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Lester R. Brown (April 5, 1973)

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Oral History Interview

with

MR. LESTER R. BROWN

April 5, 1973
Los Angeles, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with the distinguished American orchestra leader, [Lester R.] Les Brown, in Los Angeles, California. The date is April 5, 1973, Arena interviewing. Les, if I may call you Les . . .

BROWN: Please do.

ARENA: Thank you, and I'm Dick, of course. For the record, what is your full legal name; and then, from the standpoint of a little background before we go into your contact with President Nixon, for the record state where and when you were born, a summary of your educational background, including your college years at Duke [University], your major and minor, and anything along those lines of your own personal background would be of help.

BROWN: All right, Dick. Well, first, I was born on March 14, 1912, in a town called Reinerton, Pennsylvania. And I don't remember much of Reinerton because my father left there, I guess, when I was an infant, not even one year old, and moved to the next little town called Tower City [Pennsylvania] where Dad had the only bakery shop in town. Reinerton, if you could call it a suburb, was actually a suburb of Tower City, which was a town at that time of about thirty-five hundred people. And Reinerton at the most had six or seven hundred, and still does, a very small town--Pennsylvania Dutch, by the way.

ARENA: Near what other large town, Les?

BROWN: Well, Pottsville [Pennsylvania] was the closest one. That was about twenty miles away, and Harrisburg [Pennsylvania] was about thirty miles away, which of course, is the capital and down on the Susquehanna River. Tower City and Reinerton are roughly twenty miles from the Susquehanna, as the crow flies, and when the new road goes in it's only about, oh at the most, twenty-two miles from Harrisburg. We used to have to go a circuitous route to get to Harrisburg, out to the river and down. Now you can go across the mountains on a freeway, or what they call their interstates.

I went through the usual grade school in Tower City, and then my father sold his bakery and went to a town called Lykens, Pennsylvania, which is roughly seven miles from Tower City. When I finished my freshman year in high school, he sent me off with a friend, who was a great trombone player, to the Ithaca Conservatory of Music. Paul Lester was his name, and he and I roomed together at Ithaca Conservatory of Music, which is now Ithaca College, by the way. It has changed. It's a much larger school than it was then.

ARENA: Of course, that's in New York state.

BROWN: Ithaca, New York.

ARENA: Cornell [University] is also there.

BROWN: Cornell is there. We were downtown; they had a small building. They had a school of about six or seven hundred students. Now it's practically a university. They have a new campus up above Cornell, looking down on Cornell, up in the hills, and a registration of close to five thousand, but it's strictly devoted to music, the dramatic arts, physical education and plain B.A. [Bachelor of Arts], so it's not a university yet. I imagine some day it will be, but it's had a tremendous growth.

I spent from '26 to '29 there, but then I had to go back and finish my high school education, so I was lucky enough to get a musical scholarship--a full scholarship, by the way--and we needed it because those were the depression days, and from '29 to '32 I went to New York Military Academy, played in the band, led the school orchestra and wrote music for the school musical that they put on every year.

ARENA: Just for the record, to be sure, I believe you said New York Military Academy is just above West Point [U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York].

BROWN: Seven miles above West Point on the Hudson [River].

ARENA: And that is still in existence?

BROWN: It's at Cornwall-on-the Hudson, New York. It's still in existence and bigger than ever, and as I mentioned to you before, it's one of the few military schools that's still doing well, although we still get letters, "please contribute," like from any school. I get them from Ithaca, and everything.

So after three years of picking up and finishing my preparatory work, I was set to go to the University of Pennsylvania, but I met an orchestra from Duke [University] called Nick Laney and the Blue Devils. He happened to be the star halfback on the team that Wallace Wade was coaching in those days. He also liked to sing and he fronted the band. He wasn't a musician, but he loved music and he sang well--in those days through a megaphone, like Rudy Vallee. It was a couple of years later before we got a public address system. And they talked me into going to Duke University, mainly because down there we got free meals for playing a concert between 6 and 7 o'clock each weekday night, Monday through Friday. And in those depression days, free meals was a big item. As I remember, in those days tuition was two hundred dollars a semester, or was it two hundred dollars a year. I can't remember; my dad furnished that. But for playing in this orchestra they promised me this, or at least said they'd been averaging around eighteen dollars a week, which took care of buying books and having a beer, or taking a girl to a movie. In those days you could take them to a matinee for a quarter. And so I thought that was a good idea and I went to Duke University. After two years Nick Laney had finished his four years of football but still hadn't graduated, and I inherited the band, because I had been doing all the arranging and rehearsing the band, and it became Les Brown and his Duke Blue Devils.

