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Gary Saenz

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Bridges That Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:

Gary Saenz

Interviewer:

Jamie Zeffery

Interview Date:

October 7, 2014

Interview Location:

San Bernardino, CA

Length:

00:14:30

Interview Summary completed by:

M. Camacho Nuno, 2024

Description:

Jamie interviews Gary Saenz, a native of San Bernardino. Saenz explains his history with Jack Hill, of which the latter helped him join the city's library board. Being in real estate law, Saenz joined the library board with others of diverse career backgrounds. Saenz then goes on to talk about Hill as a man who was very involved and compassionate, especially since the library helps those who need it the most. Hill has a strong desire to help people and was involved in various organizations to do so. Saenz recollects his first time meeting Hill. As Hill had happened to be outside his son's house near Seanz's own, they crossed paths. From this first interaction, Hill suggested being on the library board and their connection had grown ever since. The interview ends with Seanz talking about accepting the library board position from the mayor.

Subject Topic:

- The Archiving Black History in the Inland Empire Project
- Library Board
- Jack Hill
- Diversity
- Leadership
- Neighborhood Housing Services
- Compassion/Being a People-Person
- Caring for the Community

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
San Bernardino City Hall	290 N D St, San Bernardino, CA 92401

Neighborhood Housing Services of the Inland Empire	14th and D St in San Bernardino
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Temporal Coverage:

2014

Key Events:

- Gary Saenz discusses his time on the library board alongside Jack Hill.
- Saenz is an attorney on the library board with others of different careers.
- Hill is described by the interviewee as a person with leadership, who was understanding, and compassionate.
- Saenz also served on the Neighborhood Housing Services of the Inland Empire with Hill.
- Saenz discusses housing and how the organization helps home buyers.
- The library is a place for the community to get resources, especially those who are low-income.
- Saenz meets Hills for the first time, starting right away with being on the library board.

Key Organizations:

- The Archiving Black History in the Inland Empire Project
- The Library Board
- The Neighborhood Housing Services of the Inland Empire.

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	00:01:03 - 00:03:33	Saenz talks about Hill and his role on the library board.
Digital Video	00:04:23 - 00:07:27	The Neighborhood Housing Services in San Bernardino and Saenz being on the Housing board.
Digital Video	00:10:03 - 00:12:09	Saenz describes Hill to someone who may not have known him.
Digital Video	00:12:10 - 00:14:20	How Jack Hill and Gary Saenz first met.

Related Materials

Additional oral history interviews are available from the Bridges That Carried Us Over Project at CSUSB, <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/bridges/>

Full interview transcript can be found below.

Interview Transcript

Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

JAMIE ZEFFERY: N-Z for the Archiving Black History in the Inland Empire project.

We're interviewing here at the --

__: (inaudible).

JAMIE ZEFFERY: Oh. Flow.

__: Okay. Okay.

JAMIE ZEFFERY: Okay.

GARY SAENZ: Want to let you know by the way. Feel comfortable. I have no plans till after lunch. So take your time and don't worry about my schedule or anything like that.

JAMIE ZEFFERY: Excellent. And this building is?

GARY SAENZ: City hall, San Bernardino City Hall.

JAMIE ZEFFERY: San Bernardino City Hall. Okay. So we're filming.

__: (inaudible).

JAMIE ZEFFERY: Okay. Today's date is October 7th, 2014. My name is Jamie Zeffery and I am interviewing Gary Saenz for the Archiving Black History in the Inland Empire project. His name is spelled G-A-R-Y S-A-E-N-Z. We're interviewing here at the city hall of San Bernardino. Thank you, Gary, for taking time to conduct this interview [00:01:00] with us.

GARY SAENZ: You're very welcome, it's a pleasure.

JAMIE ZEFFERY: Excellent. You were on the library board with Mr. Jack Hill a few years ago, well, quite a few years ago I suppose. What can you tell us about your time on the board with him?

GARY SAENZ: Well, I served on the board for approximately seven years.

