Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and Russell Bohlke, dated June 27, 2007. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, Mail Code 6000, University of California, Berkeley, 94720-6000, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Russell Bohlke, 1975
Photo courtesy Russell Bohlke
Russ Bohike, injured football player at U.C., was elected to the ASUC executive committee.

Runoff Elections
Monday at U.C.

BERKELEY, May 17.—Four representatives-at-large have been named to the ASUC Executive Committee in University of California campus elections while all other major student body offices will be settled in runoff balloting Monday.

Receiving a majority vote in Friday's voting were Peter Canniffe, Fresno; Russ Bohike, Carmel; Carla Merner, Lafayette, and Ralph Vetterlein, San Francisco.

Bohike, U.C. grid star in 1948 who suffered a broken neck in scrimmage, returned to the Berkeley campus last fall after a lengthy convalescence.

Daily Californian
ca 1951
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Thanks are due to other donors to this project over the years: Dr. Henry Bruyn, June A. Cheit, Claire Louise Englander, Judith Stronach, the Prytanean Society, and the Sol Waxman and Tina P. Waxman Family Foundation. The Bancroft Library’s disability history program was launched with field-initiated research grants in 1996 and 2000 from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research [NIDRR], Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education. Any of the views expressed in the oral history interviews or accompanying materials are not endorsed by the sponsoring agencies.
Personal background prior to having a disability: moves from Nebraska to California; joins the service in 1944; attends Salinas Junior College—Transfers to University of California, Berkeley in 1948: member of football team who is asked to test a new plastic helmet in practice; broken vertebrae in neck result in quadriplegia—UC Berkeley takes no responsibility for injury—Discussion of life in Cowell Hospital for nine months—Transfers to VA hospital in Van Nuys, CA, for rehabilitation and three years of residence—attends University of California, Los Angeles as a day student—Description of life on campus for a student with a disability—Returns to UC Berkeley and changes major from education to social welfare, UC Berkeley discourages career in social welfare—Elected student representative-at-large and asks ASUC for $2500 to attend foreign trade school—University regents don’t respond to issues around his injury—Disabled access issues while at UC Berkeley—Disabled people had no rights in the 1950s—Norm Mineta’s recollections—Brutus Hamilton shows concern for accident—Everyone involved with accident are closed-lipped—First awareness of discrimination toward him as a person with a disability—Disability rights recognized in the 1970s over Golden Gate bus service—Indoor Sports Club activities and its pending demise—Not much faith in Marin County Center for Independent Living.

Lawsuit against Marin, San Francisco and Sonoma counties over voting machines, American’s with Disabilities Act compliance not enforced—Thoughts on Ed Roberts—Returns to UC Berkeley for football games, access finally improved, sits with Hale Zukas at football games—In VA hospital has chance for background part in *The Men*—Attends foreign trade school and works for Crown Zellerbach Paper Corporation for twenty-seven years—Fails driver’s test to get license renewed, legal battle for year and a half, still unresolved.
Historical Framework

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed a revolutionary shift in the worldview and legal status of people with disabilities. In major cities across the United States, people with disabilities began in the 1960s and 1970s to assert their rights to autonomy and self-determination and to reject the prejudices and practices that kept them stigmatized, isolated, and often confined to institutions or inaccessible homes under the care of family members.

Within a few years of each other, groups of people—usually young, often with a university connection, and frequently wheelchair users with significant physical disabilities—formed organizations in Berkeley, New York, Boston, Denver, St. Louis, Houston and elsewhere to foster independent living in the community and to advocate for laws and policies to remove barriers to autonomy. Characterizing these groups, which formed relatively independently of each other, was the evolution of a new core set of beliefs that gave a distinctive character to this emerging disability rights and independent living movement. Their members came to insist on self-determination and control over their organizations. They resolved to make changes in their own lives and in society. And as they engaged in political actions, they began to recognize the shared experience of discrimination and oppression among groups with diverse disabilities.

Very quickly, informal regional and national networks of activists developed, often including people with a range of disabilities, who shared information about the nuts and bolts of funding, peer counseling, and service delivery. They joined together to advocate for essential personal assistance services and for the removal of architectural and transportation barriers. These networks were formalized in national organizations, such as the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (founded in 1975), and national gatherings, such as the 1977 White House Conference on Handicapped Individuals, which served in turn as catalysts for national and grassroots organizing on a cross-disability basis.

From the beginning, the movement was a part of the activist and countercultural climate of the times, evolving within the context of civil rights demonstrations, antiwar protests, and the emerging women’s and gay rights movements. Early leaders such as Judith Heumann, Fred Fay, Ed Roberts, Lex Frieden, and a host of others conceptualized their issues as a political movement, a struggle for the civil rights of people with disabilities. A wide-ranging group of activists absorbed this civil rights consciousness and cross-disability awareness during a series of defining political actions, such as the nationwide sit-ins and demonstrations in 1977, organized to demand the issuance of regulations for section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and during the subsequent peer trainings on the rights of people with disabilities, which were carried out nationwide.
As the political movement grew, the new cadre of activists made connections with the emerging parents’ movement and its efforts to free people with developmental disabilities from the massive and dehumanizing state institutions of the time. A series of landmark federal lawsuits, most notably *PARC v. Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills v. Board of Education* (1972), established for the first time a right to a public school education for children with disabilities. Alliances and coalitions also developed with a number of traditional, disability-specific organizations, which were themselves undergoing changes during this period.

New organizations devoted to pursuing legal and legislative reforms, such as the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (1979), ADAPT, a grassroots direct-action organization (1983), and a growing number of other local, state, and national disability organizations and alliances profoundly influenced national policy in education, transportation, employment, and social services. Their best known legislative victory was the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, which, although compromised by subsequent court decisions, offered broad civil rights protection for disabled Americans and has served as a beacon for the creation of disability rights legislation in fifty other countries.

Less concrete than the legislative accomplishments and legal cases, and still evolving, is the shift in attitudes and consciousness that was driven by, and has transformed the lives of, people with a wide variety of physical and mental disabilities, challenging the notion of disability as stigma and instead embracing disability as a normal facet of human diversity. Theoreticians and artists with disabilities play a prominent role in defining and communicating concepts of disability community and disability culture, and academicians are promoting disability as a category of cultural and historical analysis.

These achievements, as significant as they are, have not ended the discrimination or the prejudice. Indeed, the first years of the twenty-first century have seen several Supreme Court decisions which have limited the expected scope and effectiveness of disability rights law, and many disabled Americans remain economically and socially marginalized. While the need for change continues, the tremendous accomplishments of the disability rights and independent living movement cannot be denied. American society has been profoundly transformed, and any accurate account of the social and political landscape of the late twentieth century will acknowledge the contributions of disability rights and independent living activists.

**Project Design, Interviewees**

The Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement Project at the Regional Oral History Office, the Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, preserves, through oral history interviews, the firsthand accounts of the activists who have made significant contributions to the origins and achievements of this movement. The Bancroft Library also collects, preserves, and provides access to the papers of organizations and individuals who have been a part of the struggles for disability rights and independent living. All of the oral history texts, finding aids to the archival records, and selections
from the archival papers and images are available on the Internet, as part of the Online Archive of California, California Digital Library.

The first phase of the project, completed in 2000, documented the movement during its formative years in Berkeley, California. Berkeley was the site where the concept of independent living was most clearly articulated and institutional models developed, originally by and for students on the Berkeley campus and soon after in the community, with the founding of the nation’s first independent living center in 1972. These organizations and their dynamic leaders, together with the activist tradition in the Bay Area and a disability-friendly climate, made Berkeley an important center of the disability movement and a natural focus for Phase I of the project.

During Phase I, Regional Oral History Office interviewers recorded forty-six oral histories with Berkeley leaders, many of whom have also been figures on the national scene. The Bancroft Library collected personal papers of interviewees and others in the disability community and archival records of key disability organizations, such as the Center for Independent Living, the World Institute on Disability, the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, and the Center for Accessible Technology.

Phase II of the Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement Project (2000-2004) expanded the oral history research and the collection of archival material to document the growth of the movement nationwide. The project again focused on those leaders whose activism began in the 1960s and 1970s. The forty-seven Phase II interviewees include founders and organizers of disability rights groups and early independent living centers in New York, Boston, Chicago, Texas, and California. Of these, many have also been national leaders in the movement and founders of national organizations. Many in this group, like the Berkeley interviewees, were among those who helped to conceptualize disability rights as a political movement and shaped the programs and philosophy of independent living. Others have been key figures in the development of disability rights law and policy, as organizers, strategists, and lobbyists behind the scenes.

A number of interviewees have held positions in state and federal government agencies and commissions, helping formulate government law and policy on transportation access, social security and health benefits, and personal assistance, education, and rehabilitation services. Several have worked to free disabled people from institutions, and others reflect on their own experiences living in institutions. Some interviewees were deeply involved with the parents’ movement.

The international disability movement is represented by Yoshihiko Kawauchi, a leading proponent of universal design and disability rights in Japan; many American activists interviewed for the project also have connections to the international movement. Two interviewees are pioneering artists with disabilities, who discuss their careers as artists and the relationship of art and advocacy. Several have taught disability studies at colleges and universities, contributing to the concept of disability as a category of analysis analogous in many ways to class, race, gender, and sexual orientation.
The project Web site (http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/drilm/) includes the full-text of most of the completed oral histories. It offers the researcher four points of access to the collection: by geographic location, by organizational affiliation, by research themes addressed, and by name of interviewees. There is no claim to completeness in the collection; further interviews are planned pending additional funding for the project.