ARENA: Just to be sure, these years were between 1928 and 1932?

BROWN: No. I was in Ithaca Conservatory from '26 to '29, and from the fall of '29 to the spring of '32 at the New York Military Academy, and then the fall of '32 to June of '36 at Duke University, where I majored in French and minored in history. I certainly enjoyed the four years there at Duke, and it was a great experience for me, because I was the only one in the band that could arrange music and compose music, and it gave me my own little workshop and a band to experiment with. At the end of '36 the band in its entirety left school and went on one-nighters for a whole year and three months, until September of the following year when the parents got after half of the boys who hadn't graduated. They went back to school, and rightfully so. The band disbanded and I went into New York as an arranger and composer to see what I could do. Luckily, I got work right away. In 1938 I started what is now the Band of Renown in New York City [New York]. That brings us up through Duke, anyway.

ARENA: It certainly does. Just for the record, I'd like to go into your personal contact with the President on the basis of what fellow law students of the President recall and have you react to their recollections, to what extent these recollections are accurate, and they say they're not sure but this was

their recollections. And since your contact with the President is now a matter of record and is usually mentioned whenever his stay at Duke is mentioned, it's very important to get this as accurate as we can from your recollections. So, taking this fellow law student of the President, whose name I will not mention, taking this law student's recollections and reading them into the record, then I'll have you just react to them.

BROWN: All right.

ARENA: And I'm beginning with what he said. I raised the question: "While we're on the question of dancing and music, as it comes to mind, did you ever see him (referring to President Nixon) perform at the piano? Were you aware that he had studied the piano?" Answer: "Oh, yes, I knew that he was a good piano player." My question: "Could he go along, say, with popular singing on the spot?" Answer: "Oh, yeah. He can just sit down at the piano, and I think it's a shame that they never got him and Harry Truman together. I think somebody suggested it one time, but there weren't very many places where we ran into pianos, but occasionally Nixon would sit down at the piano some place or other and play something. I don't think I ever remember hearing him play anything but popular music. As I say, it wasn't often, but that's whatever memory there is." My question: "Do you recall Les Brown as a part of the participation?" Answer: "Yeah, when we were in school there were two orchestras. We had an East and a West Campus. You probably heard of this. The East Campus was the women's campus. The West Campus was the men's campus. There were two orchestras which played in the Unions on these two campuses after dinner every night, five nights a week, and then they'd rent themselves out for dances on other nights, and they'd play for half an hour to an hour." How does that sound from the standpoint of accuracy?

BROWN: That is accurate, except for one thing. If we did get a mid-week engagement, from Raleigh [North Carolina] or Chapel Hill [North Carolina], or anything close enough so we didn't have to miss school the next day, the manager of the Union was very nice in letting us off and there wouldn't be any music on that particular night. Now that happened maybe only six or seven times a school year. But everybody needed money in those days and he was very nice to let us off. So we were supposed to play, as I said, every Monday through Friday between 6 and 7 o'clock. He said a half hour to an hour. It was actually an hour, give or take a few minutes.

On the girls' campus, a lot of the girls would dance. But on the men's campus they just sat around on the floor or on what chairs were available. It was pretty crowded; it was a small room. It was the lobby of the Union building. They called it the Union because that was where they had the drug store and the soda shop and the post office, the administrative offices which were upstairs, things like that, as apart from the dormitories or the different buildings which had classrooms. It was a meeting place, that's all. In

Athens, Greece, I guess they called it the L'odeon. We played there every night, and it was surprising; we'd play from the first of October to the end of October, and then we'd go to the girls' campus, and Johnny Long's orchestra would come over to the men's campus, every other month. On the girls' campus they were allowed to dance, but on the men's campus they just sat and listened, of course, because it would look kind of foolish to see the men dancing. And we had a little more liberty, I'd say, on the men's campus. We had a few songs that were suggestive. Now they'd be rated GP [General Public], but in those days were a little suggestive, but we got away with it. We had tunes like, "Annie's Cousin Fannie," which was a play on words, the whole thing; and "Golfin' Papa," which was another double entendre song. We wouldn't use those on the girls' campus. We were a little more restricted. On the men's campus we could also play louder music or concert music and everything, but on the girls' campus we just played dance music. And again, it was a good workshop for us, because we got to know what the girls like and what they men like, and when we went out in the world afterwards we had a pretty good idea of what the public liked.

