

Donald N. Pitts
Interviewed by John Milner
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In Los Angeles

MILNER: Donald, you spent a part of your childhood living in the McKinley Home for boys. Could you tell me where that was located at that time?

PITTS: That was located out in the San Fernando Valley, in the area which is now Sherman Oaks. In fact, it's on the property which now includes Bullocks Fashion Square Mall on 250 acres adjacent to the Los Angeles River on Riverside Drive.

MILNER: Can you describe a little how McKinley looked and the types of buildings.

PITTS: Yes, it was spread out, obviously, with such large acreage, but it had very large solid one-foot thick cement wall type of construction of first of a big administration building, which included the dining room and the business office and social work offices. It included four major what they called "cottages," but were actually huge two-story cement buildings, which housed 36 kids on the lower and the upper level. So, we've got about 70 kids in four cottages. That shows you have about 250 kids, roughly, living in McKinley Home.

MILNER: Much like an Army barracks.

PITTS: Well, indestructible in the way it was constructed. Open dormitories with 15, 18 kids sleeping in the dormitory, and open rows of lockers in the hallways, community showers, community bathrooms. Yes, it was a lot like a military operation in a sense of the facilities and the institutional feeling.

MILNER: So you never had much privacy.

PITTS: No, no there wasn't any real privacy. There was a sluice out a ways, on the edge of the grounds of McKinley, which was kind of a jungle. The kids used to go down there and form little huts or clubs and things. In a way, it was a way of getting some privacy, but in general, there was no privacy.

MILNER: Can you remember the name of the man who was the director or head of the McKinley Home at that time?

PITTS: When I came in – my brother and I came in in 1934, the superintendent's name was Shaw. I do not remember his first name, but the kids always referred to him as "Beergut" Shaw.

MILNER: Beergut?

PITTS: Beergut. He was a drinker, and sometimes he got intoxicated some evening, let's say. He and his wife lived in the administration building, and they had a balcony up there. He'd come out there – when I look back, I guess, to say the least, it is rather embarrassing to think that the superintendent of this place was drunk and yelling at the kids and they're throwing things at him and calling him Beergut Shaw. But that was the superintendent.

MILNER: How long did he last while you were there?

PITTS: Seems to me it was a couple of years and he was replaced by Dr. Merle C. Maginnis who had come in from the school system. I believe it was Wisconsin. He was a totally different kind of person. He brought his family.

MILNER: Want to describe him a little?

PITTS: He was very efficient, very enthusiastic, very, I'd say, demanding of staff, getting them organized and having staff meetings. He was a good man in terms of

getting the community to know and understand McKinley Home, and getting a relationship with the Kiwanis Club for support. He was a very, very strong leader, if you will, and he did seem to appreciate the situation the kids were in, though he, himself, wasn't what you would call a personal counselor type of an individual. But he took an interest in the kids, trying to give them advice and guidance, particularly, as they were leaving.

MILNER: He had a family?

PITTS: Yes, he had his wife and he had a daughter and three boys, all with him. One of the things he did, which I respected him for really, he insisted, as part of the deal for coming, that they build a separate residence, a house, a normal home for the site where he and his family could live on the grounds of McKinley Home, and not up there in the administration building, which would have been impossible for a family of four kids, anyway.

MILNER: Sure. And he turned out to be a very good superintendent, you felt?

PITTS: Yes, I felt he was a very good superintendent. He did a lot for the home in terms of improving its facilities as well as getting support from other sources.

MILNER: You became a personal friend of his children, didn't you?

PITTS: Well, I became a personal friend of the youngest, who was approximately my age. We were in the same grade in school, and he had his son go to school with McKinley Home boys, which created great problems for his son. He was ridiculed by others as being the "prince," so to speak. He was looked upon as special, because he wasn't really one of us, yet he went to school with us all through grammar school, so we

grew up together from about third grade through high school. We were very close friends.

MILNER: You still see one of the daughters.

PITTS: Yes, the next youngest child was Joanne, and Joanne has also talked about the extreme problems she had as a girl growing up, living in the McKinley Home for 250 boys, and being in what would not have been a natural residential area and some of the problems she felt this created for her. Another son became a doctor, an orthopedic surgeon, and the oldest son was a missionary in China.

MILNER: Can you recall any of the other staff members, particularly, ones who influenced your life?