When I arrived to serve at the board Mr. Hill was already a member, a longtime member in fact. He had served for probably nearly 20 years at the time I joined the board. So he'd been with the board for a long long time. He was a well established member. He was probably the senior member of the board at that time. So he was very much looked up to and very well respected in terms of being able to bring a lot of the historical information as to events and certain things that had happened with the library and what the library board had done over the course of years. So his service on the board at least [00:02:00] when I became a member of the board was very significant in terms of the knowledge and experience that he had. We as board members respected his knowledge. We respected his ability. And most of all what I think he brought to the board significantly was that he was sensitive and understood that the board was a conglomeration of a good variety of individuals who brought to the board a variety of talents. Myself for example, I'm an attorney. So I brought that experience and that past to the board. There were some educators on the board. There were some PhDs. There was also at that time our executive director of the library was very much a literary expert. [00:03:00] In fact she used to do book reviews for the *Sun* on a weekly or biweekly basis. So there was a variety of people that came to the board with a variety of talents. What I remember about Jack is that he respected that variety and it was his intention I believe as the board moved forward to incorporate those variety of talents into an ability to lead the library. And he respected that significance. And I think as a result of that we did a lot of good things for the library.

JAMIE ZEFFERY: Excellent. Would you say that the talent Jack brought was leadership?

GARY SAENZ: Absolutely. I believe Jack is a natural born leader because of his ability to communicate with people, his ability to get along with people. And

because of his sensitivity to other people's ideas, thoughts, and their cares. Jack is very much a people person. [00:04:00] And as such I think his ability to lead is very much enhanced by his ability to get along with people, to understand people, to communicate with people, and also to have a strong influence on people because of his genuineness and his concern that comes out in all that he does, particularly what he does in a leadership role. I also served with Jack, had the opportunity to serve with Jack, on the Neighborhood Housing Services of the Inland Empire. At that time Jack was the president of that board. And I was a member of that board. And of course Jack as leader was very significant in that role. And I attribute that much to his ability, as I've indicated, to be a people person and to get along with people and to bring together. That board in particular had a larger variety of talents because it was a larger -- the library board was a smaller board. This was a much larger board, so there was [00:05:00] a much broader variety of talent that was on that board, and Jack was able to bring those talents together and do a lot of good things as the leader of that board.

JAMIE ZEFFERY: I didn't know you were on the Neighborhood Housing board. That's great. We were actually looking for information about that. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

GARY SAENZ: Well, the Neighborhood Housing Services organization is about helping individuals in our community with their housing needs. We did a lot of work that was primarily financed through HUD grants and through HUD moneys.

Primarily to help new and first-time property homeowners or individual homeowners be able to acquire a property that would become their personal residence. It was felt by the group that that was the way to enhance our housing stock in the city.

[00:06:00] Not only to help individuals, but to help the neighborhoods as well, because as we know, we have an overabundance of rental properties in San

Bernardino, and it was believed then and I believe the same now that homeownership is a much better way to develop and build a community sense. And with that awareness then that was one of our primary missions. So we were very much involved in that. At that time we had a very good staff that worked at Neighborhood Housing. We had a very good executive director. I don't recall his name at the moment. Then we had a very like I say varied board with people that brought broad talents. At that time it was Jack himself who invited me to serve on the board. I was a real estate broker. I've been primarily involved in real estate law throughout [00:07:00] my legal career. So I brought certain knowledge and talents to the board as did most of the other members. So we were a very good board. That organization still exists there on 14th and D I believe it is. And I believe they're still a significant service provider to the community. And Jack was a part of that for a long number of years. And at that time he was serving as president of that board.

JAMIE ZEFFERY: What would you say is the common link between Jack's involvement in Neighborhood Housing Services and the library board? He's very involved in his church. Why do you think he would be involved in all of these things? What's the thing that maybe is most important to him?