Now, as far as knowing the President, I cannot recall ever meeting him. He has told me since, because I have met him and I know him a lot better now. He's the only President I actually ever met except [Dwight D.] Eisenhower, who was a member of the El Dorado Country Club down in Palm Desert [California] where I belong, too. We had quite nice chats. But anyway, having worked on the campaign in 1968 and '72, I'm a very big admirer of the President. I do not in any way recall ever meeting him then (at Duke). He told me that he used to come in and hear the band; he has told the public that. He has told it at rallies where we've been playing in California and also at the Inaugural Ball, and also when he and I played golf here at Bel-Air [Country Club] he told me about it, and I said, "That's great. I wish I could remember you, but I can't honestly say I do." I have heard people say, friends of mine at Duke, "Oh, yeah, he was there. We saw him. He loved music and he used to come and hear the band." But I don't ever remember meeting him.

ARENA: I just want to finish whatever other remarks this gentleman had, to see if there are other ideas that might come from his comments. So I do ask, then, "What I wonder is, were the students doing this on their own?" And the answer was: "They were all students doing it on their own" (that is, you and the orchestra). They'd organized their own bands and kind of worked out this arrangement with whoever ran the student dining halls, with the administration, of course. Les Brown was one, and Johnny Long was another, and both of them became bands of national reputation. They alternated campuses. That is, one week one would play on the West Campus and the next week it would play on the East Campus, and the other one was alternating." (You made the correction that it was really a month change rather than a week.)

BROWN: Monthly, yes.

ARENA: "So we heard both orchestras in alternate weeks." I'm going back to this law student who graduated the same year as the President. "Les Brown was one, and I followed him. Johnny Long was great. He was one of the few left-handed concert violinists." My comment: "I don't recall. I know Les Brown is still living. The speaker: "Johnny Long is dead."

BROWN: How long ago was this taken?

ARENA: This was taken, oh, not more than six or seven months ago.

BROWN: Johnny Long just died in November of '72.

ARENA: So apparently he had not heard of him and assumed, I see. Then when this was taken he was still living.

BROWN: Johnny Long, you have to admire him. After his band lost its popularity, as most bands did--you know what happened to the big band business after the war, World War II that is--his band went from a full sixteen-piece band, down to twelve and then to eight and it met some reverses. A very nice man. He and I were very friendly at Duke and we double-dated an awful lot. He went back to the University of West Virginia to finish his schooling. He had never gotten his degree. In one year he picked up enough credits and he was hired as a teacher there, in what capacity, I don't know whether it was music or not. I saw him about three years ago and he told me he planned to do this. He went back and got his degree; he was teaching three months when he died--or two maybe--November of '72.

ARENA: I see.

BROWN: He was from Charlotte, North Carolina. He was a left-handed violinist, too. A very nice man. We were all friendly rivals in those days, to the point that if they were booked on a certain night and they got a request to play another engagement on the same night, they would refer these people to us, because they were busy; and vice versa, we'd do the same for them. We used to get together and have softball games and things like that, too.

ARENA: And this person bringing in the President in connection with you, this is what he says: (of course, you've answered the basic question, but there might be some other points that might be worth commenting on; that is, as far as your and President Nixon's direct association with one another) "I have just a nagging recollection that Nixon and Johnny Long came to know each other." I don't know if you think that might be true or not.

BROWN: I couldn't answer that.

ARENA: "But I do know that Nixon and Les Brown struck up an acquaintance during that period of time."

BROWN: It's possible, Dick, but . . .

ARENA: But you may have forgotten it.

BROWN: I have no recollection of it.

ARENA: "And I've heard since that they've seen each other some in later years." But that would be just hearsay, and of course, you've confirming that.

BROWN: Much more than then, mainly because in 1960 after his defeat by [John F.] Kennedy, he came out to California with a law, and the late Harry Emrich was president then of Bel-Air Country Club, or on the board of directors--I don't remember if he was actually president--and he became president of the club shortly thereafter. He and the board of directors offered to the ex-Vice President Nixon an honorary membership, which he took, and the only two people he knew in the whole club were Harry Emrich and myself. So whenever he was free--he'd never give you a day's notice--he call you in the morning and say, "Can you play?" And actually I only got to play with him three or four times, but Harry Emrich got to play with him almost two or three times a month, and they became very close friends. And Harry, of course, was a staunch Republican, and when they went to New York they'd always be Nixons' guests at dinner, and they worked hard on the campaign of '68; and he passed away, I think, in '70.