PITTS: Carl Klinger was the assistant superintendent, a big German. He was the iron hand, the disciplinarian. If there was anybody to hold the place together, he was, in terms of discipline. When you've got 250 kids running around, he was the source of that control. The matrons, if they had difficulties with you of any kind, would eventually say, "I'm taking you to see Klinger," or "You've got to go see Klinger," and that was the way the matrons had of getting you into conformance, or, if necessary, had you disciplined. Which included occasionally him having to slap you across the rear or across the face, cause some of the time the kids were belligerent.

MILNER: So, there was corporal punishment in the agency at that time.

PITTS: Yes, but only – I'd say only almost only by Carl Klinger, who was assistant superintendent, and he did it discriminately. He wasn't just batting kids around, but he did it when he thought it was necessary, I guess, in certain extreme cases to handle a kid that way.

My matron, Ms. Buckley, in the youngest cottage, carried around one of those wooden paddles they used to have balls tied to. She'd turn around and paddle and hit us with it. It would sting, but it was more in the way of corralling sheep. She was trying to get 36 little kids to go and take a shower at night, and sometimes she'd have to maybe give a little whack on the arm or the fanny to get them moving and get their attention or to keep control. One matron for 35, 36 kids required something because sometimes they would be a challenge.

MILNER: So you just had one matron in charge of 35 children. Was she there 8 hours a day or 24 hours a day or how long?

PITTS: Twenty-four hours a day.

MILNER: She was on duty full time.

PITTS: Full time.

MILNER: How many days a week?

PITTS: I believe she got off, if I'm not mistaken, one day every two weeks.

MILNER: She had one day of leave every two weeks.

PITTS: A substitute matron would come in. The dormitory, or what they call the cottage that I started in – they're all the same type of cottage, consisted of two large dormitories, 18 beds in each dormitory, meaning that you handle 36 kids – the matron's room was in the center between the two dormitories. She had access in and out to the two dormitories. That was her life 24 hours a day.

MILNER: Where did she sleep?

PITTS: There, in that room in between our two dormitories.

MILNER: She had one room between.

PITTS: Right. She ate with us, she cleaned up the cottages, the beds, the floors, the washrooms, getting us to learn how to get dressed and how to get ready for school – I'm talking about kids who were six, seven, eight at that time. Totally, she worried about us and sewing our clothes, getting our clothes to the laundry, getting them sorted out, teaching us how to make beds. You see how a human being could endure too long with such a job.

MILNER: Yes.

PITTS: Not to mention the stress involved because a lot of these kids were emotionally upset.

MILNER: Can you remember her name?

PITTS: Yes, her name was Josephine Buck.

MILNER: Josephine Buck.

PITTS: She was a very fine woman and a very well groomed woman. She spoke well. She was a Christian Scientist. I knew that because she got my mother interested in taking my brother, Ralph, to a Christian Science practitioner to see if he could help with his extreme asthma problems. But she was a firm disciplinarian, but at the same time, a fine woman. She was very fair, and she used food and candy as a way to show that we were doing well or had behaved properly, and withdrawal of candy and things if we had not behaved. She said prayers every night and every morning before we all got up or went to bed. She was a very conscientious, very hard-working woman.

MILNER: You mentioned, earlier, that there was a social service office. Could you tell me about the social workers?

PITTS: I never knew for years that it was a social workers office or that there were social workers. Maybe I was too young to tune in, but there were only two social workers that were in the administration building, and they were quite heavily involved, of course, in helping to screen and determine admissions in the McKinley Home which obviously had to be limited because there's only so much in the way of the facilities and staff. I don't recall having any contact with them at all in my growing up years. I was aware of them, but I was never quite sure what they did. I think they tended to have to focus on what I thought were more serious or problem or upset children. With only two people with 250 kids, you couldn't expect them to be covering all the bases.

MILNER: Do you know whether or not they were trained social workers who had degrees in social work?

PITTS: I don't know whether they did or not. I had the impression that the younger social worker, Miss St. John – everybody liked her – I had the impression she was educated and trained. But whether that was as a social worker, I don't know. She seemed to

MILNER: That was Miss St. John?

PITTS: That was Miss St. John.

MILNER: Can you remember the name of the other one?

PITTS: I believe her name was Miss Weiss.

MILNER: Miss White?

PITTS: Miss Weiss, W E I S S, but she was much more reserved, she was harder to reach, so to speak, but Miss St. John was out there. She communicated with and talked with and mixed with the kids. She was a delightful person.

