

Oral Transcript

Interviewer: Michael Milligan

Oral History Candidate: Daniel Jaham, Class of 1964

June 4, 2011 in Palm Springs, CA, Bi-Annual Reunion

Okay, this is the interview with Daniel Jaham. So this is at Palm Springs at the Brown Military reunion, June 4, 2011.

I'm Daniel Jaham and I'm the class of '64 and me going to Brown has had a major impact on my life. I was born in Calexico, California, I was raised in Mexicali, Mexico and all of my life I went to Calexico public school and like a lot of my fellow cadets, my first year in high school, I almost flunked. I lost that discipline and my mother, being a widow, she had two kids, myself and my brother and she had a hard time handling it because I just wasn't that disciplined and she decided I needed it and I wasn't doing well my first year in high school; I was almost flunking.

What high school was that in Calexico, by the way?

Calexico Union High School. And she finally decided I needed academics with some discipline and we were familiar with Brown because I had spent summer school at Brown in San Diego, I think in my fifth grade summer school and then my mother made the decision. Again, she looked up Brown and she sent me to Brown. And I started in the year, I think it was '61, '62 as a sophomore and it was the hardest, I came from a so undisciplined environment, in public high school, I was starting to pay more attention to playing guitar, my girl friends...

Typical high school kid, right?

I was, and when I went to Brown that first year, it was the hardest thing. I think sometimes I felt when I was myself like crying, because I was made to sit on three inches of the chair, say 'yes sir,' 'no sir,' to kids my age. It was very hard, but there was a lot of discipline that I needed, especially in the academics and my first semester of Brown was the hardest, I think because there was study hall, but little by little, I started adjusting and the greatest incentive was when I saw a lot of the cadets excelling in academics were getting promoted and that was a great incentive for me. So I started applying myself and little by little I started picking up. I was learning good values: honor, duty, country, about being honest, you know, those kind of values and those are the values that I see myself now at the age of 65, those are the values that kicked in. I tend to be very traditional and I associate that with the values that I picked up at Brown. Brown was also very important because after Brown, I went to Lavern College, now Lavern University. And it had me the discipline. Yes, I had a little problem adjusting the first year, but it evolved again; it was about discipline.

The first part of the Claremont university is...

No, it's apart from that, not a part of that, no. It's an independent. Now it's university. And again, that discipline that I picked up at Brown helped me and I got through. Then after that, I couldn't avoid, Vietnam was there. I joined the military. I went through officer's schools at Fort Benny, Georgia, but somewhere in my 18th week, I decided that I was better suited for a desk job. And basically I had graduated from the very college in business economics and whatever discipline I picked up, it stayed with me all my life and for 41 years-I just retired in 2010 when I turned 65-but for 41 years, I've been an accountant. I've held different positions as accountant, but everything flowed from that point where I

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went to Brown and I developed that discipline. I developed values because I wasn't getting them, my mother being a single mom and being the bread-winner couldn't pay attention 100% of the time and a lot of the time we were by ourselves and I think that forced me into taking values and discipline. I think it's been very important in my life.

What interesting, I keep talking to people; I keep finding ties. Do you know who the Hem's are. Hem's Mortuary in El Ci...

Yeah, I know, I think they were bought out by the Alice family.

No, they still own it. I'm good friends with, I've been good friends with the son for over 20-some odd years. In fact, they've worked on your high school. In fact, I worked for an architectural firm that did the schools down in Calexico. So it's interesting; it must have been a big move for you here on the border to all of a sudden in Glendora.

The other thing that helped, because I was living in Mexicali, which is Mexico, in coming here, the one thing that also helped me in coming to Brown was getting away from speaking half-English, half-Spanish.

Oh, the Spanglish.

Spanglish and I was picking it up because we had a lot of migrant kids in Calexico and when I went to Brown it forced me, because I was surrounded by English-speaking cadets. If anything, that another big, major impact that it had on me.

So it kind of helped assimilate you into the wide culture outside.

Being an American citizen, it got me into the culture where I was a citizen. My English was very broken at that time, and that's really interesting, because as I progress in a little bit of leadership, it helped me. I had to talk to other cadets, lower rank and that helped me a lot. And I had a lot of problems too in my communication because I was coming from a bi-cultural situation and this forced me to really pick up the English language. Nothing does it like really practicing 24-7.

That's my complaint with 12 semesters of Spanish. I can't speak it. I can read it, I can write it, but to go ahead and communicate it, you have to be put into the culture to learn the language.

Yes, you have to.

How was the racial mix of Glendora?

We were really a minority group.

Did it matter?

It didn't matter to me.

Did it matter to the other cadets?

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I can't speak for the others, but it didn't really matter. I just felt the same.

The reason why I ask you is the answer I'm getting is that, no it didn't matter. You were all cadets and that's how they saw each other.

The staff there and the military, ROTC sergeants treated you as cadets. There wasn't a differentiation.

Now the ROTC sergeants were actual army.

Yeah, regular army and we were just the military unit.

So did you become an expert with the M1 also?

That's the rifle that we'd practice on. We didn't shoot the M1, but boy, they were heavy, especially when they gave up demerits and we had to go in the quadrangle and duck-walk with the M1 stretched...

Oh, you had to duck-walk. That's different than San Diego.

And we did, we got demerits and yeah, it was pretty heavy, darn heavy, as opposed to M16. The M14 wasn't even that...

