarence Butler: My dad's mom and father are in that cemetery as well. They're scattered all over.

Bishop Jackie Green: Okay. That's good to know. And, so as it relates to segregation, well, not so much but racism in Redlands. What do you remember?

Clarence Butler: [00:22:53] You know, as far as my era, we were allowed to go any and everywhere we wanted to. I remember during the time when they were protesting in the South at the five and ten cents store. And they had the sit in. They were refused to be served. And we had a five and ten cent store downtown on Orange and Redlands Boulevard. And we had gone in and they had like a little malt shop there. Where you could buy sodas and malts and things of that nature. And so we decided well, let's go down let's see if they're going to treat us the same way! And so he went out and, and we'd been going there before. But once we heard about the riots you know in the South well, let's go and see if they're going to serve us, and we went down and we ordered a malt. And they served us.

Bishop Jackie Green: They served you.

Clarence Butler: No problem. We didn't have any problems. The only racial thing that I can remember about is the swimming pool, at the park.

Bishop Jackie Green: Yeah.

Clarence Butler: Now we can go down and swim there. But it was on a special day when they were going to change the water. You know? (laughing) And then the blacks could go in and swim and the Spanish. Otherwise, it was a swimming pool, it was above-ground swimming pool down on Occidental Street where most of the blacks and the Spanish went to swim. But Mr. Bullard, who worked for the railroad company, he was a switchman and he worked just, his position was right there at Second Baptist Church. Right up there with where the tracks are they had all those orange packing houses and things. And so, they would bring the cars down to load up the oranges and he was a switchman there for the railroad. And that's where he worked every day. But he went down to the city and said, we're not going to have this. If our kids want

to go down and swim, they should be able to go down as any day of the week. And we were allowed to do that mainly because he went down and protested. But we never were turned down, we never were turned down from going to swim. But that was one of the things that was racially known around the city about whenever you change water, then it was okay for us to go swim there.

Bishop Jackie Green: Wow. Okay.

Julia Mayhew: All right. So how would you describe the racial ethnic diversity then of Redlands? Did you mostly hang out with those in your community, like your church members and highschool friends or were the white and black communities often just working together? I'm just kind of confused on what the dynamic was like in that time.

Clarence Butler: Well, like I said, our neighborhood was predominantly black with the Spanish and Mexican, I mean whites as well had lived in the area. Even though our folks, my folks, my mom was from Georgia and my dad was from Arkansas.

Clarence Butler: [00:26:30] We always invited everyone. And we had whites who'd come to our house to play. They were my brother's and sister's, friends. And they were treated just like anybody else. You know? So, we did not face a lot of it. My dad and my family was pretty well known throughout the city. So, you know, they knew that anybody that was at our house was going to be safe because they're not coming to our house and acting a fool, so to speak you know. The kids would say, you cannot act like that here if you act like that you gotta go because if my mom ever heard you say something or do that, you'd be gone. You know you'd never be back. So we would police our own house area, and whatever but everyone was welcomed. And Buddy Williams, which is a good friend of ours, he was a schoolmate of my brother Edward. He was he was at our house as much as I was at the house. You know? And he was white. And I said, well, I guess he's our other brother, so yeah.

Julia Mayhew: Right, right.

Clarence Butler: But yeah, Other families maybe didn't experience that as we did.

Clarence Butler: [00:29:04] There weren't a lot of mixed races that went to other families. But in our particular house, everyone was well, even if it was a gangster. This was not a gangster in our house. They still knew how to act when they came to our house because we treated them just as if they were an individual. Not because they belong to a specific club or gang or anything of that nature. Because they did not display their gang abilities at our place, you know.

Julia Mayhew: You mentioned your high-school party and I have so many questions about Redlands High School! You were in so many organizations, I believe you did football, you were the quarterback. I believe you were in the choral group, Second Baptist Men's Gospel Singer's please tell us all about your high school organizations and what

it was like.

Clarence Butler: Well, high school was a lot of fun. There was six hundred and twelve seniors.

Julia Mayhew: Oh wow.

Clarence Butler: Only three blacks, All male

Bishop Jackie Green: Oh wow. Clarence, only three blacks?

Clarence Butler: Only three blacks in their senior class.

Bishop Jackie Green: Oh wow.

