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### Brian Townsend (November 10, 2016)

Wilmer Amina Carter Foundation

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# Bridges that Carried Us Over Project

## Interview Summary

**Interviewee:**

Brian Townsend

**Interviewer:**

Lea Michelle Cash

**Interview Date:**

November 10, 2016

**Interview Location:**

Rialto, California

**Length:**

00:22:22

**Interview Summary completed by:**

Rossandra Martinez, 2023.

Caroline Blanchard, 2024.

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**Description:**

Brian Townsend discusses his experiences growing up on the Westside of San Bernadino where he attended a Freedom School and was a part of some of the first desegregated classes. Education continued to be of importance throughout his life. It was a value that remained through highschool while taking advanced placement exams, and while pursuing a business degree at USC. He describes the importance of family and the legacy his father, Art Townsend, has left for his family and the community through the foundation of the Precinct Reporter. Brian Townsend remembers his early work as a kid working to lay out the newspaper by hand and he has been able to see the newspaper business change over time. Brian Townsend discusses San Bernardino's struggles with bankruptcy and the many leaders past and present who fought to make the Westside and the city itself stronger.

**Subject Topic:**

- Inland Empire (Calif.)
- San Bernardino (Calif.)
- Westside
- Education
- Segregation
- Businesses
- Entrepreneurship
- Art Townsend
- Frances Grice
- Valerie Pope Ludlum

**Spatial Coverage:**

Name of Site (if relevant)	General Location/Address
Childhood home	Westside San Bernardino, CA; corner of Muscott and Home, now Medical Center Drive
Eisenhower High School	Rialto, CA
Muscott Elementary (currently Dr. Howard Inghram Elementary)	1695 W 19th St, San Bernardino, CA
Barton Elementary	2214 Pumalo St, San Bernardino, CA

**Temporal Coverage:**

1960s- 2016

**Key Events:**

- School Boycotts in 1966
- San Bernardino Bankruptcy

**Key Organizations:**

- Freedom Schools
- Precinct Reporter
- Boys and Girls Club
- University of Southern California

**Interview Index:**

Media Format	Time (hh:mm:ss)	Topic Discussed
Digital Video	00:01:14 – 00:04:00	Early childhood and education; attending a Freedom School
Digital Video	00:04:00 – 00:06:22	High school experience at Eisenhower
Digital Video	00:06:22 – 00:10:29	First experiences with the Precinct Reporter; changes within the newspaper industry
Digital Video	00:10:29 – 00:12:30	The legacy of his father, Art Townsend and challenges faced
Digital Video	00:12:30 – 00:14:19	Brian Townsend's legacy goals
Digital Video	00:14:19 – 00:15:40	The beauty of San Bernadino along with the struggles it has faced during bankruptcy

Digital Video	00:14:19 – 00:15:59	Challenges and joys of being a leader in San Bernardino County
Digital Video	00:15:59 – 00:17:01	Princess Grace as a mentor
Digital Video	00:17:01 – 00:19:50	Experiences at USC
Digital Video	00:19:50 – 00:22:22	Future expectations and goals; message to the next generation

**Related Materials:**

Additional oral history interviews are available from the Wilmer Amina Carter Foundation's "Bridges that Carries Us Over Project" on CSUSB ScholarWorks, <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/bridges/>.

**Full interview transcript can be found below.**

## Interview Transcript

### Start of Interview:

[00:00:00]

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:00:26] Today is November 10th, 2016. My name is Lea Michelle Cash. I'm interviewing Brian Townsend for the archiving project, the archiving history of the Inland Empire project, and his name is spelled

**Brian Townsend** [00:00:44] B R I A N and last name Townsend T O W N S E N D.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:00:50] Thank you, Brian. We are interviewing at the home of Wilma Amina Carter in the city of Rialto, California. Thank you, Brian, for taking the time out of your busy schedule to have this interview today with us, so we would like to find out a little bit about your early history. Were you born in the city of San Bernardino?

**Brian Townsend** [00:01:14] I was born in San Bernardino, at San Bernardino's Hospital.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:01:18] OK.

