

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Donald L. Harwell

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Harwell, Donald L., 1946-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Donald L. Harwell,
Dates:	March 15, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:44:12).
Abstract:	Sales executive Donald L. Harwell (1946 - 2021) was vice president of sales for PowerStream Technology. He was influential in the reemergence of the Genesis Group, a missionary organization affiliated with the Mormon church. He also directed the citizens review board for adult probation and parole in Utah. Harwell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 15, 2008, in Salt Lake City, Utah. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_052
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Vice President of Sales for PowerStream, Inc., Donald Lyle Harwell was born on January 19, 1946, in Los Angeles, California, to Andrew L. Harwell and Veronica Rodriguez. As a youth, Harwell attended 42nd Street Elementary School in Los Angeles. He went on to graduate from Susan Miller Dorsey High School where he was a member of the football and track teams. Harwell attended East L.A. Junior College before receiving a football scholarship to attend California State University in Los Angeles.

After completing a course in scuba diving, Harwell became a certified scuba diving instructor and earned a position with Pacific Diver Supply in Long Beach, California. He served in that capacity, instructing high school students in Orange County and Los Angeles County until 1971. Then, in 1974, Harwell founded California Concepts providing wooden aquarium stands to department stores in southern California. In 1978, Harwell was hired as a salesman for Rotron Fans and designed the cooler for the SR 71 Blackbird reconnaissance aircraft. Harwell later moved to Colorado to work for Howard Fans in 1980. While in Colorado, he was recruited as an independent sales representative and later worked for Component Well until 1995.

Harwell moved to Utah and served as a chaplains assistant at the Utah State Prison in 1986. In 1992, he served on the corrections advisory council. In 1996, Harwell was influential in the reemergence of the Genesis Group, a missionary group that works to provide spiritual strength to its members. He went on to become the organization's president in 2003. Harwell also served as the director for the Adult Probation and Parole Citizens Review Board helping to promote integrity and accountability in ex-cons.

Harwell was Vice President of Sales for PowerStream, Inc. and served on the Stake High Council of the Midvale Utah Union.

Harwell lived with his wife, Jerri, and their six children in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Harwell was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on March 15, 2008.

Harwell passed away on May 8, 2021.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Donald L. Harwell was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 15, 2008, in Salt Lake City, Utah, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Sales executive Donald L. Harwell (1946 - 2021) was vice president of sales for PowerStream Technology. He was influential in the reemergence of the Genesis Group, a missionary organization affiliated with the Mormon church. He also directed the citizens review board for adult probation and parole in Utah.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Harwell, Donald L., 1946-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Harwell, Donald L., 1946- --Interviews

Sales executives--Interviews

Prison chaplains--Interviews.

African American Mormons--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

African American clergy---Utah--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

HistoryMakers® Category:

ReligionMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Donald L. Harwell, March 15, 2008. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Donald L. Harwell, Section A2008_052_001_001, TRT: 0:29:09
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Donald L. Harwell was born on January 19, 1946 in Los Angeles, California to Veronica Rodriguez and Andrew L. Harwell. His maternal grandfather had Cuban ancestry, and owned a funeral home and grocery store chain in New Orleans, Louisiana, where Harwell's mother grew up. There, she and her family sometimes passed for white. During World War II, his mother moved to Los Angeles to work in a defense factory. Harwell's father was born in 1916 in Tennessee. At the start of the Great Depression, his relatives abandoned him in Louisville, Kentucky. Nevertheless, he graduated from high school, and then served as a cook in the U.S. Navy. His heavyweight boxing championship title earned the respect of his fellow servicemen. Harwell's parents met at the segregated United Service Organizations in Los Angeles. After leaving the U.S. Navy, his father worked as a foreman for Shapiro Produce Company, and drank alcohol to treat his leg pain. Harwell had an older half-brother, and an identical twin, Ronald Harwell.

Sales executives--Interviews.

Prison chaplains--Interviews.