Clarence Butler: The three blacks were, there was John Taylor, it was John Fulton at the time, and John Butler. And we always had played sports and things of that nature. So, when we got to high school, well, actually before we attended the Redlands Junior High, which was the only junior high in the city of Redlands, which is now known as North Campus. And so, when we were ninth graders we all three were on the football team and we won the league. We didn't lose not one game. We only had about 40 points scored against us and in those days you play both ways. So we went into high school. I played freshman or sophomore ball. And then Johnny, or Big John, as we'd call him. They were big enough to play on the varsity. And so I was the first string quarterback on the B Team. What was called the B Team. And we did very well.

And then my junior year, I went up to Varsity. And one of the things that there was, was a second-string quarterback who was with me. His name was Dave Bobo, he was the second string quarterback when I was in ninth grade. Well, he had a year on me because he was bigger than I was. And so he was up with the varsity. And so when I went to the varsity, I said to myself, I said, I'm going to be first string quarterback. Not Dave Bobo. But Dave Bobo's dad lived not too far from the school and he was at every practice. So I said, you know what? I'm not only going to have to beat out Dave Bobo, I have to beat out his dad too. Because I know his dad is there trying to influence the coach which was Coach Surrell. So anyway, I did go up there and I became the second-string quarterback as a junior. And in those days, juniors were second string. Seniors were first string. Yeah. But we were better than the seniors, we would beat em' up every day on the practice field but we didn't get a chance to play.

Bishop Jackie Green: Right.

Clarence Butler: As they were seniors and we were juniors. Except for one game. It was a San Bernardino high school Smudge Pot Game

Julia Mayhew: Oh the Smudge Pot game!

Clarence Butler: The smudge pot game, you're right And so we were playing at the University of Redlands. And so, San Bernardino won the toss, and they elected to receive. And so, we kickoff to them, the seniors kicked off to them, and they got the ball and they marched down and they made a touchdown. Frank Surrell was so mad, he said juniors get in there! We all looked around, and said did he call us? So, we jumped up and we ran, and we went in there. And the seniors kicked off to us and when they kicked off to us, we marched down and made a touchdown. And we turned around and we were going to go back and say hey we're going to kick off to those seniors and beat em' again. Well, as we were running back to go kick off, the whole senior team was coming in and we said, what's going on? You know. So, we we ran off the field and I was trying to get the coach's attention. I was looking at him. He wouldn't look at me, he was just folded his arms and looked straight out. So anyway, I guess the seniors got the message and they went on and won the game twenty-seven to six.

So, in those days, we would take the bus from Redlands High School over to the university. Then we would have to take the bus back to the high school. So, we went back to the high school and we parked on University street and the coaches would always say something about the game and then they would get off the bus. So, the coaches were speaking and then they said, Okay, we're going to leave. And any of the players who wanted to say something it was said. So before the coach left, I said, wait, coach! Coach! Wait a minute. How come when you put us in there and then we went down, made a touchdown and we came back and you took us out, why did you do that? He said "I don't want to show everybody what kind of a team I had for next year" and he walks off the bus. So I said well okay, that sounds pretty good. That was a pretty good answer.

Clarence Butler: [00:34:21] The other thing is once we went into high school, we looked at the Makio and said, they've got all these clubs, the Rifle Club, this kind of club, the Block R Club, this club that club. Say, they don't have any clubs for blacks. You know, there's nothing for us to do. So we decided we were going to form a club of our own. And that's how the Blue Flemings got formed. My brother-in-law, Delbert Parks, He was a volunteer for the police department. And so we said, well, let's make Delbert the supervisor. And so we said, okay, he said he would and there was about twelve of us I think, yeah, at the time. But we didn't have a name. So one day, one weekend we were going down to the Fox theater because the theatre was operating at that time. And we walked by the Pink Flamingo, the bar. And I looked up and I said Pink Flamingo? Well, let's call ourselves the Blue Flemings! And they said, Oh, that sounds good! and that's how we became the Blue Flemings. So we said well, what's our colors going to be? They said let's have powder blue jackets. So yeah, Mr. Gair's store was downtown at that time so we went to Mr. Gair and said Mr. Gair, we're going to have a club and we're going to call ourselves the Blue Flemings. And we want to know if you will put together a blue blazer for us, and he said sure, we'll do that! So he did and that's how the picture that we sent you'll see, those are powder blue jackets.

Julia Mayhew: Yeah. I can share this photo really quick that you guys sent!

Clarence Butler: I don't think you've ever seen it Jackie.

Julia Mayhew: Jackie, I'm sure you're going to love this one!