Interview Themes and Topics

An overarching research goal for phases I and II of the Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement Project was to explore and document how a broad group of people with disabilities, in key cities across the country, initiated and built this social movement, and how it evolved nationally, within the context of the social and political fabric of the times. Lines of inquiry include social/economic/political backgrounds of interviewees and family attitudes toward disability; experiences with medical and rehabilitation professionals and with educational systems; identity issues and personal life experiences; involvement in civil rights or other social movements of the era; and developing consciousness of disability as a civil rights issue.

Interviews record how people with disabilities built effective organizations, with information about leadership, organizational structure and style, organizational turning points, stumbling blocks, achievements, and failures. Challenges particular to the disability community are addressed; for example, leaders of independent living centers point out the difficulties of providing much-needed services to clients and answering to government funding agencies for their service mandate, while still maintaining the essential advocacy roots of the independent living movement.

Interviews explore the building of national alliances and coalitions, investigating networking among groups from different locales and among groups accustomed to aligning on the basis of a single disability. Indeed, the issue of inclusiveness within the movement—the nature and meaning, and sometimes tenuousness, of cross-disability alliances and the inclusion of newly recognized disabilities—is a complex and significant theme in many project interviews, and offers an area for future oral history research.

Interviews document the range of efforts—from protest demonstrations, to legislative lobbying, to litigation in state and federal courts—to influence disability law and policy, to embed disability rights into the canon of civil rights, and to alter and expand the very definition of disability. Several interviews also reflect on a recent philosophical shift of some movement thinkers, who draw on a human rights framework and acknowledge the disability community’s need for social supports along with equality of opportunity and civil rights.

Also examined by many narrators are race, gender, and sexual identity issues: the role of women (large) and minorities (limited) in the movement; the development of programs for women and girls with disabilities; questions of sexuality and disability; and the disability movement’s relationship over the years with the women’s, gay and lesbian, and African American civil rights movements. The involvement of able-bodied advocates,
including parents of children with disabilities, is examined by many interviewees, both disabled and able-bodied, with telling accounts of often awkward and sometimes painful struggle over their place in the movement. (For instance, one organization toyed with the idea of granting able-bodied members only three-fifths of a vote.)

Another important theme running through these interviews is the question of equal access. This includes the impact of technological advances—from motorized wheelchairs in the early days of the movement to adaptive computer technologies more recently, all of which have profoundly extended opportunities for people with disabilities. And it includes the campaigns, legislation, and lobbying—on campuses, in communities, and in Congress—for removal of architectural barriers to people with disabilities, for access to public transportation, and for access to personal assistance services, all essential requirements for independent living.

Many interviewees reflect on the process of developing a disability identity and a sense of belonging to a disability community. Several explore the concept of disability culture and its expression in the arts and in media, and theoretical explorations of disability by scholars and educators. Interviewees who have pioneered the fields of disability scholarship, arts, and ethics point out the contributions of disability studies to the broader society in fostering new and more complex ways of thinking about the body, about normality, about crucial ethical issues relating to abortion, euthanasia, and physician-assisted suicide; and in contributing a unique disability perspective to scholarship in history, literature, and cultural studies.

Project Staff and Advisors

Since its inception the project has been collaborative, with staff members and advisors drawn from the disability community, from academia, and from the Bancroft Library and its Regional Oral History Office. The national advisory board for Phase II includes disability rights leaders Fred Fay, from Boston, and Lex Frieden, from Houston; scholars Frederick Collignon and Sue Schweik from UC Berkeley, Paul Longmore, historian from San Francisco State University, and Karen Hirsch, disability scholar from St. Louis.

Ann Lage directed the project for the Regional Oral History Office, providing years of experience in oral history and leadership for the interviewing team. Interviewers for the project had a unique set of qualifications, combining historical perspective, training and experience in oral history methods, personal experience with disability, and, frequently, activism and participation in disability organizations. Oral history interviews were conducted by Sharon Bonney, former director of the Disabled Students’ Program at UC Berkeley and former assistant director of the World Institute on Disability; Mary Lou Breslin, cofounder and former president of the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, policy consultant and lecturer on disability civil rights topics, and Henry Betts Award winner; Kathy Cowan, librarian for a public interest law firm; Esther Ehrlich, oral history interviewer and editor in the areas of disability arts and community history (who also took on myriad project management responsibilities); and Denise Sherer Jacobson, writer and educator on disability issues (The Question of David, A Disabled Mother’s
Journey through Adoption, Family, and Life, 1999). David Landes, former coordinator of student affairs for the Computer Technologies Program in Berkeley, took a less active role in Phase II when he was appointed to a full-time faculty position in economics. Susan O’Hara, former director of the Disabled Students’ Program at UC Berkeley and the initiator of the original idea for this project, again served as consulting historian, occasional interviewer, and convenor of monthly project meetings.

Conducting interviews in Massachusetts and Washington DC was Fred Pelka, a writer specializing in disability rights politics and history, author of The ABC-CLIO Companion to the Disability Rights Movement, and a recipient of a 2004 Guggenheim Fellowship for his proposed book, “An Oral History of the Disability Rights Movement.” Harilyn Rousso, educator and consultant on issues of women and girls with disabilities, moved from project interviewee to interviewer, conducting one New York oral history and then organizing and moderating a videotaped group discussion with four New York advocates. The Regional Oral History Office production staff, coordinated by Megan Andres, transcribed interviews and carried out other production tasks.

Bancroft Library project personnel in the Technical Services unit collected, arranged, and catalogued personal papers and organizational records and prepared detailed finding aids. They included Jane Rosario, supervising archivist, and project archivists Susan Storch and Lori Hines, all under the supervision of David DeLorenzo, head of Bancroft Technical Services. The staff of the Berkeley Library’s Digital Publishing Group, headed by Lynne Grigsby-Standfill, prepared the oral histories and other texts, photographs, and finding aids for digital archiving in the Online Archive of California. Brooke Dykman designed the Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement Web site. Theresa Salazar as curator of the Bancroft Collection, provided curatorial oversight for the project.

Oral History and the Oral History Process

Oral history provides unique and irreplaceable sources for historical study. It preserves the reflections and perspectives of those who have participated in historical events, documenting with firsthand accounts how events happened, how decisions were made, and the behind-the-scenes interplay that underlies the public face of an organization or social movement. Beyond documenting what happened and how, the words of participants reveal the personal and social contexts and the institutional and political constraints which profoundly shape events but may not be apparent in the written record. Most significantly for this project, oral histories offer an opportunity to elicit reflections on often elusive matters of identity, changes in perception and consciousness, and the personal experience of living with a disability. Finally, they provide a record of how people remember and understand their past, often a indication of personal values and cultural meanings.

The DRILM project team, primarily based in Berkeley, all contributed to the original design of the project and assisted in developing interview protocols. Bay Area interviewers were joined by Fred Pelka from Massachusetts for a two-day orientation
session in December 2000 and by telephone during regular monthly meetings, held to plan and evaluate interviews and review progress. Interviewers assigned to document the movement in a particular location conducted research to choose potential interviewees and interview topics. Once narrators were selected and arrangements made, they prepared a preliminary outline before each interview session, based on interview protocols, background research in relevant papers, consultation with the interviewee's colleagues, and mutual planning with the interviewee. The length of each oral history varied according to the length and complexity of the narrator’s involvement in the movement, but also was dictated by scheduling and availability limitations.

Tapes were transcribed verbatim and lightly edited for accuracy of transcription and clarity. During their review of the transcripts, interviewees were asked to clarify unclear passages and to give additional information when needed, but to preserve the transcript as much as possible as a faithful record of the interview session. The final stage added subject headings, a table of contents, and an index (for the print versions). Shorter transcripts were bound with related interviews into volumes; longer transcripts constitute individual memoirs. Interviewees were offered the opportunity to seal sensitive portions of their transcripts, or omit them from the Internet versions.

There are more than one hundred oral histories in the Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement series. Nearly all of them are available via the Internet in the Online Archive of California (http://www.oac.cdlib.org/texts/); they also can be accessed through the project Web site at http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/drilm/. Print volumes can be read in the Bancroft Library and at the University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Special Collections. They are made available to other libraries and to organizations and individuals for cost of printing and binding. Many of the oral histories are supplemented by a videotaped interview session. Video and audiotapes are available at the Bancroft Library.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. The office is under the direction of Richard Cândida Smith and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. The catalogues of the Regional Oral History Office and many oral histories on line can be accessed at http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/.

The Bancroft Library's Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement Project, of which these oral histories are a part, was funded by field-initiated research grants in 1996 and 2000 from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research [NIDRR], Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education. Additional interviews on “Antecedents, Implementation, and Impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act” were completed for the project under a 2006 contract funded by DBTAC-Pacific ADA. Any of the views expressed in the oral history interviews or accompanying materials are not endorsed by the sponsoring agencies.
Thanks are due to other donors to this effort over the years: Dr. Henry Bruyn, June A. Cheit, Claire Louise Englander, Raymond Lifchez, Judith Stronach, the Prytanean Society, and the Sol Waxman and Tina P. Waxman Family Foundation. Special thanks go to Professor Raymond Lifchez for his generous donation in 2006 in honor of Susan O’Hara.