I got to know the President much better from playing golf and down at El Dorado [Country Club]. He'd come down to visit with [Dwight D.] Eisenhower and I'd see him down there, too. I didn't get to play with him down there. He always played with the President. I was invited to play with Eisenhower once and that day I just couldn't make it. I had something that I thought was important to do, and my wife stills thinks I was crazy for not giving up whatever I had to do and playing with him, but I didn't.

ARENA: For the record, El Dorado [Country Club] is in what city and state?

BROWN: It was at that time considered part of Palm Desert. Since the boundary lines have been changed, it's now in Indian Wells [California], which is roughly seventeen miles east of Palm Springs [California]. It's in the Palm Springs area, and it's the class country club down there.

ARENA: And just so there's no confusion, the club that sponsored--and you were one of the sponsors--the President as an honorary member, is the one we are now in, the Bel-Air Country Club.

BROWN: That's right, in West Los Angeles [California], in the hills above UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles].

ARENA: There is just one sentence or two which completes this gentleman's recollections, and I do want to get it down for the record and get your reaction. "I do know that, because I suppose of Nixon's interest in music, he'd get over there to hear him play." Here of course he is referring to both you and Johnny Long. "He enjoyed hearing them play, and he got to know Les Brown." And of course, we've handled that situation. I just wonder if you want to say anything about your contact with the law school in the sense that, did that stand out in any way from the standpoint of the undergraduates being aware that there was a law school? Did the law school have any special open trial sessions that you attended?

BROWN: No, I never attended any. Of course, we were aware of the law school. It was considered in those days probably the best law school in the South by the academic people. But the graduate school and the undergraduate school were more or less apart. I think socially they were, too, if not for any other reason than that the graduate students worked a lot harder than the undergraduates, especially in law school, which I am sure takes an awful lot of study.

We did play--both Johnny Long and our Blue Devils--for law school dances, which they had in a ballroom in the Union. It was on the second floor. They could only accommodate about two or three hundred people, but that was big enough for most fraternity dances and special dances, law school dances, whatever.

ARENA: Do you recall: one, firsthand at that time that the law school had a particular social dance a year and that you had some connection with it; two, do you recall since that time, right up to the present time, you and the President discussing this role of music, your role and his interest in it? Whatever comes to mind along these two lines would be very helpful.

BROWN: Well, yes. As I mentioned more or less before, when we were playing golf he'd tell--we generally played as a foursome--the others, "I used to go listen to Les all the time. He played for our dances at Duke." And I'd always say, "Isn't it funny, Dick (I called him Dick in those days), I don't remember. I remember playing for the dances, but I do not remember you. Of course, I followed you all through your days in Congress and as Vice President, and I've been a Republican all my life." And I've worked with him since, and we talked about how I've worked on the campaigns, with the President, you know. What do they call it? They had a different name for it this year. Actually in '68 I was in charge of Celebrities for the President, but in an honorary sense rather than a working sense. A friend of mine from Dayton, Ohio, Cy Laughter (spelled like Laughter)--Cyrus, the Great, I call him that now and then, because he can hit a golf ball a mile--called me one day and said, "I understand you're working on the campaign." I said, "Yeah." And he gave up six months from his family-owned company, a tool and die company of which he was president and his

father was chairman of the board, to go along with Nixon wherever he went, and he still has carte blanche at the White House, inasmuch as being accepted. He has been there many times as the Nixons' guest. He spent a lot of his own money and never put in a bill. He's an affluent person. He made me honorary chairman of Celebrities for Nixon. I did get people like Fred MacMurray and [James] Jim Stewart and other Republicans I knew anywhere from San Diego [California] to San Francisco [California] to at least have their name as backing the President, and things like that, so I did do a little work in that way, but that was in 1968.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: I wonder if you, by any chance, recall to any extent the policy of eating in these outer homes, where I understand the students would pile into a big car and the person who may have brought them out there may have gotten his meal free? Or did you have all your meals taken care of by the scholarship and did not take advantage of that?

BROWN: Well, it wasn't a scholarship. It was just that in return for our services the whole orchestra got free meals at the Union for working the five nights a week.

ARENA: It was just that, it wasn't tuition. You just had meals free.