Clarence Butler: And this picture is taken at the church. And it's only a few of us. Yeah.

Julia Mayhew: For some reason it's not going to let me share my screen.

Clarence Butler: You're muted again, Jackie.

Julia Mayhew: Jackie, I think you got it in your email. For some reason because I'm recording, I think it's not going to let me share.

Clarence Butler: Yeah. You're muted I can't hear you, Jackie!

Bishop Jackie Green: I turned it off. My husband said, that's Clarence! So he said Hi! I go, I can't get on the interview, I can't let you on.

Clarence Butler: [00:37:02] So, our purpose for the Blue Flemings was to get everybody involved. So we had dances, we had a sock hop, we had semi dance, we had formal dances and things of that nature. And so one day, one weekend, we had a dance. It was a semiformal dance. And John Howard was a track star at San Bernardino high school. And everybody knew him and he was well known and stuff like that. But once we said whatever the address was, that's where we met. So he came to the YWCA where we held a lot of our dances. And he didn't have a tie on. And we said, John, you gotta have a tie this is the semiformal. He said, you know, you know me I don't have to have no tie. He said, let me in. We said no John, that's our policy. You have to have a tie. And so we said, go down the Stater Brothers, buy yourself a tie. We don't care if it's green, red, blue, yellow. Whatever just go down, buy a tie, a tie and put it on and we'll let you in! So he went down to Stater Brothers and bought a tie and we let him in. But he thought we were going to just let him in just because he was well-known. Well, you know. But we didn't. And so and then we had at the school, it was a closed campus so you could not go off campus for lunch.

So we told Mr. Ronen, he was the assistant principal and truant officer, so to speak. So we told Mr. Ronen, we're going to have a luncheon and we're going to call it The Grasshopper Luncheon. And it's about, it's all going to be food from our families. Our parents are going to cook it, but we need to be able to go home for lunch and pick up the food and bring it back. You know fried chicken, and you know all the soul food. And he said, okay, you could do that. So we got that day at lunchtime and anybody who was invited to take the food. So we went home and brought the food back and we called it the grasshopper picnic. And it was sponsored by our club, the Blue Fleming club. And so, but when we had dances, we invited everybody. There were other clubs that were

formed at the school and beyond the school. But we invited everybody to come to our dances and things of that nature. And, and our motto was, nobody's a wallflower.

Everybody that comes is going to enjoy themselves and it was our position to go around, and if we saw anybody just you know at a dance and they were standing on the wall we said come on, let's go dance! You know, "I don't know how to dance". Well, we'll teach you how to dance! And that's what we did.

The other thing is when we first had the first dance at the YWCA, the police department said, well, you gotta have security and so we said, okay, well, how much of that? It was \$7 an hour. We said, okay, well, we can afford that. It's only going to be about three hours so we can afford that. So after the first dance that we had, and they saw how we policed our own The next time we told them we we're having one they said, well, you don't need security we'll just drive by and make sure that everything is okay. You guys did a good job on keeping everything covered. So we never had security after the first one. They'd just check by just to make sure that there was no problems. But everybody was welcome. Everybody had a great time because we made sure they did, yeah.

Julia Mayhew: That's great! You have so many beautiful memories about Redlands. Jackie, do you have any other questions, you want to get through?

Bishop Jackie Green: [00:41:29] Well, I'm just curious. Clarence do you remember seeing the KKK in Redlands? Redlands has had a history of their presence in the city. Do you remember or recall anything back in the day?

Clarence Butler: No. All my lifetime I've never seen, I've heard of the KKK and I knew of it in the San Diego area and Carlsbad places like that. But I'd never experienced anything in the city of Redlands. Never ever, like I said, we would go anywhere and we did go, I mean I did especially, anywhere we wanted to go we went, whether it was walking or bicycle or cars or anything. Matter of fact, one of the things that I remember as a grammar school kid I bought a bike. My first bicycle that I owned was in sixth grade. I remember telling my mom. I said Mom, I want a bike. And this was around July or something like that. She said, well, if you save your money, save up enough money, she said, You can buy a bike. The bike that I wanted was a Schwinn and it was thirty-five dollars.

Bishop Jackie Green: Yeah.