Ann Lage, Project Director
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California, Berkeley
August 2007
Interview History—Russell Bohlke

Russell Bohlke was a member of the UC Berkeley football team in 1948 who broke his neck during football practice while testing a new type of helmet and became quadriplegic. He lived at Cowell Hospital on the Berkeley campus for several months after his accident, then transferred to the VA hospital in Van Nuys. After extensive rehabilitation at the VA and studies at UCLA, he completed his education at Berkeley in 1953. Mr. Bohlke contacted the Bancroft Library in early 2007, having read about the oral histories of the Berkeley students with significant disabilities who founded independent living programs on campus and in the Berkeley community in the 1960s and 1970s. He shared with us the story of his injury and his experiences as a student using a wheelchair on campus well before the existence of state or federal regulations mandating accessible classrooms and reasonable accommodations or any notion of civil rights for people with disabilities.

Mr. Bohlke agreed to become an interviewee for the disability history project and on June 27, 2007, interviewer Sharon Bonney met with him in his home in Larkspur, California, to record his oral history. His two-hour interview complements the oral histories with students from the 1960s-1970s and those from a new project focusing on current Berkeley students. He notes the university’s failure to take responsibility for his accident or provide any assistance to him in compensation for injuries sustained, all of which seems astonishing from a present-day perspective. Finally, his oral history reveals his growing awareness of discrimination against people with disabilities, his reflections on the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and his work for accessible transportation and voting machines. Now retired, Mr. Bohlke was employed for twenty-seven years at Crown Zellerbach in San Francisco. He has been active in the Marin County Indoor Sports Club, Californians for Disability Rights, and Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Mr. Bohlke reviewed the transcript of his oral history without making any substantive changes. His oral history was funded as part of a project on the antecedents, implementation, and impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act, with support from DBTAC-Pacific ADA Center. It is part of a larger series on the Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement Project. Interview transcripts from this series are available for research in the Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. Audiotapes and/or videotapes are available for listening/viewing in the Bancroft Library. Transcripts of most oral histories in this series are on line at http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/drilm/.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through recorded memoirs the Bancroft Library’s materials on the history of California and the West. The office is under the direction of Richard Cáñada Smith and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, The James D. Hart Director of the Bancroft Library, University of
California, Berkeley. The catalogues of the Regional Oral History Office and most of the collection of oral histories can be accessed at [http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO](http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO).

Ann Lage

Project director

August 2008
Interview with Russell Bohlke

[Audio File 1]

01-00:00:00  
Bonney: This is the Russ Bohlke interview. It's interview one, tape one, and it is Wednesday, July 27, 2007. I mean June, excuse me, June 27, 2007. Russ, thank you for letting me come to your house and interview you.

01-00:00:25  
Bohlke: A pleasure.

01-00:00:28  
Bonney: You wrote to the Oral History Office at UC Berkeley, giving us some of your background as a disabled student at Cal in the 1950s. So we want to talk about that today, and explore that with you. But let me ask, can we start with some early history about you? Like where were you born and raised, and tell me a little bit about your parents, what they did for a living.

01-00:00:55  
Bohlke: Yeah, I was born in Hastings, Nebraska, where there's a hospital. Actually our farm was in Holstien, Nebraska. And we lived in that area for—I guess until I was about nine years old, something like that. Then we migrated—my mother and I migrated out here and lived in Southern California for a while, then my father came out. We went up to the San Joaquin Valley, where my dad could do some carpenter work, which he was involved in. From that, he got a job in Carmel, California. So we lived in Carmel for—they lived there for at least twenty-five years, something like that. They were moved in the—other areas of the Monterey peninsula. But I went to high school in Carmel, graduated in 1944, and went into service that year, until 1946. Then came back, went to Salinas Junior College, which is now called Hartnell, and was there for about a year and a half, when I transferred to the University of California. That would've been in early 1948.

01-00:03:27  
Bonney: Where did you serve in the service? Where were you?

01-00:02:40  
Bohlke: I was primarily in Southern California. In 1944, the war was starting to end at that point, and I got in while they were offering all kinds of different schools, and I just kept taking a school, seeing how much education I could get while I was in service. And all that education was in the San Diego area, Los Angeles area.

01-00:03:08  
Bonney: What year were you born?

01-00:03:12  
Bohlke: In 1926.
Tell me how you met your wife.

Well, I've been married twice. So you mean with Vicky?

About this wife?

Yeah, this wife here. (laughter) Yeah, I met Vicky through a friend. I'd gone to the friend's house, a married couple. They, unbeknownst to me, she was making arrangements for other women to either—might possibly be a candidate for. So there were three women there, and Vicky impressed me the most, because she had so many layers of clothes on. She says do you mind if I take off—this is silly with other people around, I'll take off my sweater. She started taking off her sweater, and then another layer, and then another layer. How many layers you got there? So we sort of started off on the right foot with her taking off her clothes. (laughter)

Do you have children?

Yes, two adopted children.

A boy, girl?

Yeah, the girl was forty-four, the boy is forty-two now. Lived in San Francisco for a while, and we adopted after—in my first marriage, after we moved to Marin County. So my children are still in this area, one in Novato, and one up near Healdsburg.

After you got out of the service, what did you do right afterwards?

I immediately started junior college.

Okay, and then you came to Cal. So tell me about that.

I was a pretty good football player, and a pretty good basketball player. I got interviewed by a couple of coaches—not coaches, assistants actually—one from Cal [University of California, Berkeley], one from Stanford, and a couple other schools. But I first interviewed at Stanford, and that was a pretty stuffy interview. Then Pappy Waldorf was at Cal at that time. And he had sent a fellow, Paul Kristoffeson his name was, a very delightful guy, and we met for dinner. We met other people, and it was a lot of fun. So I decided that I'd go to Berkeley, even though Stanford was closer to Carmel. So that was in
the fall of '47 that all this started happening, as far as the interviews are concerned. I transferred for the spring semester in 1948.

Bonney: What were you majoring in at the time?

Bohlke: I was going to—wanted to be a teacher. So I was in education.

Bonney: So you played football.

Bohlke: Football and basketball, yeah.

Bonney: Tell me what happened when you were practicing football at Cal.

Bohlke: We—at that time I think we had a—we had a game first, first game of the season. It was pretty competitive as far as who was going to be on the first team, you know, first string, second string, whatever. In those days, you had a different people—well, I shouldn't say that. You'd have the same person, player, playing both offense and defense. And that was a center and a linebacker. I did fairly well in the first game, second game, was a trip back to the East Coast, Annapolis. In between the first game and the second game Pappy came over to me and said, "We got a new helmet, and we would like to have someone try it through—it's pretty hard when they're talking about the helmet heads. So it was the first plastic helmet they had bought, and looking back on it, it was quite loose on my head. I made a tackle in practice, and the helmet went back, and the helmet was not protected by rubber or anything back there. It went right into my spinal cord, and bruised the area of cervical five and six, and broke a couple of vertebrae, shattered—they had to operate to remove the bones. They were afraid they might start floating around in the fluid and cause more problems. That happened—that operation happened at Cowell Hospital [the Berkeley campus hospital], where I was the whole time. I was in the Cowell before I went down to the VA [Veteran’s Administration] Hospital.

Bonney: So, do you think that this new helmet was responsible for the break?

Bohlke: Absolutely.

Bonney: What happened? Did Cal take responsibility? What did they do? I mean, you were paralyzed, weren't you at that point?

Bohlke: Yeah. Fortunately, it was called an incomplete lesion. I have pretty good use of my arms and so forth. I never lost my feeling, and that was really the best thing that happened, because therefore you don't get pressure sores and so forth. But no, the helmet disappeared after that. They never mentioned it. I asked for it later on, they had no idea where it was.
So they got rid of the helmet at that point, and never took responsibility really, for the possibility that that might have been the problem, which I think definitely was the problem.

Bonney: Tell me what life was like in Cowell [Hospital] back in 1947-48. I mean, now it's sort of a drop-in place, but you were there for months, right? What was it like there?

Bohlke: Yeah, I was there—let’s see, September, through the end of the year, I was there until probably March of 1949. They didn’t know what to do with me, to tell you the truth. They’d had only—they didn’t have any experience with spinal cord injury at all in those days. There was a fellow, older guy, that had broken his neck doing work on the trampoline, but it was a dislocated vertebrae. He recovered quite fast. So he came over quite a bit and tried to encourage me. There really wasn’t anything there for exercise. I got very low exercise in that six months as a result. I did get up into the chair, sat, but I never did push around. So it was just six, seven months of complete lack of any kind of exercise or going out or whatever. [Added during editing: I should insert here how great the UC student body was during my early days at Cowell. They would come in groups later in the day to sing, lead cheers, and send encouragement. At Christmas time they had a collection to buy me a tv console. It was great, only two or three shows could be seen—what a novelty.]

Bonney: No rehab at Cowell?

Bohlke: No rehab at all.

Bonney: Is that because they were a campus hospital, and they weren’t equipped to do that, or was it because they didn’t know to do that?

Bohlke: They just didn’t—they started getting experience with spinal cord injuries during the war, and the VA was the first one to really get in to all the treatment of it. Now at that time they had two spinal cord injury sections in VA hospitals, and one of them was in the San Fernando Valley, Van Nuys, and the other was back near Chicago. Those were the only two places. I’d belonged to a fraternity at the time I got injured, Sigma Phi, and we had an older member whose name was Dr. Bill Donald [correct spelling?]. He’d started doing some research on this, and this is how he found out about the VA hospital having that particular expertise as far as spinal cord was concerned. So they worked on that, and got me out of Cowell, on down to the VA hospital in Van Nuys. That was, I think, March or April of ’49.

Bonney: So you went to Van Nuys for some rehab?
Bohlke: Yeah, right. I mean, it was the best thing that could've happened, because the moment I got there, I saw guys pushing all over the place. And you know, I wanted to be just like them.

Bonney: Why didn't you push your chair when you were up in Cowell?

Bohlke: No chair.