BROWN: That's all. As leader, I made a little more than the other boys in the band, but very little, and I had to do three times as much work, because I did all the arranging and copying and all. We didn't use what they called stock arrangements in those days, which you could buy for seventy-five cents. We did our own so the band would have it's own peculiar or particular style. It could be peculiar in some ways, too. Yes; that happened I think during the depression all over the country, like eating places, boarding houses, if you want to call them that without sleeping there; you would sleep in the dormitory. I know the meals at the Union were, considering the day, I think their dinner was 75 cents, and probably lunch was 35 cents or 50 cents and breakfast 35 cents. They could still get a better deal and better food, because it wasn't done on a large scale. The Union served over two thousand undergraduates an evening, but if you went to one of these eating places, generally the woman was a very good cook, and eight of you could eat for maybe five dollars a week. Now remember, we're talking about '32, '33, '34.

ARENA: Would that be one meal a day, when you're talking about five dollars a week?

BROWN: It might only be dinner. It might have been even less than that; I don't know. But it was much better food than you got at the Union, only because they had to do it on a grand scale, to eat there you know, and the menus weren't varied. You

could practically tell what day it was by what they fed you, and you had no choice. There was enough to eat. It was a balanced diet; they had a dietician and it was good.

ARENA: Speaking about common interests and common places of eating, do you recall, again from firsthand recollections of that time or since that time, discussing the question or subject with the President of the interest that the students, including graduate students, had in sports at college?

BROWN: Well, of course, during the years that I was there and the President, we had very good football teams. Wallace Wade was considered as good a coach as you could find in the country. We had a lot of All-Americans. And I mentioned before, Nick Laney who had the band before me, was the star halfback, and he made All-Southern, but we had guys like Ace Parker who made All-American easily and went on to the pro ranks. Also Fred Crawford who was an All-American tackle, first choice, and that was in the days when they only had one. I think it was the Walter Camp All-American. Collier's Weekly didn't have one and Liberty didn't have one and the Saturday Evening Post in those days. Now, you know, there's so many All-Americans that which one is the most prestigious, who knows? In those days they only had one.

We had a very good football team. We went to the Rose Bowl, not during that time it turned out, but later in '39 some of the fellows that I went to school with came out here and played at USC [University of Southern California] and lost in the last ten seconds on a field goal. And that was the year that they had a team that was unscored upon, undefeated and unscored upon, 1939, until the Rose Bowl [Pasadena, California] game. And again, during the war they had the Rose Bowl; they came to Durham [North Carolina]. They transferred there because there was a blackout here on the West Coast. And of course, we all know the President's enthusiasm for sports, especially football, even trying to be a coach himself. I'm sure he attended all the games, because it was a big event when we had a football game during the fall, that was a big social event, and there would always be the dance afterwards, probably two or three, and we'd be playing for one of them.

ARENA: Do you recall his mentioning to you at any time his interest in or his association with dancing, by the way?

BROWN: No.

ARENA: So much is said about . . .

BROWN: We have to talk about Ace Parker and Fred Crawford and Wallace Wade and the great players we had there. There are others that are still there at school, as coaches or in the athletic department. In fact, Ace Parker was a great baseball player, too. He was up with the Dodgers and became after Jack Combs died, who was the baseball coach, Ace became baseball coach there. Combs was a big pitcher for the Philadelphia Athletics under Connie Mack.

ARENA: To go from the physical to the spiritual, to a certain extent, do you recall the head of the school of religion? Do you recall him personally, Dr. Elbert Russell?

BROWN: Only by name. I am not a very religious person.

ARENA: Did you know that he was a Quaker?

BROWN: No, I didn't. I think they had the most beautiful chapel there at Duke, and I'm almost ashamed to say that I was inside of it maybe four or five times, and that was for very special events.

ARENA: Does that mean--if this isn't too personal--that chapel was not required and that you just skipped it?

BROWN: No. It was required in the old days of Trinity College, the school that became Duke. A religious course was required to get your degree, at least one year of something, two semesters of whatever you wanted to take. But it was not required that you attend church at all.

ARENA: You don't recall that Dr. Russell may have been that religion teacher, by any chance? Or you think you would have if . . .

BROWN: I think I would have if . . .

ARENA: Yes.

BROWN: But they had more than one, of course. They had quite a few religious courses in the curriculum, and I'm sure that I never attended one that Dr. Russell conducted.

