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Joseph Edward Tolliver III

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Bridges That Carried Us Over Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee:

Joseph Edward Tolliver III

Interviewer:

Unknown

Interview Date:

February 24, 2023

Interview Location:

San Bernardino, CA

Length:

00:07:15

Interview Summary completed by:

M. Camacho Nuno, 2024

Description:

In this interview, Joseph Edward Tolliver III is the guest. He talks about going to San Gorgonio High School from 1974 to 1976. There, he saw a lot of good bands perform at the high school such as KISS. Tolliver also participated in track and field and remembered that some students in basketball went to the NBA. Despite having a parent in the military and hanging out with GIs, he decided to go to school and towards a career instead. The interview ends with a discussion about how high school impacted Tolliver, more about the military, and fraternities and sororities.

Subject Topic:

- High School
- Living on Norton Air Force Base
- Music/KISS
- Basketball
- Track and Field
- BSU
- Dances
- Military
- College
- Career

Spatial Coverage:

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
California State University, San Bernardino	5500 University Pkwy, San Bernardino, CA 92407
San Gorgonio High School	2299 Pacific St, San Bernardino, CA

	92404
Norton Air Force Base	San Bernardino, CA (Defunct Location)

Temporal Coverage:

1974 - 2023

Key Events:

- Tolliver graduated from San Geronio High School in 1976.
- KISS and other good bands that came to the high school.
- Good sports teams such as some basketball players who went to the NBA.
- Memories of the BSU as a student who was seeing kids like him become passionate about these kinds of causes.
- Going to hang out with the GIs in the military base.
- Deciding not to go into the military and, instead, going to school and into a career.
- Joining the Black fraternity in college, Alpha Phi Alpha.

Key Organizations:

- Norton Air Force Base
- BSU
- The Teen Club
- Alpha Phi Alpha
- AKAs

Interview Index:

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	00:00:57 - 00:01:22	Tolliver recalls that it might have been that, among many good bands, KISS performed at the school.
Digital Video	00:03:02 - 00:04:58	Tolliver recollects about going to the military base and hanging out with the GIs.
Digital Video	00:05:00 - 00:06:44	The one thing in high school that helped Tolliver prepare him for the career he went into.

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]

Q: What I'm going to ask you to do is give me your first name, your last name, tell me what high school you went to, and the years you went there.

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: Okay. Now, you don't need any formal name? I can use my shortened name, right? I don't have to go all this -- Joseph Edward Tolliver III, all that stuff, no?

Q: Oh, well, now you've said it... (laughter)

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: Okay. Oh, am I on now?

Q: Uh-huh.

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: Oh, okay. All right, let's see. I grew up --

Q: You went to school from what time to what time?

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: So I was at San Geronio High School from, gosh, 1974 to 1976, so I graduated the Bicentennial year, so --

Q: The year that we became an all-American city.

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: Oh, okay, I didn't know that. So I was on Norton Air Force Base, as I said. Took the blue bus to school, so we were considered outsiders a little bit from the general crowd. So -- but it was nice growing up there as a kid. And San G was -- [00:01:00] it was a pretty good school as schools go. Didn't have too much drama, as I recall, and we had some pretty good bands there that came through.

Q: Like who?

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: Well, I think we might have had Kiss come through when they were nobody; early, early days. I don't know if people remember that, and a few others that I probably can't remember, but it was really a good crowd of people.

I remember we had a great basketball team. We had -- I know we had at least one or two that went to the NBA. Steve Johnson, as an example, is one that I remember that had graduated around then, but it was a good school. A lot of good track and field. I ran track, so we had some good times on the bus taking it to -- over to Cajon and Pacific, San Berdoo, all those places.

Q: Who won? (laughs)

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: We had a pretty good track team with some good -- so it was -- track is one of those things where it's hard to dominate, but we did very well. I'll say we did very well. Mt. SAC Relays -- [00:02:00] we did well there. Think I still have a medal from back in those days from the relays, so it was good.

Q: Okay. BSU -- do you remember who the advisor was or trips that you might've taken, any (inaudible)?