Clarence Butler: Way back, that was a lot of money. So but she knew what kind of industrialists Johnny and I were and So you could go up and down the alleys and pick up Coke bottles and beer bottles. Five cents for a beer bottle six cents for a Coke bottle. And so you'd find pennies and things around, so I started saving my money. And so October came around and I was counting my money. I had it in a jar, And I said Mom, I got fifteen dollars and seventy-five cents and she said, you've got that much money? And I said yes. She said well if you got that much money your brother and I will put in the rest of it. We'll buy that by bike. I said okay, great. But it had taught me a lesson.

The lesson was, if you put forth an effort to do something, somebody else will come forward. And help you finish it. I never forgot that.

And I got my bike. Well, once I got the bike Johnny, his sister bought him, he had five sisters, he was the only boy, and he was the youngest. His sisters told him that if he got a certain grade or whatever, I don't remember what class it was or something like that. That they would buy him a bike and they did. And so we both had brand new bikes.

Bishop Jackie Green: Ohhh.

Clarence Butler: And we would ride them, you know, up to the packing houses and things of that nature. And of course, those times you had a lot of stickers, so you wouldn't look flat.

Clarence Butler: [00:44:24] So there were three places that we would go to take care of our bikes. Russell Degrass had a Richfield gas station on High and Orange Street. And so one day we had a flat, we went down to Mr. Degrass' shop and said Mr. Degrass, we got a flat. Can you fix our tire? And so he did. He said ah Okay, I'll do it. And so he did it the first time. And we said We don't have any money but we'll pay you, we didn't have a job. We didn't have any money but we'll pay you. So he said okay. He fixed our flat. I think it was like 15 cents or something like that. So, you know, he had a little tab that he'd put it on and he'd say, Okay, pay me when you can! So we went and got our money and we'd come back, and we'd pay.

Then we went up to the 76 gas station one time when we had a flat up there and I said, it was Eugene Ruckle, the 76 gas station. The gas station is still there now. So we went up and he didn't want us to call him Mr. Ruckles. He always wanted us to just call him by Eugene. So yeah, Eugene. We gotta flat, can you help us fix our flat? And so he said I will show you how to do it. So he took our bikes and turned it upside down and he said this is the tool that you use and when you take the tire out, the tube out, you pump it up and you put it in a water tank and you find out where the flat side, I mean, where the holes are and your mark it with a chalk. And then you get the top of the patch, they can scrub it. And then you put a light to it, and put the patch on it and I said, well We don't have any money right now and he said don't worry about it. He said I'll fix it. I'll just put it on the account. So he fixed our flats and put it on the account. You know, we said, wow, we got an account, we don't even have a job.

So we went and got our money, we came back and we payed him. Next time we had a flat we went up to Eugene's and he'd say, you know where all the equipment is. Just go ahead and fix it, and when you get through just let me know how many patches you use. So we did, and we did that for many years. I said how come he's so friendly and how come he's so nice? Well, he always had kids at his shop. Then you would check your tires, You know you'd check people's tires. Pump the gas for them, go wash their Windows. You would fill their tank up, I mean go fill their radiator up with water if it was needed and things of that nature. That's the service that the kids did.

And then when we needed a bicycle tire, it was Mr. Grismore. He had the Grismore's bicycle shop downtown. We'd go to Mr. Grismore's and say Mr. Grismore, We need a tire because they've got so many patches on it you can't patch it anymore. We said, but we don't have any money. He said don't worry about it what size innertube? I said twenty-six inch and so he'd give us the inner tube and we'd go and we'd get our money, and we'd go back and pay him. So we had three accounts and neither one of them, all of these are three white men. Neither one of them ever said to us, if you kids aren't going to pay it, are your parents kinda pay it? Or anything. Never. Not ever did they ever say it. If we said we were going to pay them, we said we're going to pay them and they just believed it. And we would do it, we would go down and do it. Well, as I got older, and got into high school. Then I'd come to find out, I said Eugene Runkel, he was on the Bench Warmers. And the Bench Warmers were the club that would raise money for kids who wanted to play sports. So I said, no wonder he was so nice to us! He was always used to dealing with kids and he was on the Bench Warmers. He knew at one time or another we were going to be in high school and we were going to be playing ball, he was going to be supporting us.

Bishop Jackie Green: He supported you.

Clarence Butler: That was the truth, that's just the way it was. But I said wow we were in sixth grade. And we had an account, we could buy anything we wanted as long as we paid for it. We always paid for it, we never owed him a dime. You know we'd come back and money scrap up our money together and go out and pay him and that was it.