**Brian Townsend** [00:01:19] So I'm a native,

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:01:20] So you are actually a native of San Bernardino. And tell us a little bit about the early life that you had the beginning of it and the elementary schools that you went to and who were some of the people, even when you were a young boy, that you looked up to your role models in your life at a young age?

**Brian Townsend** [00:01:40] Okay. I grew up on the west side of San Bernardino, at the corner of what was then Muscoy and Home Avenue. It's now called Medical Center Drive, right across the street from a junior high school. So a lot of times we saw older kids walking through the neighborhood. Sometimes we saw fights after school, [inaudible] it was a neighborhood, and very early on I was uh. My father was my role model from the very beginning. I grew up in the 60s, so I always saw a lot of activity around me. I mean, even as a young kid, my father was going to churches on the weekends and and speaking to various groups about staying active and getting active and, you know, trying to change things as other people were during the 60s. So from a very early age I was, I was surrounded by adults, more so than even kids. I was I was part of the the effort when they were integrating the schools, I was in the first class that was integrated. I went to a freedom school while we were.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:02:44] And what were the names of those schools?

**Brian Townsend** [00:02:46] It was called, it was just called a Freedom School.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:02:48] Freedom Schools. Oh.

**Brian Townsend** [00:02:48] I remember where it was I just remember a room for kids and they were keeping us out of the regular schools until they got their case taken care of. And that was led by Frances Grace, Bonnie Johnson and Valerie Pope Ludlum.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:03:03] Mm hmm. So you were in that first class of.

**Brian Townsend** [00:03:06] of San Bernardino? Yes.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:03:08] Of San Bernardino for the integration?

**Brian Townsend** [00:03:10] Yeah. My first school I went to, Muscott Elementary School, which is now Inghram, and I was there for kindergarten first grade, and then I was bussed after that and second grade forward, I was bussed to this side of town and I went to Barton Elementary School. And so I was in the first class. I think there are only three or four of us that were bussed that first year. And my initial reaction was, you know, I had seen obviously a multicultural, you know, we go downtown, you'd see all kinds of people. But when I went to Muscoy in kindergarten and first grade, it was entirely black and Hispanic. And when I went to Barton elementary school, there were three black kids and all white kids were there. And it was just such a culture shock to see all of that around me that wasn't like me. And so it was different.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:04:00] It was different. So we're moving on to high school. Where did you go to high school?

**Brian Townsend** [00:04:06] And by the time I got to high school, I had, we had moved to Rialto. I actually went to [unclear] middle school in San Bernardino. Then I went to Frisbie in ninth grade and then went to Eisenhower for the rest of the time.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:04:18] You're a Frisbie alumni?

**Brian Townsend** [00:04:19] I was only there for a semester.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:04:21] Oh, okay.

**Brian Townsend** [00:04:23] So and by then, and by the time I moved to Rialto a lot of people, there was a big migration from the westside of San Bernadino to the bench, the Rialto Bench area. And so a lot of my friends from San Bernadino had already moved to. It was still San Bernardino, but they were going to Rialto schools. So I had some friends in Rialto when I moved there to Eisenhower.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:04:45] So you're in an Eisenhower alumni?

**Brian Townsend** [00:04:48] Yes.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:04:49] That's amazing. Tell us about your experience there. At Eisenhower,.

**Brian Townsend** [00:04:54] Eisenhower, you know.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:04:55] Why was it very, was it special to you? Or do you think about it sometimes or, you know, get together with the.

**Brian Townsend** [00:05:03] No.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:05:04] The Class? The Alumni?

**Brian Townsend** [00:05:04] Not at all. I know I am, I am in touch with only three people that I went high school with, primarily again because I was surrounded by adults at such

an early age that I was really working for my father a lot. When I was six years old, seven years old, I was already delivering papers for them. And so and then I got in the middle school. He would pick me up from school and I'd go straight to the office to work for him. So most of my activity was not school related, except for the actual school work. So in high school, I did get some outside jobs from the family business or fast food. And I went I had very good experiences with my teachers. I took a lot of classes that prepare me to go to college and and they made sure that I did well and I took, you know, advanced placement courses and passed the tests. And so I had a good experience in high school, but I wasn't active in intramural sports, but after school I was working. So when I left the area to go to college, I really lost touch with a lot of people and haven't really. Even sometimes I see people on the streets where I recognize their face, but I can remember, you remember the names. I'm sorry to say I'm not really very active, even even when I'm back in the area, and have been back in the area for years. I'm not really in touch with local high school friends.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:06:22] OK, so now we know that you are the publisher of the Precinct Reporter group. So and as you just explained to us, you have been involved in the Precinct Reporter, which was founded by your father, Art Townsend, for your entire life.