Bonney: Oh, they just put you on a regular chair?

Bohlke: Yeah, just put me on a regular chair.

Bonney: Oh, I see. Not even a wheelchair. What did they expect you to be doing?

Bohlke: They didn't know what to do. They were really dumbfounded as far as spinal—any kind of spinal cord injury was concerned.

Bonney: What was their attitude towards you?

Bohlke: Well, the hospital was fine. They were very attentive in the care that I got. But it was—this was nursing care. The doctors just didn't know. They did stabilize my neck by putting a—you know, the skull cap on, where they drill a couple of holes in your head and make it so you can't move your head at all. Well, the vertebra being there were healing up, and other than that, that was—they knew how to do that because of other broken necks, but not beyond—not to the point of being paralyzed.

Bonney: Now tell me, when you were down in the VA in Van Nuys, you wrote in your letter to us that by 1949, in the fall of '49, you were driving a car and doing all kinds of stuff? Did they have hand controls in 1949? Is that how you drove?

Bohlke: Yeah. They—when the hand controls first came out, that's the—they didn't have vans, all they had was—what you looked for was a two-door car, and some of the drivers, particularly of the paraplegics that had strong shoulder muscles would get in on the driver's side, and get into the seat and then they would pull their chair in behind them. I just didn't have that much strength or balance to do that, so I had to do it on the passenger's side, and pull it in, and then slide on over. But you had to have a two-door. We ordered—the car that I got was new, and it was a Pontiac, I believe. We ordered that from my family. I'd had a—an insurance policy then that gave me something of a big deal, I think it was $15,000, something like that. It only took a little bit more than that to get a new car in those days. So we used the money to get a new car, and they said they would
put the hand controls in there, the active control. They did, and it worked out pretty good, but it was in a couple of cases that I could've really gotten into bad trouble as far as trying to stop immediately, and the vacuum just wasn't good enough to have stopped the car. We would glide quite a ways. So fortunately, I never had any accidents. But that was one of the first ones that the manufacturers put in.

Bonney: I was going to ask you, you said there were two VA hospitals, and one of them was in Illinois.

Bohlke: Yeah, Hines I think it was called. The Hines VA.

Bonney: Hines. Did you know at that point that the University of Illinois at Champaign had a program for returning vets and people with disabilities to go to school there?

Bohlke: No.

Bonney: You didn't know that? Okay.

Bohlke: Well, after I got the car in '49, that's when I started UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], so UCLA had a little bit of a program going on. They had, I would say probably four other people in wheelchairs who were going at that time. Three of us were quads.

Bonney: So at UCLA there were four of you?

Bohlke: Yeah.

Bonney: Did you see how they got around, and what they did? How they lived?

Bohlke: Oh yeah, yeah. They were from the hospital, so I knew them from the hospital. There wasn't anybody other than the veterans that were going to school at that time.

Bonney: So did you live in the hospital during the evening hours, and you went to school during the day?

Bohlke: Right. The—I lived in a VA hospital for two or three years. I mean, it was rehabilitation, and thank God for that, they'd be throwing me out, as they do now, because they're so darned crowded, I wouldn't have gotten the education that I had, the experience, I mean, it just—I don't know what would've happened.
Bonney: What was it like at UCLA at that time? Did you get accommodations?

Bohlke: It was a lot better accommodations than Berkeley, yes, because it's much more level. But at both schools, the problem was finding those courses that were on a floor that you could get to—accessible floor. If it was on a second floor with no elevator, they wouldn't move the class. So you had to search around for another class, and you know, I sort of got to—in order to get classes that were required, I had to go to six colleges and junior colleges, not around Van Nuys. They moved the hospital from Van Nuys down to Long Beach after I was there for about a year. Then they had Long Beach College and a couple of others there. So that's where I picked up my extra courses that I couldn't get into. There were some that I could get into, and I'd have to go all the way to UCLA from Long Beach to get to class, and there were no freeways in those days.

Bonney: No one you asked—who would you ask on the campus to move the class?

Bohlke: I'd go to the administration building.

Bonney: What would their response be?

Bohlke: They weren't going to change a class just for one person.

Bonney: No understanding of disability?

Bohlke: Yeah. When I first went to UCLA, they said—I think the tuition that I had to pay in those days for veterans, it was $50 or $100, something like that. They said, “Well, how are you going to pay for this?” I said well, “I'll have to arrange to get some money to do it.” They said, “The University of California isn't taking care of your education?” I said, “No.” So that person went to the assistant chancellor, something like that, talked to me about it, and he said that is so ridiculous that they're not paying anything. So he gets on the phone, calls them up, and by God, I got my tuition paid for.

Bonney: This was at UCLA?

Bohlke: Yeah, this is UCLA, and $50 a month besides that for expense money.

Bonney: Now, when you went up to Berkeley after that, did this payment of tuition continue for you?
Bohlke: They wanted to take it away. I said, “Look, you take it away, I don't have any money coming in.” I said, “I had some money at the time I got injured, and I'm going through that.” There was a small pension that the VA gave non-service connected, but I think it was only $75 a month. So it was really pinching pennies. Thank God gas was under twenty cents a gallon.

Bonney: So when you were at UC—going to UCLA, you drove yourself back and forth there every day?

Bohlke: Yeah.

Bonney: Then did you park on the campus and push around? Or how did you get from class to class?

Bohlke: No, the parking wasn't bad. I never had—I can't recall having any kinds of problems with parking there. The lot was fairly close to the classes I went to. I don't think the—yeah, the one quad that was going there, had a van, and then he transported the other fellow that was a quad. So that's how they got to school. The other people I can't remember too well.

Bonney: But you just drove there, and then got out of your car and pushed. Now, when you came to Cal, how did you get around? Because it's not flat.

Bohlke: I worked at grounds and buildings for a while. I was at—I don't know, that was afterwards. Anyway, I went to grounds and buildings and explained my problems. They said, “Okay, we'll get back to you.” Apparently, they had chains across, as they probably still do, and it had one lock, or one—it all had locks, they had one key to unlock all of them, all the locks. So they—they gave me a key. So I opened up to a chain, and waited for somebody to come by and ask them—they gave them the key, and asked them to undo it and drive through, and then they gave me the key back after chaining it back up. So that was the main thing. Usually it was only one chain that I'd have to go through. I'd lift up next to the I-House, the fraternity house was up in that area. I didn't live in the fraternity house, but I'd have lunch there usually. Then I lived down on Haste Street, below Shattuck, about a block or so. There were two or three of us living together there.

Bonney: Now when you were driving on campus, you would go through the gate, and have it unlocked, and locked behind you, and you'd go to class. For your next class then, would you have to get back in your car and go through the gate, go to some other gate and go to another classroom building?

Bohlke: Sometimes I'd have to go through another chain, but it wasn't bad. Usually the classes were close enough where I could hit two or three of them at a time. I had the same
Bonney: At this point then, when you came back as a disabled student, were you still majoring in education?

Bohlke: While I was at the VA hospital, I took a—one of these surveys on what your preference in life would be, to see what it was, I thought it would be working with people, and so I decided to go into social welfare. So I took the prerequisites for social welfare and got into their program after talking to them, and they encouraged me.

Bonney: Why did you give up teaching? Why did you give that up?

Bohlke: They weren't hiring disabled teachers in those days. No way you could get a job. It was hard to get a job anywhere in the 1940s in a wheelchair, or the 1950s.

Bonney: How did you feel about having to change your whole life's plan because somebody wouldn't hire you as a disabled teacher?

Bohlke: Well, I went through quite a few changes there in order to find a job, because the social welfare department, after I got my bachelor's degree in social welfare, wouldn't let me into the master's program. They just said they didn't think I would fit in well in there, in the social welfare community, because of being in a wheelchair. But they said you could always go down to San Jose State and go to their school. They wanted to get rid of me. And damn.

Bonney: What was your response to them?

Bohlke: Oh, I was mad. I was mad. I said you encouraged me—went through the story of getting into the program. Once I get in the program, want to go further, then you don't think it's a good program for me. I sort of wanted to get out of school, you know. I got a bachelor's degree, and I wanted to get to work and get my life going. I think it was at that time that I worked at grounds and buildings for about nine months, and that was strictly an accounting job that they had. I mean, I like accounting, but it's not what I wanted to do for a lifetime of work. I, during that period of time, I got encouraged by a couple of older fraternity brothers to go to the Institute for Foreign Trade, down in Glendale, Arizona. I don't know whether you've ever heard of it or not, they call it Thunder Bird Foreign Trade School now, something like that. I, you know, found out more about it. I decided to look into it. About that time, I got married, so there'd be two of us involved in it. It cost $2,500 for tuition down there, which was quite a bit in those days. So I went to—between the period I was in school, I was a rep at large [an elected student body representative]. I don't know whether they still call them that or not as far as the student politics on campus was
concerned. It was an elected position, in fact. I was also—I was almost encouraged to run for the student body president, and thank God the timeline had passed by, because then I had a couple of guys that were really pushing me to do that.

Bonney: Why did they want you specifically?

Bohlke: Well, I think what encouraged them is that I have a good rapport with the students. By that time, by the veterans that were returning, they were graduating, so it was a younger group, and I looked like I was mature and all that stuff, so I just went in pretty good. Belonging to a fraternity and I like social events, so probably a little bit too much, but that's—I enjoyed college life, really.

Bonney: But you were elected, were you not, to the student body?

Bohlke: No, I wasn't elected student body president. Yeah, I was rep-at-large, yeah.

Bonney: A rep-at-large. You ran into some problems with that, with access.