Bishop Jackie Green [00:49:13] I had another quick question. Clarence, before your wife passed, Cheryl, we know she was involved in helping to found the Black Student Union?

Clarence Butler: Yes.

Bishop Jackie Green: At the high school?

Clarence Butler: Yes.

Bishop Jackie Green: Can you talk about that? And how she got into that?

Clarence Butler: Well, Mr. Hobbes was the Black Student Union supervisor and he retired. And so they wanted to know if anyone that was teaching would take it over. But Cheryl said, well I'll do it, because she was a Deputy Sheriff. She had gotten a disability retirement from them. And then she went into selling real estate. So she had time to go down and be the Black Student Union's supervisors.

Bishop Jackie Green: Okay

Clarence Butler: Which was one of the best things that ever happened to those students at that time. Because even though she was in charge of the Black Student Union, everyone was invited to attend.

Bishop Jackie Green: Right.

Clarence Butler: And it was her belief that the kids were to succeed in whatever they wanted to do. And so she would schedule events to go down to premier TV shows that we're starting. I remember when Queen Latifah first started her show. She took a bus load of kids down there to view the show. And then she took the kids to conflict resolution, you know, so that they learn how to get along with each other. They went to camps and things of that nature. And then when it came down to taking the SAT, she would tell the kids, have you taken your SAT? No, not yet. How come? Because I don't - well go see Mrs. Espinosa and get a voucher from her and you take the test. And if you don't pass it, then you'd take it again. And so, most of the students that she supervised all went to college. She made sure they went to college and they had the grades and things to do that or they got into business or things of that nature. She just was one, because she was involved when she was in Georgia. Not in Georgia, I'm sorry. In Fayetteville, North Carolina. She was involved in some of the Martin Luther King marches and things of that nature. She always was an activist at heart. And when she came out here, she got involved. Actually, when she first came out here when we got married, she told me, she said, I don't like white people. I said, Well, if you're going to live out here, you're going to have to learn how to get along with everybody. Some of them will become your best friend. And I said so that's something that you're to learn how to deal with. And I guess she took it to heart. And she really did. Some of her best friends were white people.

Bishop Jackie Green: White people.

Clarence Butler: Yes. I mean, when she started with the sheriff's department, she started as a clerk and then they opened up for full-fledged deputy female sheriffs, but she had to go through the academy. So she was one of the first to go through it and Sheriff Bland who had been the sheriff there for like twenty-five years. He was like her best buddy, so she went through the academy and became the first black female Deputy Sheriff.

Bishop Jackie Green: I saw that. I have the article, I saw the article in the paper. Excellent.

Clarence Butler: And she got to work mostly in the jail but when she got hurt and had knee surgery, Sheriff Bland it was about time for him to retire, and so he asked her and said, "you want to go out with me?" She said yes! So they both retired at the same time. They both got disability retirement

Bishop Jackie Green: That was good, that was good.

Clarence Butler: But yeah, a lot of the students, even a lot of the students today.

Bishop Jackie Green: I think my daughter Liz was in that group

Clarence Butler: Liz was in the group?

Bishop Jackie Green: My daughter was in that group.

Clarence Butler: Yes. And that's when I think a lot of the kids realize that if you want to do something and you want to do it bad enough, you can. And so a lot of the kids, the black kids either became police officers and things of that nature, and I like to say that that's because of Cheryl. She always told them you can do anything you want to do. If you want to be a police officer, you can be a police officer. If you want to be a schoolteacher, you can do that. And she was there to make sure it happened.

Bishop Jackie Green: Yes. That's wonderful.

Julia Mayhew: That's wonderful. Cheryl sounds like a wonderful woman I would have loved to meet her! So we're coming up on an hour. If you could give some advice for the next generation, what would you want to say? Anything at all would be perfect.

Clarence Butler: For the next generation

Julia Mayhew: There's probably a lot of stuff that needs to be said!

Clarence Butler: [00:54:50] Yes they just need to get involved. They need to have a purpose in life as to what they want to do. And the sooner they do that, the better off they're going to be. I mean, when I went over to, when I heard about Bekins, they didn't have any blacks working for them. And I found out through a union steward who had signed them up and told Mr. Tyler. Do you remember Ted Tyler? Jackie?

Bishop Jackie Green: I think so.

Clarence Butler: It was his daughter. I forget her name right now. But he had a shoe shop. He had a shoeshine parlor downtown.

Bishop Jackie Green: On that corner?

Clarence Butler: Yes.