**Brian Townsend** [00:06:43] Basically, yes.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:06:44] So from that period until now, can you pinpoint any of the changes that you've seen over the years in the newspaper business?

**Brian Townsend** [00:06:56] I was completely different from where we started. When I started working for the paper, we were classic. You know, we would roll the papers and throw them out of a truck and deliver them door to door. We'd actually walked neighborhoods as we would hand out the papers. My first job in the office was writing headlines for the various stories, and it was it was much more mechanical when I was when I was young. We literally had a headline machine where you would type up the headlines. You would, It would go out on film, you know? And I had to go inside and develop the film and then bring it back out and wax it. And then we place it on the storyboards. Now, everything's done by computers, it's completely different. There's no hand layout at all. There's no manual layout at all. And so you would think to be a timesaver I haven't seen that, but there's a generic cost savings because we're not dealing with a lot of paper and a lot of wax and the machinery has got. All we need is a computer, a couple of computers each and we can design a newspaper. And then, of course, the business has changed because now that everybody's going online to read the news and we're really in a state of flux right now.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:08:08] And so now as a young, as he as a young man following in the footsteps of your father, what are some of the challenges that you saw him go through that have paved the way for you as the publisher of the newspaper?

**Brian Townsend** [00:08:26] Well, you know, he was the true entrepreneur. I mean, I'm a business person. We maintain the business. But he started the paper from scratch, and his livelihood was as a real estate broker. And so he didn't rely on the newspaper to support his family. And so not until actually near the end of his newspaper career did we actually start making money at the newspaper, so he always did other things to support the business, like just like other publishers never do. We're probably the only ones where I'm a full time publisher. And so by the time he captured some major accounts, that allowed us to do that full time. That's really changed the business. I didn't have to worry about

supporting my family outside and having a second job or a second career to make sure that I have, we take care of our kids. Maybe I should have, you know, just to heck, you know, I probably at the time, but I've always wanted to be a publisher, so.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:09:26] So how did your dad come up with the name Precinct Reporter? Is there a story behind that?

**Brian Townsend** [00:09:31] Well, the only story that I have is because we the family actually was kind of nervous about the name. You know, it's kind of it doesn't come off to lips very easily. It was not that easy to say. It's not a catchy phrase. And and I was very young. I was only five or six years old when we started the paper. And so my recollection is that, you know, the paper started literally in a voting precinct, and it was designed to get the word out about that voting process that things are going on and meetings are being held. Candidates that they need to go, people need to go see and meet. And so it's called a Precinct Reporter to for that voting precinct. And now that has gone way beyond the single voting precinct and we've maintained the name, but it's not as relevant as it was when it was named.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:10:18] So what is it that you want your legacy to be? And tell us a little bit about your dad's legacy?

**Brian Townsend** [00:10:29] Well, my dad's legacy is that he was he was just became a lot more. He was the first in so many ways and laid the groundwork for the next generation. You know, he was he wasn't beholden to anybody who didn't have a job with the city or the county here or any kind of public entities. So you could say what he wanted to say and do what he wanted to do. And and he worked with other like-minded men. He worked with J.D. Greenwood, who was a bail bondsman, and and Bob Parker, who was he owned a shoe store. And so these entrepreneurs and and the early or pastors and ministers they were they are very powerful force to, you know, bring change. And that's what I remember. And now that the we changed from that where a lot of the leadership is not independent. My view is that we're not moving as fast as we could be because people are trying to protect their jobs or protect their image. You know, so I feel I'd like to say more about that with this current generation is coming up. You know, I think that we have a lot of newer leadership that's coming on board. You know, they're not millennials necessarily, but they're a new generation even beyond, earlier, younger than myself. And, you can't just do selfies and be a leader. You can't just go to all the events and then call yourself a leader that's not being an activist because you attend meetings. It's what you do with that. You know what to do with your contacts and how many lives you try to change, you know? So, I think we can be doing a lot more. I think there are people that are active, but I don't think that they are using the power that they have available to them.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:12:17] So what is it that you are saying that you want your legacy to be?