African American Mormons--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

African American clergy--Utah--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald L. Harwell, Section A2008_052_001_002, TRT: 0:29:46
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Donald L. Harwell grew up in Los Angeles County, California, where his first home was on East 124th Street in Compton, a quiet neighborhood at the time. Harwell and his twin brother, Ronald Harwell, began their schooling in the local Catholic schools, and then completed their primary education at 42nd Street School in Los Angeles. While their mother bought them matching clothes, they eventually asserted their individuality. After a brief troublemaking phase, Harwell immersed himself in athletics at Los Angeles' Susan Miller Dorsey High School. He played running back on the football team, and ran track. He remembers the African American football players of the era, like Ollie Matson, Jim Brown and Bobby Mitchell, whose technique he emulated. Harwell also recalls the changing demographics of his school and community in the mid-1960s, as white flight became commonplace. Upon graduating in 1963, he attended East Los Angeles Junior College for two years. In 1966, Harwell was drafted into the U.S. Army.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald L. Harwell, Section A2008_052_001_003, TRT: 0:29:02
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Donald L. Harwell graduated from Susan Miller Dorsey High School in Los Angeles, California, and then matriculated at East Los Angeles Junior College in Monterey Park, California. There, he played football for two years, before being

drafted into the U.S. Army. After basic training, Harwell was stationed at Dolan Barracks in Schwabisch Hall, Germany, where he served from 1966 to 1968. During that time, he prevented his fellow troops from rioting when they learned of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. He returned to Los Angeles, where he majored in public administration, and served as the football team's running back at California State College, Los Angeles. After earning his scuba diving instructor's license, Harwell taught diving at majority white high schools throughout Southern California. He also gave private lessons to clients like Rudy May, the Anaheim Angels' pitcher. In 1987, Harwell had his first diving experience in the Caribbean, while honeymooning with his wife, Jerri Harwell.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald L. Harwell, Section A2008_052_001_004, TRT: 0:30:51
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Donald L. Harwell founded and operated an aquarium stand business in Southern California in the early 1970s. After four years, he transitioned to Rotron Manufacturing Company, Inc., where he sold cooling fans. In this capacity, he successfully negotiated a deal with Martin Marietta Corporation's Skunk Works, an aircraft manufacturer. When a competing fan company, Cummings and Associates, offered Harwell a higher salary, he moved to Denver, Colorado. Then, Harwell decided to relocate to Salt Lake City, Utah to found his own company, Component-Well Inc., which distributed products for clients like Lundahl Astro Circuits. In 1983, Harwell attended his first service at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS church), and soon felt called to join the church. He was baptized at the Ensign Stake in Salt Lake City, and was a high priest at the time of the interview. Harwell describes the doctrines of the LDS church; its finances; and the process of ordination to the priesthood.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald L. Harwell, Section A2008_052_001_005, TRT: 0:28:41
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Donald L. Harwell was baptized in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS church) in 1983; and, at the time of the interview, had attained the highest level of the priesthood. Harwell talks about the LDS church's community involvement, and its inclusion of African American men in the priesthood from 1978. After moving to Salt Lake City, Utah, Harwell founded Component-Well Inc. The firm represented PowerStream Technology, an electronics parts supply company founded by Daniele Reni. After Component-Well Inc. lost its primary client, Lundahl Astro Circuits, in 1996, Harwell accepted a full time position as a national sales manager at PowerStream Technology. In 2005, he was promoted to vice president of sales. Harwell describes his hopes for the African American community, as well as his opinion of the Iraq War and 'The Oprah Winfrey Show,' which he perceived to exclude African American Republicans like Condoleezza Rice and General Colin Powell.

Video Oral History Interview with Donald L. Harwell, Section A2008_052_001_006, TRT: 0:16:43
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Donald L. Harwell and his wife, Jerri Harwell, had two daughters and four sons, not all of whom chose to become members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS church). Harwell talks about his family's experiences of racial discrimination in the LDS church and their mostly white community in Salt Lake City, Utah. In addition to his priesthood in the LDS church, Harwell was active in the prisons near Salt Lake City. After serving for six years as an assistant chaplain, and for nine years on the prison advisory council, Harwell

was invited in 2001 to direct the newly formed adult probation and parole citizen review board. Harwell reflects upon his life, legacy and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.