Did you become an expert of the weight of the M1?

I had no choice. No, but those are some of the benefits and I think the most important benefit that I have at my age are the kind of values that I have. It's pretty good. You know, I think I'm pretty much the same as everybody went for, good solid values and I see that as I talk to other fellow cadets. I see the same thing.

How do you think the leadership that they trained you, how did that prepare you?

If you wanted to get rank or leadership, you had to excel academically and want to want it and once you really got that leadership, it put you in the position...

You had to fulfill it, right?

I had to fulfill it, and it was a good learning training because that helped people in their later life; it helped me as an accountant to make presentations in front of people. I was not very extroverted; I was more introverted and it brought me out. It really did. The first time they put me, I remember when I got to be a corporal and they put me in front of platoon and it was scary, being an introvert, but it evolved, like everything, more practice and the ROTC sergeant, I remember Sergeant Gibfords was always behind me to make me better, to make the best I could and he was always saying, you mother's paying a lot of money, you try better. And he was a motivator. And you remember those people that push you to be the best you can be and I really feel bad for kids that never had an opportunity like that.

Don't crush me, I know I feel bad. I feel bad that I missed out on what my father had.

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It's a different. Now you come here, you feel a part of something. If you look at today's political terms, we were a minority, but I really didn't feel that way.

I gather that there wasn't that problem and this was the 30s, the 40s, the 50s and the 60s.

Kids, even in Mexicali, because we're mixed with Asians too.

So the best Chinese restaurants are down at Mexicali and Calexico.

So even down there, but I mean we were used to being different and when I went there, we all wore the same uniform, we saluted the same flag.

What rank did you acquire?

I was second-lieutenant, but the most important thing to me was that, my Senior year, I was under the scholarship ribbon, academically, and this is a person that was flunking out my first year of high school.

What's a scholarship ribbon? It's the first time I've heard that.

I had a scholarship ribbon if you got B's or greater than B. I had a science ribbon. You had to be a B or an A. I had history-a subject that I didn't do well in my first year. Here, because of that motivation, I did well. I mean, it really helped; it really did in my language and everything. I look back and I thank my mother for sending me there. Now, when she sent me there, I was infuriated. I hated it. I said, I didn't think she wanted me.

I can understand that, living up in L.A. and going to L.A. for me would be a death sentence.

I was having fun with my homies, playing guitar.

She didn't want you to end up being one of those, uh...

The ventures or...?

No, one of those guys in that movie that Antonia Banderas plays. The guys that play and sing in the corner of Mexico.

Oh, Mariachi.

Mariachi. She didn't want you to become a mariachi.

Well back in my time, in those years, it was slow rock, you know, all the teen songs and that's what I...and that's when I bought myself a Fender guitar and an amplifier.

Don't you wish you had that now? So did you meet your wife at the...?

No, I met my wife in Mexicali, at a wedding.

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No kidding.

Yes, she was there. Yeah, we've been married 38 years.

Congratulations. I'm just finishing my 26th.

There 38 years; hopefully I'll be with her forever.

Well I hope so too.

Even beyond that.

Daniel, I know what you mean. I truly know what you mean. And you're happy too, right? (to wife)

Don't ask her, she might not have the same...

Do you live in Mexicali now?

No, Comer City, I live in Comer City, but we have a home in El Centro and that's where we're going to retire. I'm already retired.

Are you going to go back down to El Centro? Where?

We live just a couple of blocks away from the new high school.

Oh yeah, Southwest!

Southwest.

Yes, my friend Kent designed Southwest.

Southwest, so it's just maybe a year or so for my wife to retire.

So it's pretty, not doing so well down there. The economy's doing really bad.

I know, but when we go down there, we're going to be retired. I mean, we'd never go looking for a job down there, that's for sure.

I had to work there a year; that was enough. I did a lot of stuff for camp down there.

Well, we're going to travel, here within this country. I want to travel to some of the historic places that I studied in history and also show my wife, because she became a naturalized citizen and I think it'd be great if she saw...

You're still dual citizenship, right? (to wife?)

No, just American citizen.

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Really?

(Wife) No, because I never...But I chose that if I want the passport, they'll let me. I'm choosing...

My cousin became a Mexican national, so he had dual citizenship.

(Wife) Yeah, it's not a big deal. I think...I get the passport

It's been a very tough time there, economically; I wouldn't go down there.

(Wife) But I mean the economy here, what is the benefit? I don't see it.

...He was Pilipino. He was in the...You know, there was no...

Is Walter here?

No, he's not here. I didn't see him here, but he's been, he went to the Pacedina. He lives in Orange County.

Let me ask you, if there's one thing you can say about Brown that you feel you really have a memory for, what would that be?

I think the friendships.

Friendships?

Friendships.

The sweet accord, the...

The friendship was, you make a lot of friends and it's a bond that stays with you.

One cadet said that it's like a fraternity in college. That's what he relates it to. It's a fraternity. It doesn't matter when you're in or if you're at Glendora or San Diego, you're in a fraternity.

Yeah, it really is, because you have your traditions and it's heavily rooted in traditions. First year, we'd do certain things. That's where the older kids end up telling, you know, kind of training the new kids.

Passing on the legacy.

And it didn't develop until...and so, that's it.

Daniel, that's great, don't worry about it. It's...