Bohlke: I ran into problems all over the campus with access. I mean, I had—I had classes that wasn't bad, but when it came to the life science building, there were steps up there, and I'd just call a couple of guys over. You know, could you give me a hand up these steps? There was always somebody around.

Bonney: So they would pull you and your wheelchair up those stairs?

Bohlke: Yeah, one in the back, one of them in the front, and they would pull me up. But the student, Eshleman Hall—I know you know that very well—was really a problem, because you had to—all kinds of steps to go up there, with the student body, where the student council met was up on the second floor, and that must have had at least fifteen or twenty steps. I was calling guys around all the time, I think they started avoiding me after a while. But it wasn't that bad, you know.

Bonney: So people actually pulled you up all those stairs?

Bohlke: Oh yeah, they were so helpful.

Bonney: The ASUC [Associated Students of the University of California] student reps never thought of moving the meetings someplace else? Did you ask them to?
Oh no, no. I mean, what would—I don't know where else it would've—where they would've been able to hold it. I mean, it was a student hall I guess, or whatever you want to call it, where all the student activities went on there. I didn't ask for too much, except when it came to the $2,500, and then I asked them. I wanted the (inaudible) cause I have—I'm almost finished with school. I've got this opportunity and I'm wondering if I can get $2,500 from this school to do the program down in Glendale. Well see, the Regents stayed away from my injury completely. They would never acknowledge it. They left everything, all the expenses, if there was going to be any expenses, to the ASUC. When I tried to get history after that, from the Regents, they wouldn't give me anything on anything that had to do with me. So I don't know what they've got there, as far as my reputation or whatever is concerned. So I was just a student, as far as they were concerned.

So they took no responsibility ever, even when you asked them about anything?

Never, never.

Now, you were asking the ASUC for $2,500 to go to the Glendale school? Did you get that from them?

Yeah, I did. But they said this is absolutely the last money you get from the ASUC. And see, I didn't, in those days you didn't go to get legal service on something like that. You very rarely sued, and if you sued, you might get $10,000, $15,000, maybe $25,000 or something like that. Had I done that, the VA may not have taken me in, because they looked at income that you had, and if I had at that time that much money, they probably wouldn't have accepted me. So I stayed away from the legal action completely.

When you were at UC Berkeley, did you need attendant care? Did you need help bathing and —

No, no. I could do all that myself.

You did all that yourself. Okay, Okay. During this time, when you were asking for classes to be moved and getting keys to fences and all this sort of thing to get around, did you ever think that it was your right to have access to these things? Did you ever think —

The disabled didn't have rights in those days. You know, they didn't. They didn't know what to do with the disabled, and they looked at what would please the majority, and that's the direction that they went. There wasn't any exceptions.
Bonney:  How about you personally? Did you feel like you had a right to all these things, but couldn't get it? What were your thoughts about it?

Bohlke:  My thoughts about the whole thing about being in a wheelchair was it was just amazing, you know, there wasn't any kind of—any kind of rules for the disabled in driving. There wasn't any handicapped parking spaces at all. I would have to park maybe in two spaces at an angle in order to get out. Sometimes I'd get a ticket, and sometimes I wouldn't. They didn't give a darn.

Bonney:  Okay. When you contacted us, you told us one kind of cute story about you and Norm Mineta [Secretary of Transportation]. Can you tell me about that?

Bohlke:  Yeah. The way that I would go to Wheeler [Hall] was to—you know, it's a broad sidewalk down there. So I would drive down there, going real slow because of all the—because from where I went into the chained area, it was almost all up and down hill. If I parked up there, why I—it would be awfully difficult for me to get back up. So I would slowly drive along behind these kids, and they would look back at me and get out of the way, be very courteous. Some of them would give me a strange look. I wrote a letter to Norm Mineta after he became senator or whatever he was, and I was asking him to do something about—work on some kind of accessibility issue. I got a letter back saying that he would look into it. Then handwritten down below was "I don't know how many times you almost ran over me on campus." (laughter)

Bonney:  So you knew each other when you were on campus?

Bohlke:  Well, not really. I knew he was a —

Bonney:  He knew who you were.

Bohlke:  Yeah. Well he knew—probably ask you know, why is that guy down there—and then he'd see the wheelchair and start asking questions.

Bonney:  Okay, I just want to go back to your accident for just a minute, or maybe it's post-accident. You also mentioned [in initial contact with the Oral History Office] that Brutus Hamilton, who was the athletic director at Cal—I assume when you came back as a disabled student. You said that he showed that he was troubled by what had happened to you and by UC's lack of response. What did he do to show you that?

Bohlke:  Well, I didn't realize the direction that he was taking (inaudible) at the time. But he was asking a lot of questions. You could see that there was concern. (break in tape)
Bonney: Okay, so Brutus Hamilton, you could tell, was bothered by something.

Bohlke: Yeah, he—I think he was concerned all along by what happened. Well, all the people that were involved around the injury were concerned, but their hands were tied. Pappy Waldorf came down to the hospital one time and visited me with most of his assistants that he had working for him then. They made a big hit, and it was nice. The only problem is when they—this troop of guys come in, why it was while I was joined with a lot of therapy, and I didn't have any clothes on. I was near the water while I had to get out and cover up and dress up a little bit to say hi to them. But it seems like every time I got a visitor that I wanted to see and talk to for a while, they came right at that time. It was a funny —

Bonney: Do you think that all of these people at the UCs who didn't respond at all to your injury, do you think that maybe they did not think of it as their responsibility?

Bohlke: They knew what happened. But I think they were just closed-lipped about it. This was a liability on the school. They bought the equipment, and just didn't follow up on it. They gave me my shoulder pads, my jersey. They gave me everything except the helmet. Maybe it was because it was the only one they had. I just don't know whatever happened, and nobody would say anything. I'm sure it was discussed before the Regents, and I couldn't get any information out of it that way either.

Bonney: What would you—what would you have liked their response to have been?

Bohlke: Well, to take care of a lot of expenses that I had. That was the primary thing. It's a serious, serious injury, as you know, you know, from your work with the disabled. Particularly in those days, usually the disabled—particularly quads, just didn't live past forty years old. So I mean, I had to worry. (break in audio)

Bonney: Okay, along in your lifetime, when did you first begin to perceive that you were being discriminated against, as a person with a disability?

Bohlke: Well you know, I really got spoiled when I looked back on it, being in the VA hospital in Van Nuys, because people in that community—there was a lot of movie people that were there, to would come out and entertain you. When you went into—say to a bar that night, they'd set up free drinks. I mean, there was just so—it actually seemed like they were happy to see you. I mean, they'd ask some stupid questions at times, and you were a little bit embarrassed for both of us, but then after nine months or a year when we moved down to Long Beach, it completely changed. I mean, the Long Beach community just didn't really care at all. It was—the hospital was completely separated from the community, and so it was a—that's when my eyes started opening up. Even while on the Berkeley campus, I'd run in to—not so much with the men students as with the girl students. They were
really afraid of someone in a wheelchair. Then at the times we would have one girl that was—had polio, and she had to walk with really a definite limp. She was from a rich background. She was in a sorority and so forth. I thought, you know, since we had something in common—I mean, it wasn't a romantic interest at all, it was just the fact that we were both handicapped, something in common that we could talk about and relate. The last thing she wanted to do was have any kind of relationship with somebody in a wheelchair. It really—my eyes started opening up there when you kind of have problems with fellow students in that direction, particularly with the female section of it.

I remember one time, I went to a—I think it's the first time I ever—as a character in a wheelchair to a costume party. I went down to the art department, and I said I've got something in mind. I've got this party to go to, and I'm thinking of going as—what was that song about an engineer—I guess Casey Jones. I said; “Well, can you make a cardboard thing that looks like a locomotive? I'm going to get a hat, a local engineer's hat and so forth. I'll go this way, and I'll be able to still be able to push a chair, and look like I'm Casey Jones.” So I go, and I got accused by the female people of trying to attract too much attention. Now, years later I went to other costume parties, and I went sitting in an outhouse. I wonder what they were thinking then. (laughter) Handing out toilet tissue.

Bonney: Now that you have an outhouse calendar handy (inaudible) you like outhouses.

Bohlke: Well, I find them interesting; they come in all shapes and forms.

Bonney: When you felt this discrimination, or you started to perceive it in relationships, when did you start picking up on it in terms of, you know, being able to get on the bus, being able to have a classroom moved, that sort of thing?

Bohlke: Well you know, that didn't come until the seventies. We had that problem right here in Marin County. The organization I belonged to, the Indoor Sports Club, we sued the Golden Gate Bridge. They had just bought out the route that Greyhound had as far as bus passengers are concerned. They were just starting up in Marin County, and none of their buses were accessible. However, there were—before you could have an accessible bus, you had to have two manufacturers that could build lifts, and we thought we had two manufacturers available. We got a lawyer and the judge refused to accept one manufacturer because he hadn't been in business long enough. However, it did set up a standard as far as the future was concerned, that the Golden Gate Bridge had to follow it when they ordered new buses, when two manufacturers were available. So we did set up the whole thing, but that wasn't until the 1970s. It just wasn't —

Bonney: Do you remember what—1970 what?

Bohlke: I think it was '76 when we sued.
Bonney: Tell me about the Indoor Sports Club. Are you still a member, is it still around?

Bohlke: I'm the national executive secretary of it.

Bonney: I guess you're still a member then, aren't you? (laughter) What does it do?