GARY SAENZ: I think probably the most important thing to Jack Hill as I know him, as I've indicated, that he's very much a people person. He has a great deal of compassion for [00:08:00] people in general. He has compassion for people in his community. He's very caring and loving and concerned. He's lived here for a long long time, so he has a deep felt regard for the history and the knowledge of San Bernardino. And he brings that in his involvement. He's not just a member who is there who has a physical presence. He very much brings that compassion and that passionate attitude about genuinely trying to help people. And in this community there's a number of people that need help. I believe Jack's involvement in the

library was primarily because libraries serve the people who need it most. That is people who can't buy their own books, who may not have a place at home where they can find a comfortable place to read a book or to do their homework or to study. People who need for example as time went on, people who need computers but don't have them at home. [00:09:00] Many of the children in our community, particularly in San Bernardino, are from lower-income families who obviously have very strong needs. And Jack understands the significance of those children being able to have available to them things like computers, things like books, areas where they can study, classes of various kinds. So he's sensitive to those needs. He's very caring about individuals. He has a very strong compassion. And I think that's what he brought to those organizations. And he brought them not just as a member but he brought them with a true sense of compassion and desire to help people. And because of that strong feeling and the genuineness of it that he brought with his involvement that he was able to have a very influential significance as a member of those organizations. [00:10:00]

JAMIE ZEFFERY: Great. You said that he's a very compassionate person. If you had to describe Jack to somebody who didn't know him, and I know you already used a lot of description, so if you don't have anything else that's fine, but just as a possible 'nother sound bite, if you had to describe him to someone who didn't know him, how would you describe him?

GARY SAENZ: Well, the word that comes to mind is that he is the ultimate gentleman. He's in every sense of the word. I've used the other words to describe him. But everything you can think of that a gentleman is. And those are both exterior, because Jack is a very handsome man, and he's very well dressed and well groomed, I always admire his appearance because he always goes out of his way to make a nice presence. He's well groomed as I say, [00:11:00] he's a very

snappy dresser. And of course he's a very handsome man. I've always admired his looks. I sometimes used to imagine jeez, Jack at 25 and 30 years old, he must have been a real lady-killer. I'm sure that was the case. But that's just on the exterior. He's very much a gentleman. But more significantly than that, on the interior he's extremely gentlemanly in every sense of the word. He's kind. He's compassionate. He treats people genuinely. He cares for people. He's sincere. When Jack looks at you and smiles you know that he means it. It's not a put-on. So for all those qualities that he has, he's the ultimate gentleman. You look up gentleman in the dictionary, there should be Jack Hill's picture next to it, because he is in every sense of the word that. He would be an ideal person for every young man in our [00:12:00] country to model themselves after. He's admirable in every sense of the word. I admire him. I love the man. I first met Jack when -- he has a son that lived on the block that I lived on. My first house I bought when I was a much younger man. On 25th Street here in San Bernardino. And Jack has a son that lived on that street. I was walking my dog and my young daughter at the time in a stroller and Jack was in his son's front yard. I don't recall if he was watering the lawn or something. But he was standing alone out in the front yard and as I was walking through the neighborhood there we greeted each other with a friendly good morning or whatever it was. And then we started up a chat and we ended up talking for a long period of time. And we ended up talking about our respective histories. And that we were both -- that I was a native here in San Bernardino, born here. And the long history. And [00:13:00] obviously there were some mutual people that we knew and mutual events and so on that I was from the west side, I was born and my family lived on Evans Street. Close to Roosevelt Elementary School. So I grew up on the west side. So we had a lot of things in common. And it was during that first chat in fact when Jack suggested, "You know, you'd be a

good candidate to join our library board.” Which I had not considered at that time or never even thought that I would be interested in doing that. I expressed an interest in becoming a member of the library board, having heard from Jack what he believed, that the library -- the significance of the library, what I might be able to bring to the board as a contribution. And it was not long after that that I got a call from -- Judith Valles was mayor at the time. [00:14:00] The library board members are appointed by the mayor. So I got a call from her and she asked me if I was interested in an appointment to the library board, which I accepted gracefully. So that was how I met Jack Hill. And I’ve been a friend of his ever since and I’m very proud to say that.

JAMIE ZEFFERY: Excellent, thank you. I think you covered everything.

GARY SAENZ: Okay.

JAMIE ZEFFERY: That’s great. Perfect.

End of Interview:

[00:14:30]