Bishop Jackie Green: Okay. Yes. Yeah.

Clarence Butler: Ted Tyler well, he was the one that told his son-in-law, which was Joe Townsend and myself, that Bekins had become a union shop and that they didn't have any blacks and they wanted to hire blacks. So he and I went down and of course I got hired. I had a couple of years of college. Joe didn't. I had a short haircut and Joe had a

processed haircut. So I said, well I think I'm sure they've got to hire me. But I was only 22 years old at the time. And when they called two weeks later, they called me back to tell me that they wanted to hire me. And so they showed me how they store the equipment and things of that nature and you he turned me over to the operations manager and we went back and he was telling me all about the company and how he said this will be your job to do this, and to do that for them as we were coming back to the warehouse. He was a kind of fat roly-poly guy. Picture him that way. But he said, "We may have some problems. You're the first black we hired." And I said "problems? I don't expect any problems, I come here to work." So it just kind of shocked him, you know, So he took me downstairs and he turned me over to the dispatcher. And so the dispatcher was saying well, you're number 36 on the seniority list. And he says, only thing I can tell you is don't turn anything down. He said, you know, a lot of the guys work a lot of hours and things of that nature. And come the weekend sometimes they don't want to work. Norton was open and so was March Air Force Base, so it had a lot of military business. So he said, you'll be on call. He said that we will make a line up every day. And then if you're going to work, we'll call you or you can stop by and the lineup will be on on the window. So I said, okay, Thank you.

He says you have any other questions? I said, uh, "yeah. How high can I go into this company?" I haven't put one foot on the truck yet. And he said, "How high do you want to go?" And I looked over to the right because there was an office and there was a glass window and there was a gentleman in there himself. I said, what's his job over there? And mind you, this is an open office. There's other people in there. And we're talking back and forth, and he said, well, he's a district manager. I said, Well, that's how high I want to go. He said, well, you spend about three years on the trucks, three years in sales and three years in operations. He said you can become a district manager. I said good this is the company for me. And I walked out.

Bishop Jackie Green: Wow.

Clarence Butler: He was smiling and I didn't know why he was smiling, But I said he's gotta be telling the truth because, otherwise everybody else in here he's lying to them too. Because they could hear us talking you know? So anyway, I came home and I told my friends, I said, guess what? I got hired over Bekins. And guess what they said? I could also become a district manager. And they said in San Bernardino? And I said yes, in San Bernardino. And I said oh, sometimes you can't tell everybody what your plans are and your goals are. Sometimes you have to keep it to yourself. I realized that.

Bishop Jackie Green: Right.

Clarence Butler: Because I said I was first string quarterback, And there was only three of us blacks. The rest were white, Mexican, and if I could manage them, I guess I can manage over here. So anyway, that evening, I went home. I went over to my mom and dad's house. And I wasn't as enthusiastic as I was when I told my friends, and I went into the house and they were sitting at the kitchen table. And I said, I got hired over Bekins and they also said that I can become a district manager. And mom and dad

never look up. They both just said, you can do it. Wow, what powerful words. If mom and dad said I can do it, I can do it. I'll never say another word to my friends. I'll just do what the dispatcher told me. And when I became district manager at the same place I was hired on as a helper, I never became friends. I don't know why. But it just had to be the Lord that says, don't become friends. This a job. Do your job. Do it well. You are business partners. Basically, you're not friends. So I never became buddy buddies with anybody, always my job. Matter of fact at the end of the first year, we were looking at our checkstubs and they said I made such and such for this year and I made such that for that year you know. They said Clarence how much did you make? I said, oh, I made such and such and they said how'd you make that much money! I said, well when you were saying you wouldn't work? Yeah. I said I would. That's how I made that much money. And so I said I said, you know, some of you just want to be helpers, some of you want to be drivers, some of you want to be warehouse men. I want to be a district manager. So, but it's okay if you want to be what you want to be. I don't have any problem with that.

Bishop Jackie Green: Right.

Clarence Butler: But I want to be better.