Bohlke: Well, it was originated in 1930. It was to get people out of their homes and out and about. And the name Indoor, that meant shut in, in sport, and it meant someone who was happy or lucky. So I was trying to get the people out, and being a more happy life. They had with them an organization called the Good Sports Club. And the Good Sports Club would provide the transportation and the way of getting people up and down the steps in order for them to get out into the community, riding around and seeing what the world was all about. So that was the start of it. We worked at that angle of it until the—I joined in probably—let's see a second, probably in the sixties when I joined. And our whole goal then was to make life easier for the disabled. [Dog barking]

Bonney: Now, you told me you're what right now? Executive?

Bohlke: National executive secretary.

Bonney: National executive secretary. What is your job as that? What do you do?

Bohlke: Well that, you'd have to take care of business in between conventions. Unfortunately we have gotten so small now that we can't get a quorum any longer. People have grown old that were the workers of the Indoor Sports Club, and you can't get the young to join any more. They have—one of the reasons for that is, we built it, they don't have anything to work for any more. They have things that are provided for them already. They've got the center for independent living, and taken now, at this point, the center's main objective is getting grants to keep their place in operation and to provide it for people who need housing and so forth. Then there's others here, a couple of others in Marin County that would give grants to people who need ramps and so forth. So the disabled feel that they're - the newly disabled just feel that they don't have to do the amount of work that we have done in the past in order to get to this point.

You ought to realize how much more needs to be done. The fact that right now, we're very interested in a new taxicab called Standard Taxis, and if you'd like to look up on the computer a little bit, standardtaxi.com. They've got a new taxi that they've built, a yellow cab that has a wheelchair seating right next to the driver. The driver has a partition with a window on it that they can roll down and speak to the passenger. But they have that place specially for wheelchairs. Every taxi, they want every taxi to be that way. I'll tell you, New York has how many thousands of taxis, they only have a small amount that are accessible. We're just getting into taxis here, but that's a taxi we want. We have put down
- the $250 is all it was to reserve a taxi, and they'll start manufacturing them in the next six months or so, but it was really something of the future. There's room besides that. There's room for four other passengers in the car, or at least one other wheelchair, too.

Bonney: So the Indoor Sports organization is focusing on the taxi issue?

Bohlke: Yeah, for right now, in this area. We've put out a bimonthly newsletter, and we'll be advertising it—not advertising, but stating here and there that we want the other chapters to get involved in it, if they can. At least right there on their taxi committees, within the cities and towns that they're in, so they can get on the ground floor of these things.

Bonney: What do you think is going to become of the Indoor Sports Club?

Bohlke: We'll have to dissolve it pretty soon. You know, it's like we've got Californians Disabled Rights [CDR] organization for California, and they're having the same problems as far as keeping members, getting new members. There's just hardly any large disabled organizations anymore. You've got—we're having the association for the people with disabilities. But you know, that's all a wrapped thing, and we paid off on it and so forth. We haven't gotten any paid officers. I don't know what they have in—I think it's the same thing in CDR.

Bonney: So if it dissolves and goes away, who then, say in Marin County, will be pushing for accessible taxis and other things that you see as needed?

Bohlke: I don't know. Just individuals.

Bonney: Do you work with the independent living centers around here?

Bohlke: No, we don't have much faith in them.

Bonney: You don't, why not?

Bohlke: Particularly not the one here. The one in Berkeley is good, and we've talked to—we have a couple of members we have talked to, I can't remember the lady that's —

Bohlke: Jan, Jan Garrett?

Bonney: Yeah, Jan Garrett. She says well, if the Marin CIL [MCIL] will not provide something for you, you give us a call, and we'll help you out. But it's the leadership that they have here which is more, and they want people from their paid positions to take all volunteer
positions on the committees, government committees. They won't recommend any
disabled organization outside the MCIL. We want people to fill those positions. They have
able-bodied filling disabled positions on a couple of those commissions. We just
complained like heck to them, and I think Bob Roberts is the executive director here, and I
don't think he'll be there much longer, but —

01-00:57:13
Bonney: Okay, let's stop there. We need to turn—change the tape.

[Audio File 2]

02-00:00:00
Bonney: Oh, this is the Russ Bohlke interview, this is tape two. Russ, we were talking when we
broke about the Marin Center for Independent Living, and your feelings about it not being
really effective right now. What would you like to see it do that it's not doing?

02-00:00:23
Bohlke: Well, I think they could do more at getting the disabled community together, rather than
forcing it apart. They just do so little. It's primarily due to their leadership. But they've
always had a problem, in my way of thinking, in handling the job over there, because it is
a hard job. You know, you're helping the aged, the aging, and all different types,
homeless, and maybe my idea is that they should do more for the disabled. But they just
don't seem to be in that direction at all.

02-00:01:23
Bonney: Okay. I don't think I asked you, when did you join the Indoor Sports Club? What year was
that?

02-00:01:30
Bohlke: I think it was 1968, somewhere around there, it's been almost forty years that I've—a long
time.

02-00:01:37
Bonney: So you did join sort of the movement organizations early on, because they didn't start until
the sixties, most of them—what we think of as the movement.

02-00:01:50
Bohlke: Yeah, well I belong to the Paralyzed Veterans [of America] Association, and to the AAPD
[American Association of People with Disabilities], (inaudible) the Paralyzed Veterans
Association now has a—along with AAPD and the Blind Association, they have a lawsuit
against the county of Marin that I'm part of, representing the PVA, because of their voting
machines not being accessible. They are suing this county. They're suing San Francisco
County and Sonoma County on that. It's a matter of having backup records, you know,
after you vote, a paper count that you can use to back up. They haven't gotten to that point
here. They had a—what's it called? HAVA, and there was a certain bill that was passed
where they had to have accessible voting machines, and they gave out money to poorer
communities in every county to get these machines. Marin County got the money for it,
but they never did get the machine or the system set up to have a paper backup, so that's a
reason for the lawsuit. I think it's just the way you handle these things to make sure they
get in line and do the proper thing. I don't think it's a penalty thing.

02-00:03:45
Bonney: What are your thoughts on the ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act]?

02-00:03:53
Bohlke: I think it's gotten weakened a little bit too much here in the last few years. Getting the
building inspectors of each town to enforce the rules of the ADA isn't followed up on too
well.

02-00:04:31
Bonney: Compliance is not followed up.

02-00:04:34
Bohlke: Right. It depends on the community. For instance, here I got involved in you know, in
1990, they had to start looking at every town having a section of their city laws that said
that they had to have a committee on accessibility of that particular community. They had
to have other representatives on it, and one or two of them would be disabled people. It
wasn't until about 1995 that Larkspur put that in, and they've never followed up on it. I've
reminded and reminded them of it, and I just—all the things you have to meet twice a
year, you have to be available to look at plans that would be involved. Now here, you
didn't see it coming in, but Redwood High School has a sidewalk around it. It never used
to have a sidewalk, and when they put the sidewalk in, they only made it about twenty-
eight inches wide, so you can't—really can't pass someone in a baby carriage or another
wheelchair on that sidewalk. And it's blind. You have to come around a curve, so you
can't see someone coming. So we threatened them with a lawsuit on it, and they never did
follow up. We didn't follow through on the lawsuit, but there were two lawyers that they
have there. It just got too busy and so forth. He's looking at it again now, but it's just
ridiculous. All they had to do to get—to comply was to build a pull out every twenty yards
or so along the sidewalk in case you do meet somebody, and you pull in and let them go
by, but they didn't even take a look at that. That is something that they could've looked at
prior to ever building it, and gotten that out of the way. But they just refused to do it.

02-00:06:52
Bonney: You mentioned in your letter that you've met Ed Roberts several times, got to know Ed.
What are your thoughts on Ed?

02-00:07:00
Bohlke: Oh, I thought he was a delightful fellow. Our organization had a convention —

02-00:07:10
Bonney: By organization you mean Indoor Sports?

02-00:07:12
Bohlke: Indoor Sports Club, yeah. At the Holiday Inn, and it was called the Holiday Inn then, at
San Rafael. I called them up and arranged for him to come over to be a speaker, so it was
the first time I met him in person. We got along quite well. Then there was other times
that you'd be at a meeting or something, and you'd see one another, and nod our heads at
each other. The last time I saw him was - I can't remember the name of the hotel on
Broadway, there where they have a lot of meetings. We had lunch together there. We talked over things, you know, his days in Berkeley and so forth. But he—I just wish he had been there before I was, so we could've gotten things started a little bit.

Bonney: Now, when you read something or hear someone say that Ed Roberts was the first severely disabled student at Cal, what's your response?

Bohlke: Well, I didn't think much about it until—that's when I first contacted whoever wrote the article that was in the paper. I said that you know, I want to let you know that Ed Roberts wasn't the first one in a wheelchair or you know, handicapped at Cal, or who had graduated from Cal. So I said, you know, I graduated in 1953, and that was a few years—about two years before old Ed came along. That's how we got started in this direction.

Bonney: Do you remember what kinds of things you talked about with Ed?

Bohlke: It was mostly past things, you know, not philosophizing on the future or anything you know, it was sort of going over old times that we both had in common. When you go to a meeting, you know, such as that, once you're in the meeting quite a while and then you come out, you don't want to start talking about things that you just saw, or at least I don’t anyway.

Bonney: Do you ever go back to the Cal campus?

Bohlke: Oh yeah, I used to go to the football games there all the time. Other than the football games—and there was one time that I went over there to get tickets, and I got in the wrong building. They had moved it. I thought they were in one of the swimming pools, and where the basketball court is, and I was looking around for the ticket office, and I knew it was on a lower level, or I thought I knew. I get in this elevator, and it goes down, and apparently it wasn't functioning properly, and this was on a Friday, after I had—and I get down there, and there's nobody around, and I tried to get back into the elevator and it wouldn't work. So I'm in this place where they're doing some construction work, all by myself, wondering how the heck I'm going to get out of this. Sorry, went over to the windows. I looked down where there were passageways. I was pounding on the windows, trying to make people understand. They couldn't hear me through the glass. Finally one guy caught on, you know, got a hold of a janitor or something, and they came down and got me. But that was a little bit embarrassing, you know. You think you know the campus, and after a few years it changes a little bit.