**Brian Townsend** [00:12:22] My my legacy is in a state of flux. You know my original

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:12:28] It changes,

**Brian Townsend** [00:12:29] right, well.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:12:29] You know?

**Brian Townsend** [00:12:30] My my original intent was to maintain a family legacy of the newspaper. So my father passed, I want to make sure that continue. We've expanded the paper to other regions, so we've done well in our industry. You know, we're respected nationwide. My father's in the Black Press Hall of Fame in Washington, D.C. You know, we're known nationally, even though we're, we're not a major market. You know, if we're talking about it as a business, San Bernadino is not a major market. We're not L.A. or New York or Chicago, but we go to those cities and they've all heard of our newspaper. So, I'm pleased with that. As far as any local legacy, I've been active in many groups. I've I've been officers in many groups. I've I've tried to scale back the last few years and I kind of regret that. Now I think I need to get back into the fray.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:13:26] So tell us about some of those groups because I know one of those groups is the Boys and Girls Club.

**Brian Townsend** [00:13:30] Well yeah, my father was one of the founders of the Boys and Girls Club, and I was on the board for many years and we try to maintain our support of the Boys and Girls Club. I think it's very important entity in the West Side. I think that the leadership is very vocal there now. As always, as a nonprofit it's always struggling to survive. But, I think it's I think it's very important, a very important entity in the West Side. I think other civil rights organizations, you know, there are a lot of organizations that I think are so important to the area and they just need to have workers, rather than people smiling in front of a camera.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:14:06] So what do you enjoy about being in the Inland Empire, about living in San Bernardino County or, or being among the leaders in this county?

**Brian Townsend** [00:14:19] Well, you know, San Bernardinio Valley is actually a beautiful area and people, you know, make fun of us being out in the suburbs. But, you know, we're surrounded by mountains and and on a clear day, it's, this is a beautiful valley. And, when I was growing up, we had a, San Bernadino was the was the head of the San Bernardino County and the rest of the county looked to San Bernardino for leadership. And now that's reversed. So I'm kind of, you know, I'm obviously concerned that San Bernardino's going through bankruptcy is, it's really going through a lot of flux right now. And so I know of a lot of people that are trying to save it and turn it around. So hopefully that will be the case. I think people are committed to that because we know what it has been for those of us who have been native to the area. I think that as a very group, you know, not only by party, by gender, by culture. This is a very multicultural area. So it can be an exciting area. I just think the city itself needs to blossom again because when you look at other areas of the Inland Empire, they are blossoming and why shouldn't we be doing the same? And we've had to overcome some barriers. And you know, it's like with the latest election where they changed the charter. We'll see if that will help at all, but we need to get through this bankruptcy and turn it back around.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:15:40] Yes, we do. So being fortunate to have a father in your life, and a mother, and your father being your role model. What are some of the other role models that you feel were in your life or that you looked up to?

**Brian Townsend** [00:15:59] Yeah. Well, you know, I read several and many of them are not here anymore, but you know, Princess Grace is obviously a mentor of mine.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:16:07] And why?

**Brian Townsend** [00:16:09] Well, again she was. She helped lead the effort to integrate schools so I've known her my entire life. She actually worked for my father, volunteered for my father, so she was very important to me. And then when I was in college, I actually came back to San Bernadino to work for the summer. And instead of working for my father, I worked for her operation second chance. And that was a very powerful experience. I mean, not only did I have access to her every day at 20 years old, she had me running one of her programs. And so I had 25 kids that I had to get jobs for at Cal State, and I had to work with the Cal State Administration to get the jobs available to them. And

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:16:51] So you're one of her babies that she speaks about those babies in an operation

**Brian Townsend** [00:16:57] because gave us a lot of responsibility, at young age to ascend into the world

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:17:00] She believed in you guys.