Clarence Butler: And they were teaching me the business. Even in the office, the assistant secretary to the manager was teaching me the business. And lo and behold, in ten years, I was managing at the same office that I started out as a helper, and I was managing some of those same people that taught me the business. And I said nothing but the Lord. Because most cases if you wanted to you know, go from a driver to a helper or helper to inside the office, you go to a different office. You don't work at the same office in which you were brought up in and manage. But I happen to manage work as a helper, a driver, operations dispatcher, operations manager, and a district manager at the same office that I started out as a helper and I managed and worked there for 27 years. Longer than any other manager. Every manager then came there, as I was moving up the ladder, would say to me, I understand you want to become a district manager? I said yes, and I had never told him it. They already knew it. And they would say, I'm here to make sure that happens. I said okay. And they did. They did. So I had become a district manager in the same office where I started out as a helper. And I think back and I said, It is nothing but the Lord because who else? I mean, I would have a good month and I would tell myself, okay, you guys want to go celebrate? I'll come over And I'll pay the tabs. I was the operations manager and they'd be over to the bar and I'd go over and I'd have a Coke or something like that. And I'd say, Okay. How much do I owe you guys? I'd pay the bill and then I would leave. I would never ever become their buddy buddies.

Bishop Jackie Green: Right.

Clarence Butler: As I had to manage them.

Bishop Jackie Green: Right.

Clarence Butler: Right. And I said, wow, I was 22 years old. I knew that. Why did I know that? It wasn't because I was so smart. It's because it was in the Lord's plan.

Bishop Jackie Green: That's a good one. It's a good lesson.

Clarence Butler: Yes, they have to be involved: they have to have an idea of what they want to do in life and then strive for it to get there. And sometimes you can't tell everybody, You just have to go about doing it yourself. Because not everybody wants you to succeed.

Bishop Jackie Green: That's right

Clarence Butler: Surround yourself around those that do. Surround yourself around those people who are going somewhere about something. that want to be somebody, and then you can too. So that would be my advice. To the young kids today.

Julia Mayhew: Thank you for sharing that with us. Okay. I think that wraps up our interview.

End of Interview:
[01:05:25]

Additional Information and Stories from Clarence Butler:

When my dad moved here from Arkansas, he started to work for the Ford company and wanted to be a mechanic for there were no black mechanics. He washed and polished cars and his boss told him that if he wanted to be a mechanic and be given a stall to work in, he should ask the other mechanics if they needed any help doing anything to show them he could do the work and to buy as many tools as he could to have his own tools case and once he completed his purchases and experience with helping the other mechanics he would give him a stall. Well, he followed his advice and next thing everyone knew, he became a mechanic and had his own stall and stayed with Redlands Ford for 52 years.

Also , many of the black women in the 50's and 60's were domestic workers, professional cooks, caterers (without a culinary license) cooking for the rich people up in the hills who own large homes and lots of property and businesses within the city and they did very well.

The Mitchell's ran their own white laundered clothes only, out of their home on Stuart St.

Many of the black men had their own businesses such as gardening, janitorial, junk man, fruit and vegetable sellers and haulers whom brought in goods from imperial valley, Ca to sell and distribute in the city of Redlands.

What we call homeless people today, we called hobos and wino's in the 50's and 60's Most had skills but once they received their money they couldn't control their habits but they were known by many and bothered no one. Sam, Sam "the drunken man" as we called him, was a masonry worker and excellent buggy, muggy piano player, he even baby set for us a couple of times for my mom.

Pastor Charles Hopkins was a professional singer with the Paul Quinn Gospel singers from the Brazos River area and put together a quintet group before us who perform on the Art Linkletter show on national TV. After most of them graduated and went their own separate ways, he worked and put together our group called The Mu-Tonic Singers back in the late 60's.

After pastor Hopkins left Second Baptist, we continued to work with Minister Claude Duckett, who was one of the older group singers and we sang at many churches, schools and coffee houses. During the Civil Rights era we joined up with a folk group, three white and Clabe Hangan, whom had gone folk singing professionally and all over many countries and we called ourselves " The Messengers' " again, we supported and participated in many Civil Rights movements.

The Mu-tonics recorded an Album in 1974 and the Messengers did a video as well.

My dad owned 13 two room cabins on 9th and Stuart st. and rented them out to

elderly single men in the late 50's and eventually sold the property to SCE for their expansion.

Many of the blacks that lived not far from the church and in the area that was being developed either left Redlands or moved to the west end of Redlands around the Texas and Lugonia area.

For those people who lived on Stuart and High Street, their garages were in the back, accessed by an alley. My friend Johnnie and I spent a lot of time up and down these allies and that's where we mostly saw Elmer Bryant and his mom who actually lived on Stuart street. He and his mom would enter their home from the alley.