Bonney: How is access now when you go onto campus? What's it like going to a football game, for instance?
Bohlke: Much better than it used to be. I used to have to park down—I used to have to sit on the field. I remember—oh God, what's his name, the guy that has the pointer?

Bonney: Oh, Hale Zukas.

Bohlke: Yeah, Hale Zukas. Hale Zukas and I used to sit together down there and watch the games. There wasn't too much conversation going on except for yelling, you know, when something good happened. And we—I remember one time there was a pass; it was thrown out of bounds right at us. Actually, I think it hit Hale. You know, he was just steadying himself because he's not too steady anyway, and we were laughing about it, so every time we saw each other, we'd duck like that. (laughter)

Bonney: How is access now when you go to a game? Where do you sit now? You don't sit on the field any more.

Bohlke: No. We were sitting up—we started sitting up above, behind the students’ sections, Cal student section. And we were parking along the street there, it was after I first met Vicky, and then we started parking on the road that leads up to the laboratories up there. There's a little place up there where we can park, and we got to know the cop that was on duty during game days. So he would always save us a spot there. Then he retired, and they built a new parking lot over on the other side of the rugby field, or whatever that field is there. Now you have to pay for that. So we haven't been for—we didn't go last year at all. I think the year before we went one time. But you know, it's a little bit of a push in order to get—not so much going down to the student section, but they fixed up the student section pretty well now, above for the wheelchairs. I know I had to write two or three, four letters to tell them to get rid of the row right in front of the wheelchair, people would stand up, and you couldn’t see anything. You go to any games?

Bonney: I used to.

Bohlke: Yeah, I was going every year there. Maybe we saw each other there. (laughter)

Bonney: We could have. What kind of a response did you get when you wrote to them and asked for better seating?

Bohlke: Not much of a response, but eventually it got done. [dog barking] (break in tape) They eventually started making improvements, so they did take out that whole row. Then people would walk along there, and they would start to watch the game. It's right in front of us, so they had to get—put guards or student ushers at both ends and keep people from walking down there unless they absolutely had to. So it's much better now than it was. Then they opened up other areas, you know, and other sections up above, where you could
sit as well. So it's much better than it originally was. I enjoyed going to the games. I always have. A couple of tears come to my eyes when the Cal Band comes out, then the trombones—not trombones, but the guys with the big horns—tubas. The tubas come out.

Bonney: Were you there for the Big Game when all that (inaudible) went on, veiled for twenty minutes?

Bohlke: We were there, and because of the parking place that we had, if we didn't get out there a little bit early, to beat the crowd, I mean, we had to wait there until the whole place emptied. We got out there early, and that's when that last second thing happened.

Bonney: You didn't see it!

Bohlke: No.

N2: Heard it on the radio though.

Bohlke: We've seen it plenty of times since though.

Bonney: You mentioned that you sat with Hale Zukas. Tell me what you know about Hale, and what are your thoughts on Hale?

Bohlke: I'll tell you, that guy is as—really has the ambition. He just keeps going, doesn't he? He's still doing meetings, as far as I know, and going on. But we didn't—he had—that was one of the first pointers he had at that time, and we didn't communicate too much on it. We just smiled at each other a lot and knew that we both enjoyed the game. But other than seeing Hale at the games, that's the only contact I ever had with him.

Bonney: Okay, back to the VA hospital, you were telling me a little story about being in a movie. You want to tell me about that?

Bohlke: Yeah. It—you know, the movie business, you never—you'd have no idea until you get there on a set about what goes on, and I—they've got cables all over heck, so you, when you're in a wheelchair, you can't do much around there until your scene comes up, and then you've got to make sure that you're in an area where you can move a little bit when you get there. So there really wasn't too much moving around for the few of us that had the background parts on it.

Bonney: Now, tell me what movie this was, and who was in it, and where it was, those sorts of thing.
Bohlke: That's right, it was called *The Men*, besides Marlon Brando and Teresa Wright, there was Jack Webb, remember him? He was in it, and then there was another fellow that's been in a lot of movies, and I can never remember his name. But he was in it. What I've always been amazed with, as far as movie stars are concerned, was down in San Fernando Valley, I saw Clark Gable one time, and he was a little guy, about like that. I mean, you always get a picture of Clark Gable as big, well same thing with Jack Webb. A little guy. I mean, he was taller than that. Then the other fellow, and Marlon Brando was a pretty good size, he was well built. But it was—you know, the people that are in the business. I had one scene between Marlon Brando and Teresa Wright that they took over thirty times to make the scene. They kept going back, it was a very emotional scene, and I sat through the whole thing, watching, you know, watching it. What was different from this one and the last one and the first one and the last one. You know, they wanted perfection, and that's the way that Fred Zinnemann was. He's one of the main—produced *High Noon* too. Not produced, but directed.

Bonney: What was the storyline of the movie?

Bohlke: A fellow coming back from going to war, and being shot, becoming paralyzed, coming back and his adjustment to the community. His falling in love and not knowing how to handle himself, and finally ending up, you know, with Teresa Wright, but just the problems that he had. I forget, Jack Webb I think was in the hospital with him.

Bonney: Now, you almost ended up in the movie, right? You almost ended up being in the movie, right? You had a shot at it, what happened?

Bohlke: Well, that's when I couldn't remember my page of words. It was a very emotional thing, and you had to remember what to do as far as your emotions are concerned at the same time you're reading, and it's not something I can do apparently as well as the other fellow. The other guy was just excellent in the part. If you get a chance, to see these old movie books that come out, you can order them, I think it's probably, you know, $20 or something. It's a good movie to see. It's probably the first wheelchaired individual being a star.

Bonney: A non-wheelchair person starring in it. (laughter) Well Russ, is there anything else that you would like to talk about that I haven't asked you?

Bohlke: Well, I don't think so, except for the fact that I continue, after almost sixty years, you can still continue to run up against discrimination. It's not as open as it once was, but you know, I can make it all, having dates down in Southern California and the girl I was with is a pretty girl, you'd have someone able bodied coming up and saying, "You don't want to be with this guy, you want to be with me," and this type of thing that went on as far as the—you know, how distasteful someone in a wheelchair was at that time. Fortunately, the girls I was with were usually pretty mature on this, but the guy's habit, telling them to
mind their own business. But it would be something that, had I been on my feet, I would probably punch the guy. It's not that I was that fiery a guy, but I just—the lack of respect is just amazing.

Bonney: You know, one thing I didn't follow up on is you went to Glendale, right, to the School of Foreign Trade? What did you study there, and what did you do for a living?

Bohlke: I learned Spanish, you know, foreign trade courses, and I got the job that I had for twenty-seven years after that with Crown Zellerbach Paper Corporation. At the time they hired me, they were thinking of opening up an office in Puerto Rico or somewhere down there. Then they had, after they hired me, why they put that idea on the backburner. The Zellerbach, I've got to hand it to the Zellerbach family, they took a chance with me, you know, being a quadriplegic. They both went to—the whole family went to Berkeley, and they knew about my accident and decided to give me a chance. They stuck with me, and you know, eventually the older men retired, and then Bill Zellerbach took over the Zellerbach Paper Company, but didn't have anything to do with Crown Zellerbach. But I kept on there after that. But it was always a fight. Then they started to—well, there was seven years in a large corporation, and I didn't like that. At that time, they had almost a complete change of personnel, upper personnel. It was sort of a mental badge. When you got somebody new in and they were looking for a cut, oh, they've got the eye on the disabled guy over there and there's no way you could protect your position then before the ADA. I just sort of had to roll with what was going on. I mean, I had a lot of close calls of getting laid off.

Bonney: So your supervisors were not as open to these ideas that the Zellerbach family was?

Bohlke: Right, exactly. Yeah, they—and one way they would do this, which I thought was always sort of lousy was that they would move someone down to one of their offices as office manager. You could see the pattern that always happened. When they moved somebody down there, that guy never did a good enough job, and they would lay him off, fire him or whatever. Here, the guy moved his whole family down there, and after about two years, by then, that was just the regime that was in there then. So they offered me a job down in Texas. I said, "Let me think about it." That was about the time that we were going through adoptions. I said I won't be able to accept the position because of—we're going through an adoption now, and I don't want to lose this opportunity, which was taking a chance. I thought maybe they'd say, “Well, you'll have to go then.” But no, they kept me on, and sure enough, the guy they did send down there after a year, year and a half, he was gone. I mean, it was just sort of a—it was a raise in pay, and guys wanted to take it and get out of the headquarters, but it was a sort of a cut your throat type of thing if you did take it.

Bonney: What was your job with Zellerbach?
Well, I was what they called the customer service, is what I started out with. I found that to be quite interesting, talking on the phone, you know. If they had a problem, while I was taking care of problems as far as their orders are concerned, or if they could speed up their order, and then you'd have to talk to the—this is all before computers, so there was a lot of phone work that went on. So as a matter of—you know, the main thing is pleasing the customer. But then you get dealing with paper and people—people at the paper mills, and they didn't care about customers too much, so you had to deal with them as well and work out stuff. I remember when I was in specialty papers, they had what they called raisin tray paper. Which I don't know whether you're familiar with that, Raisin industry or not, but what they do is to—they level the ground in between rows of [grapes] that they know they want to turn into raisins. Then they have wooden trays that they put down, and then they put on top of that the brown craft paper, and they used fifty, sixty tons of that a year, over in the valley. So there was a lot of paper used.