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: Sad to say when it comes to the BSU, I don't remember a whole lot about, other than attending the BSU, participating in the BSU. I kind of remember the president might've been a guy named Bill Pope, so I do remember some things, but again, remember we're talking 45 years ago. We -- I remember some teachers, but when it comes to the BSU -- yeah, so I would have to say that I probably was BSU by the color of my skin. Everybody was getting into it, but as far as heavy participation, I probably didn't do a whole lot because if so, I don't remember it.

Q: Well, let me ask you just your most --

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: BSU dances -- I remember going to BSU dances and things [00:03:00] like that, and maybe that kind of participation, but...

Q: From high school, do you have any one particular memory that really -- besides Kiss coming? (laughs) Or even in San Bernardino, any memory that you --

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: Well, I tell you, San Bernardino -- again, I grew up in base housing, so it was a little different world for us. We had the youth club -- teen club, if you will -- where we could go, and we had bands that would come and perform. We shot pool, we had burgers and fries, people taught -- were teaching others how to play the piano, so it was a really good -- nice place to go for teens to hang out. But the other thing we did was we used to hang out with the GIs on the base.

Q: Really?

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: We would sneak under the tunnels and get on the base, and we'd go -- and then we also had a blue bus that took us during the day, but we --

Q: What's a blue bus?

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: That was the base bus. Yeah, it was just a navy blue Air -- because it was -- [00:04:00] Air Force blue bus, and everybody knew us as the blue bus kids because we'd be -- would be bussed into San G from the base housing.

Q: On the blue bus, okay.

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: Yep, on the blue bus, so -- but the cool part about growing up as a kid there was the GIs. Those were the guys that were, as you know, in the military already but they're young people, most of them; 18, 19, 20, early twenties. We used to go and play basketball with them. I remember playing foosball, ping pong, pool --

Q: Did you go to the military, or did you (inaudible)?

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: No, I did not. My dad was military, but I saw the regimentation that he -- especially Black men got at that time, and I decided that wasn't going to be for me. I didn't want to be waking up at three a.m. in the morning

and -- sirens going off, and I had to show up and shine my shoes a certain way. And somebody taught me how to do it, so I decided to go a little bit more in a traditional American way. I went to school for engineering and got into that, and never looked back to military, so...

Q: Is [00:05:00] there one thing in high school that you feel helped prepare you for the career that you went into or your life -- the life that you're...?

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: Well, it's interesting. You go into a career, but then we change so often, so even though -- yeah, electronic classes were available at San G, and I took those. And you took the ASVAB test or whatever, and they tell you, "This is where you should probably be," so I followed suit. So did they have an impact? Absolutely. With the programs they had, it kind of said, "Hey, this is something you might want to pursue." But then as we get out there -- you could start off as a lawyer, end up as, I don't know, the wife of a president or -- (laughter) like Michelle, or do a lot of things. One of the things I did do, though -- I did -- I don't know if it was because -- coming from the base housing, it was a lot more diverse even though we had Black peoples a lot less. But then going to San G, being in that population where you had a [00:06:00] broader spectrum of Black people and my interaction with them and everything, when I got into college, I decided to migrate towards a Black fraternity. I pledged Alpha Phi Alpha as a result of that contact because growing up at base housing, we didn't see that many Blacks. I was usually the only Black in the classroom. Might see one other Black somewhere, so it was different. So going to San G had an impact in that way.

Q: That's beautiful.

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: Yep, and a lot of good friends there, had a lot of good memories. Sad to say, though, 45 years now to see -- when I think about it, so

many of the people that I hung out with when I was younger have passed from the base housing, so... But did it have an impact? Absolutely.

Q: Yes, that was beautiful. We got to the HBCUs. That's beautiful -- not HBCU, but the fraternity.

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: Yeah, the fraternity, yep. So matter of fact, my daughter -- she just graduated, and she's heading to UCLA. And I talked to her about maybe looking at [00:07:00] AKAs because I hung out with the AKAs when I was in college, so...

Q: Like our vice-president who's an AKA. (laughs)

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: That's right, Kamala Harris. That's right. I saw her picture over there too somewhere on one of those news magazines, so -- yep, so...

Q: Thank you, and that's it.

JOSEPH TOLLIVER: All right, thank --

End of Interview:

[00:07:15]