ARENA: Some idea of the President's high regard for the undergraduate school at Duke University is indicated, I believe, by the fact that his brother, Edward [Calvert] Nixon, has stated in a recent article in Pageant magazine (which has a lot of pictures and references to the President's stay at Duke) that the President encouraged him to choose Duke University for his college education. In view of that, could I ask you how you would size up your own alma mater, Duke undergraduate school?

BROWN: I think Duke [University] at that time was a very good school, and now I think it's a wonderful school. We were there during the formative years. Actually, I think the Duke endowment started in 1928, and it took them two, three or four. . . . When I got there in '32 they were just finishing the men's campus, and not completely. When it rained or something, we still had to walk around in mud because the sidewalks hadn't been finished, but the buildings, the beautiful Gothic buildings had for the most part been finished. Now they've been added to, and there's been all kinds of things added.

In my day they didn't have a music school, that's why I majored in French and minored in history. They didn't tell me that when I was in Boston [Massachusetts]. However I'd had my music education, but I would have liked to have had more; you can never get too much. And I enjoyed my years there immensely. I sent my son there, and I have had friends there there I've kept in touch with the school, the deans and presidents; as they've come and gone. I'm still on the fund-raising parts and active in the alumni here in California. I've been lucky enough to get some very good students. Some friends of mine right here from Bel-Air, their sons and daughters have gone to Duke and have shown a very good record. It's the hardest school in the country to get into, or it's just as hard as any; I wouldn't say the hardest. Especially in the women's school; that hasn't grown a bit. They still take one thousand girls and that's it, and you better have an A+ average or you're not going to get in.

ARENA: Excuse me, Les. As you know, we're not interested in this project at this time in the political years. Bearing that in mind, is there any question or topic that does deal with the non-political side of the President that I have not raised that you want to be sure is on the record?

BROWN: Well, I can't add much to it because, as I say, I have little or no recollection at that time, '32 to '36, of ever having seen the President or having been with him. It all came from his telling me what he did, and that has been spurious, too, because we talked mostly of the football teams and how he used to come to hear my band and Johnny Long's band. I didn't even know he played the piano until I read it in Time magazine one time. I wish I could say we did everything together, but it would rub off because it's not true.

ARENA: Would it be too much to ask you to give an evaluation of the President as a piano player?

BROWN: I've never heard him play. I think at one time there was a television show in which he sat down and played a few bars. Was it Duke Ellington's seventieth birthday?

ARENA: Television news showed that, and with Harry Truman.

BROWN: Yeah. I heard him play a few notes and it sounded fine to me, but I've never heard him play in person. We're going to the White House May 24 for the POW [Prisoner of War] show that Bob Hope is MCing [Master of Ceremony] and our band is playing for, and all the people that went overseas with us are invited back to put on a mammoth show for the ex-POW's and their families. I'm going to suggest--you've given me an idea--that he play the piano, and maybe we can get him up there.

ARENA: I just hope I don't get in trouble for that.

BROWN: No, I won't use your name, Dick.

ARENA: I do want to thank you, even though you wish it could be the other way around, even though you admit you do not recall personal contact with the President during the Duke years, since rumors are rampant, and it's a job on the historian not only to discover new information but to spike rumors and myths, and that is one of them, that you and the President knew one another personally.

BROWN: That's possible, you know.

ARENA: Yes. He knew you but you did not know him. Or, as you say, you may have known him and forgotten.

BROWN: Right. I just don't recall it. We were both young kids, so to speak. In fact, I'm a year older than the President. He always thought that because I was in undergraduate school--and we've talked about it--twice he said, "Well, you remember, I'm a little older than you. That's why you hit the ball farther," or something. And I said, "Now, wait a second. Let's get it straight. I'm a year older than you. Don't you remember? I told you, I went to three years of music school before Duke." Let's see, he was born in January, wasn't he?

ARENA: Yes, 1913.

BROWN: He's ten months younger than I am.

ARENA: In this reminiscing with the President, even now, do you recall that he mentioned his piano teacher, that is his aunt, Mrs. Jane Beeson, by any chance?

BROWN: No.

ARENA: Well, Les, I want to thank you again very much for not only granting this interview for the sake of history, but for being a most gracious host and allowing me to have lunch with you.

BROWN: It's been a great pleasure, and I'm certainly interested in your project. I hope it will be a big success and I can't wait to see the final project. I'm still interested in history, whether it be current or past.

ARENA: And this is both past and living history.

BROWN: Right.