I remember one guy that was really happy with the service that we'd given him. He said he'd like to take me out to lunch. He was going to bring me something from the field and all this. This guy gets over here from the valley, and I come down to meet him. He sees me in a wheelchair, and he is speechless. He goes and says, "Here's the stuff from the vineyard." This guy has two great big boxes of grapes. He tossed them down, and they were oozing out. (laughter) He says, "I've got to go off to lunch now, see you later." And here, he'd set up a lunch date. It was a change of mind.

Then later on, I got the job of planning the machine schedules from headquarters up to the mills, St. Helen’s, Oregon, Camas, Washington. What you had to do there was to make sure that those machines were operating all the time so that you had to get orders in to fill the machines, or if they—if there was a breakdown, then you had to—even if it's just all kinds of problems that could happen. So it was an interesting, and very responsible as far as—not so much as headquarters were concerned, but the mills themselves were concerned.

So you worked for Crown Zellerbach for how many years?

For twenty seven.

And you retired when?

1982.

So now that you're retired, what do you do every day?

Jeez, I've got the work with the disabled workers, that's what really keeps me busy, and I'm on the advisory committee for disability on the Golden Gate Bridge, and I'm with the paratransit coordinating council, and then there was a couple others I was with for a while.
But I just ran out of time and so forth. Then you might be interested in the fact that about a year and a half ago, I had to take my driver's license test—you drive? Took my driver's license test, and I passed the written test, and when I went to do the eye test and so forth, why—and then there's a paper to sign, and what I usually use is a felt tip pen, because it's easier for me to grab and to write with. The damn thing had dropped out of my wallet in the car and I didn't have it. So I asked them for a felt or for a pen, if they had a felt tip or not, and they didn't. They had a ballpoint pen, which is one of these that you have to push down real hard, and I had to use both hands to do it. So the gal at that desk referred me to—I wrote a note to the safety officer, and the next thing I know, I'm getting a call into the safety office. So I'm getting interviewed up at Petaluma. I took the test in Novato, the written test, and then I got this to go to Petaluma, to the safety officer there. We talked for about an hour or so, maybe even more. She wrote on her report that you know, the thing she was recommending was to take a driving test, because I hadn't taken a driving test in a long, long time.

Well, what has happened with it ever since they found out with the DMV [Department of Motor Vehicles] is they lost all their records on disabled drivers, this is computer records. They had no paper backup at all. And of people who had taken the driving test, and on the back of our license is probably a little note on the back of it, if you've noticed, saying that you had to have hand controls. I had it on mine for oh, a few years, and when they changed over from the type of license that they had at one point over to a very heavy plastic, why it didn't have it on it, but I didn't even notice that. At that point I needed to get my driver's license renewed. I took the written test, and that's all I had to do. I never was asked to take a driving test. But after getting to be a certain age, I guess seventy or something like that, why you're supposed to take it every two years or five years, whatever that's required. They never did ask me. I just followed the regulations, and so they accused me of getting away with something. I kept asking them “What am I getting away with?” I never got a reply to the safety office lady who asked me that, and then I took the driving test, and she said the same thing to me. I said, “This is the second time this has happened; what is it I'm getting away with?” She didn't answer either.

Well, they couldn't say it because they had lost the records, but they knew that I hadn't taken a driving test for a long time. I didn't know I had to take a driving test, unless they specifically asked for it. So I take the driving test and the gal wasn't, I don't think, too knowledgeable as far as the disabled driver was concerned. I asked her, I said, “Do you have a driving test for very many disabled people?” She thought about it, and she said, “Oh, I have one lady. A single mother that had five kids.” She was telling me about her experience with that. That's all she mentioned. So from what I could see, she really didn't know what to look for as far as disabled drivers were concerned. I mean, the fact that you have to have one hand on the knob and one on this, you know, there are times that you're going to have to take your hand off to do something. Put on a turn signal, you know, you take it off this and hold on. But anyway, she couldn't see that. She put me down, there was one on the driving test, if you get a critical error, what was my critical error?

Wife: Backing up or—no, it was going too fast.
Oh, it was going too fast.

No, no, going too slow in a forty-five mile per hour zone.

Yeah. What had happened is that, this was up in Novato one morning, she took me out for a drive. The first problem that I ran into was she asked me to park parallel along the curb, and there was nobody else, so it was pretty easy to do it. I drove over and pretty much straight into the curb area. She said, “That's fine.” Then she'd mark it down on her comments. Then she says, "Back up for me." I backed up. You have a van I take it?

No, just the car.

Well, with the van, the door opening, sliding door, is on the right hand side. So if you get too close to the curb, you can damage that door, and then you can't get it open at all. So I make sure that I'm a distance from the curb. So when I backed up, I backed up in the same angle that I came in, and she screamed at me. “I said a straight line,” she absolutely screamed, “a straight line.” I looked at her, and I said, “When I was started out, I was about six inches from the curb, and right now I'm only about twelve inches from the curb.” I said. “I think that is pretty much a straight line as far as the regulations are concerned.” She was completely wrong on it. Because I looked at what she has to follow as far as the driving test is concerned. You can be you know—I was within regulations. I don't know why the hell she screamed at me. But anyway, what she got me for was along—what? Well, she mentioned the fact that when I went to unlock the car, I took my key out, and I put it in my mouth and turned it. I had to put my key in my mouth in order to turn the—I mean, that's what I do.

So what? (laughter)

Yeah, exactly. If I knew she was that sensitive to it, I could've done it a different way.

You didn't ask her to put it in her mouth. (laughter)

But I went on Redwood Highway, which is parallel to Highway 101, and when I took the corner, you know, you're trying to do everything right. Looking back here, looking this way and that way, I missed two signs that said “Speed Limit 45” miles an hour. But anyway, later on, on the road, there wasn't anybody else on the road, in back of me, in front of me, and I knew she was going to ask me to turn left, because otherwise I would've had to go over to the freeway, and she didn't want to get over there. So I just sort of slowed down, not knowing that forty-five—I don't think it would've made much difference. I guess I got below thirty-five miles an hour, as far as she thought. I mean, I don't know how else she could tell from the angle, and she blew me down for a critical error, for going ten miles an hour lower than the speed limit. So that was the critical error.
So I get back, she makes out the report, and there are places there that say—ask what equipment, special equipment does the driver have on his car? She didn't put anything down for that. So I don't think she knew what to look for. I have wraparound mirrors on my car, so you can see all over the place. Well, you can see the car right here, windows all over the place. So she wasn't very observant. So she writes down, "Should repeat because of the critical error, should repeat driving test," and sends it back to the safety office. The safety office, I get a letter from them saying, "Turn in your license." I haven't had a ticket in twenty-five years. I call up the lawyer, and I says, "Tim," I said, "I think something screwy is going on here," I told him about it. He said, "Well, let me look into it." He said, "That's ridiculous." So he said, "Give me the license, send it to me, and I'll take it over there in person just to make sure that they have it." I wasn't supposed to drive anymore. So he delivered it. That was a year and a half—and we've been going at it as far as legally ever since then.

Bonney: So you haven't been able to drive for a year and a half? And no one responds?

Bohlke: Well, we've been—we've had our court appearances. We had one February 28, and that was before the settlement judge. You always have to see if you can settle these things, according to what he wants. He's a busy guy, apparently, and didn't have too much time. He's—Tim had asked for a delay on it, and he said, "No delay, we're going to get on it right now." So this was 10:00 a.m., worked through about two hours—four hours straight, and got things going on it pretty well. Then he had other appointments and had to stop, and he hasn't had time since then. I think that it's either today or tomorrow that his secretary was supposed to call Tim and let her know when they can set up the next appointment. So it's just one of these delayed things. What it looks like it's going to be is there—they'll have a couple of settlement court dates, and then there will be the jury on January 8. That's another six months off. It's been pretty trying, particularly for Vicky, because she's got to drive me all over. I'm going nuts, you know, I just love getting in a car and doing things. Little errands here and there, something I need or meetings or whatever. She's not too bothered by my schedule.

Bonney: Well, sorry to hear that little story. It's not very hopeful.

Bohlke: Well, we found out that they're talking now about wiping everything off my record having to do with this. They can see where they're—their lawyer can see where there was a mistake made. So we're at least at that point, which makes me feel good. Of course, I have to say that there's going to be certain things that have to be done. There is a couple of things on the car that needs to be upgraded. I don't—your hands are pretty good, pretty strong for pulling an emergency break and so forth.

Bonney: I've never tried it.

N2: You have to do it when your driver's license test.
Bonney: I can't do that.

Bohlke: Yeah. Well I've got a knob there to pull, but I can pull it and get it pretty well in —

Bonney: Well, mine's in the console. But I can pull it, yes, but I can't release it.

Bohlke: But so we're going to have to have a hydraulic thing put on the emergency brake, so I can just push a button. Then the damned windshield wiper control is on the end of the signal indicator, and it's just—you have to turn it very slightly in order to turn it on or go to different positions. We have problems with it all the time because when you go to change a signal, well you can turn the thing on without a drop, but I've got to get that changed around too.

Bonney: Well Russ, I want to thank you very much for letting me come and interview you. And thank you for contacting us.

Bohlke: Yeah. Well, I'm glad to unload all my troubles. (laughter)

Bonney: Those troubles and moans. Well, thank you very much.

Bohlke: Sure, thank you.