Elmer was a few years older than us, a single child and raised by his mother only. When he was in school he was pretty much an "A" student and a great dresser. We would converse with him many times and marveled at his intelligence. But for whatever reason and we don't know why, once Elmer graduated and quit schooling, someone introduced him to wine and from that day on, Elmer became one of those wino's.

Obviously, we were very disappointed that this happened to him for we looked up to him and had so much hope for his future. Elmer had so much going for himself and it all went to waste.

The only good thing all of us kids got out of this situation was that we got a chance to see how easy it was for one to fall from having a great potential to succeed in life to literally throwing one's life away. Many of us vowed to not let that happen and most of us didn't.

Images:

One Life The Butler clan loses patriarch



Courtesy photo

Joe Butler, the master mechanic, the much beloved patriarch of Redlands' Butler family and a devoted churchgoer, died Oct. 8 at age 96.

Mechanic led masterful life

By Debbie Pfeiffer Trunnell
Staff Writer

REDLANDS — It was the late 1920s, and a woman called the Ford Dealership here to say her car had broken down in the local mountains.

The dealership sent out Joe Butler, the only black mechanic at the shop, to get the car running.

At first, the woman questioned Butler and was reluctant to have him work on the car, recalled his son, Clarence Butler of Redlands.

But after he went down the hill, got the right part and fixed the car, she called the auto shop and showered praise on the young mechanic.

"He encountered some attitudes in those early years, but he never got upset," said Butler's son. "He was always a very calm man who would see what was needed, then fix it."

The master mechanic, much beloved patriarch of the Butler family and devoted churchgoer died of respira-

See **BUTLER** | Page B2

BUTLER

Continued from Page B1

tory failure Oct. 8 in Redlands. He was 96.

Butler was born July 11, 1910, the ninth of 10 children, to Charles and Mary Butler in Garland, Ark.

The family farmed for a living, but Joe Butler didn't like farming and at age 18 moved to California to find work.

After looking briefly for work, he returned to Arkansas to help his mother, father and younger sister move out. In 1928 the family settled in Redlands.

Soon after, Butler started out sweeping floors, washing cars and helping out other mechanics at the Ford Dealership.

Over time he built up a tool collection and eventually the dealership owner gave him his own stall.

"When it came time to get him his own stall, the other mechanics couldn't say anything because he had been helping all of them out," said Butler's son.

He worked his way up to master mechanic and continued working for Ford dealers in Redlands for 52 years.

Loyal to his company, he owned a Model T Ford, a Ford Pinto and later a 1974 Ford Torino that he kept going until 1993.

"In all that time it still had the same engine," said his son.

When he had worked 42 years for Ford dealerships in Redlands, Inland Motor Ford honored him with a plaque for his service to the company.

During his years in the auto business he also met and married Hattie Bracewell in 1932. Together they raised nine children in a home on Sixth Street in Redlands.

He worked hard to support his family but never raised his voice to his children.

Daughter Lorraine Wilson of Redlands recalled that her family was the first in their neighborhood to get a TV.

"All the neighborhood kids would come over to watch, but he never minded when he got home from work," she said.

Butler was also active in Second Baptist Church of Redlands from when he first arrived in the city to his later years when he was the oldest member.

Over time he served as a trustee and deacon. The social hall is named for him and his wife.

Outside of work and church, he enjoyed fishing, one day taking a plunge into the Salton Sea when he lost his fishing pole.

He also took cruises with family members. He and his wife celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on a Caribbean cruise.

After he lost Hattie in 1994, he socialized with five generations of family members in Redlands and learned how to e-mail, play games and find information on his computer.

He was still always available to fix any car that needed fixing.

"If he knew you were having a car problem, he would be there before you woke up to get it running for the day," said daughter-in-law Cheryl Butler.

He is also survived by his other children Edward Butler, Linnell Williams, Louise Whitaker and Dorothy Harris, all of Redlands; 36 grandchildren, 43 great-grandchildren and eight great-great grandchildren.

A memorial service was held Oct. 13 at Oasis Christian Fellowship in Redlands. He was buried at Hillside Cemetery in Redlands.

Contact writer Debbie Pfeiffer Trunnell at (909) 386-3879 or via e-mail at deborah.pfeiffer@sbsun.com.



★ ★★★★★★★★ ★

BLUE FLEMINGO'S

★

Address 515 6th Street.....

City Redlands..... State California.....

Name Clarence Butler..... Ph. 2-4425.....