**Brian Townsend** [00:17:01] And and so from that there I met a lot of corporate people because my degree was was in business from USC. And so when I graduated from USC, a lot of the contacts I made through my first and second chance offered me the capable of getting a job after I graduated. So my experience with her is more than just the schools and you know, she. She's like family, I don't, I'm not as I'm not as helpful to her as I should be, but she's been very important in my life. Very much so. Bonnie Johnson was the same. I haven't spent time with her lately either, but she when she took over the bail bonds business, everybody looked to her for help supporting in the background. She wasn't always in front, but she was always, she was. Her mindset was bring get this done, we're going to take care of business. So we had a lot of strong women in this in this area, and I know they get credit and we need to start replacing them, you know? You know, we are we had her. And then Valerie Pope Ludlum became a city council woman. And whatever you think of her policies and efforts, her no. The main thing is that she was always trying to make the West Side better. And so you can't take that away from her. And she did a lot of development, housing development. So it was, I had a lot of people look up to when I was growing up.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:18:23] So we're going to back it up just a twinge. You mentioned USC graduating from USC, so tell us about that experience. You went to college

**Brian Townsend** [00:18:33] I went away to college and lived on campus and off campus, and I thought of it as a job. My job was to go get a degree. And so I even there, I maintain some contacts, but I wasn't there to socialize. I was there to my to keep my nose to the grindstone and get a business degree and bring that back into the family business. I thought USC was, now they have a powerful alumni network and they have a very proud tradition, so that has stuck with me. I, you know, I've I've been around a lot of strong experiences. And when you go to USC, Trojans think that they are the best at everything. My father, he was very good at doing whatever he wanted to do, and I've never had anybody feel insecure about what they're getting into. And so I've always felt pretty sure of myself.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:19:24] So what expectations do you have for yourself now? Are you looking forward to some goals you'd like to accomplish? Because any young person that's going to see this video? Ten years from now, 20 years from now, some of those

goals that you say you might like to accomplish and they're looking at this thing, yeah, he accomplished those goals.

**Brian Townsend** [00:19:50] Well, you know, I've done a lot of what I wanted to do already, so again my goals are changing my goals now are I have, you know, I've done some mentoring after being a mentee is kind of hard to imagine yourself as the mentor. But obviously I've been at that level for quite a while now and actually I step back from that and now I feel I need to get back into that. I'm not really happy with, a lot of people that could use some of my experience. I like to sit down with some of these young men and say, Hey, you're active, you want to be helpful but these are things that you could be doing to make yourself even more empowered and more helpful to the community. So I plan on doing more of that. I plan on watching my grandchild grow, and so I'm really more of, I'm really set, and I want to maintain the newspapers and see where our media is going. The media is really changing, so that's really got me working hard at the office, I thought I'd be able to step back by now and I can't. But you know, my daughters are grown and they have college degrees, and now they're starting to have their own family lives. So I'm just trying to really enjoy that and enjoy my wife, enjoy some travel, and see what I can do to just kind of. I don't necessarily want to get active and lead the charge or anything. I'd like to sit that with some of the people that are doing that and just kind of be a bug in their ear and say, you know, just give them some tidbits of thoughts that I have.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:21:23] OK. Mr. Brian Townsend, we want to thank you very much. Would there, is there anything that you would like to say to a young person or anyone in regards to watching this video? What would you like to say to them?

**Brian Townsend** [00:21:40] Well, one thing I'd like a young person especially to think about is that I was lucky, you know? I had a very powerful presence in my father, and not everybody can say that. And my mother was very powerful in my life. Not everybody can say that. So if you don't have that, find someone that can be that for you. You know, find, you don't necessarily want to find a father figure or a mother figure, but find some strong figures in your life that can provide guidance for you and lead you in a direction that is the most powerful way for you to go.

**Lea Michelle Cash** [00:22:13] Okay. Well, we thank you, Brian, very much for giving us this interview today.

**Brian Townsend** [00:22:18] All right, thank you.

**End of Interview:**  
[00:22:22]