MILNER: Did the agency do much work with the parents, with relation to parents?

PITTS: No, I think really not – a very, very, must have been a very limited extent because of the limited resources. In my case, I only know that they occasionally talked to my mom on the phone when she called about something, which would be rare. The other time was when the home arranged for my brother and me to meet our father out at a work camp where he was arrested for not providing child support or something of that sort. They took us out to see him. I'm not sure what that was all about, why, but it was a most traumatic experience, but they did arrange for us to see our father that one time, at his request, I think he made a strong plea to see us.

MILNER: Who sponsored the agency?

PITTS: The Community Chest.

MILNER: It was a Community Chest agency?

PITTS: It was a Community Chest agency.

MILNER: Was there any men's organization that was key sponsored?

PITTS: The Kiwanis Club was, and probably still is, focused on supporting primarily athletic facilities and equipment and activities, building a tennis court, handball court, football uniforms, they set up and arranged the camp up in Big Pines, Camp McKiwanis, which was a combination of McKinley and Kiwanis's names. They looked at the recreational side, and did a good job providing excellent courts and equipment, and things, excellent job. And they came out once a month and visited and had a dinner in the dining hall with the kids and then they'd have an entertainment program in the auditorium, which was a mixture of things, kind of boring films which we didn't understand. (laughter)

MILNER: You mentioned McKiwanis Camp. Did you go there as a kid, yourself?

PITTS: Yes, every kid went there. Each cottage had its turn during the summer, when it would go up to the camp for ten days. I started working up there as a counselor when Dr. McGinnis made the decision, I guess, to have kids that achieved Eagle Scout status, which he strongly supported the whole scouting program, to become counselors for this camp as form of recognition, as a way of having them feel how they had achieved and how they might develop further from that.

MILNER: You were an Eagle Scout?

PITTS: Yes, I became an Eagle Scout at the McKinley Home, a Boy Scout Troop, as did my friends Charles, Dana, and Jerry, and so forth, and so at one time we were counselors at the camp.

MILNER: How old were you when you were a counselor?

PITTS: I was a little young – one year younger than the rest. I was, I believe I was, say, 16.

MILNER: About 16 years old? Who headed that camp? Who was camp director?

PITTS: Camp Director was originally a fellow named Miles Smith, a very fine, outstanding teacher from grammar school. He really got the camp organized and set up. It was an outdoor camp; you essentially slept outdoors. There were not a bunch of buildings. There was a place for the kitchen, and a recreation hall where the director and some equipment was kept but basically the camp was outdoors. I worked up there as a counselor, and then I worked up there the next when my buddies went into the Navy. I was too young. I got out of high school before I was old enough to go into the Navy.

They asked me to be the program director at the camp, so I worked up there as the program director.

MILNER: You actually worked there at least two summers?

PITTS: Three summers. I also was asked, when I got out of the Navy – I was only in the Navy a year-and-a-half or so – when I got out, they had written me and asked me if I would come back, when I got out that summer, and assist the camp director, so I worked at that camp three years.

MILNER: Yes. Was that with the same director you had before?

PITTS: No. Mr. Smith had passed away, and they had to pull in somebody else.

MILNER: You mentioned that Mr. Smith was from the grade school. Was that located on the campus of McKinley Home?

PITTS: For all intents and purposes, it was, but it was a public grammar school in the public school system and built on property adjacent to the borderline of McKinley Home. It was just like being a part of the McKinley Home facilities. Though it was a public school, people in the area recognized it as a McKinley Home focus and they did not send their children, though other children did go there. It was McKinley Home grammar school.

MILNER: Can you remember the name of the school?

PITTS: McKinley Home Grammar School.

MILNER: It was called McKinley Home Grammar School.

PITTS: It was on the corner of Riverside Drive and Woodman Avenue, a delightful school and a well-kept facility, the grounds and the way it was run. It had a principal, Louis B. Hoffman, who was a fine – I thought, a fine principal. He brought

into focus things that maybe other schools didn't at that time, but he brought into the school classes and focus on nature and the different areas of the country and the fauna and flora and naturalism, and he taught us a whole lot about what you may call nature study with examinations and tests to keep us focused. It was a very, very good program.

MILNER: Did that also serve these kids as a high school?

PITTS: No, the grammar school went up to the eighth grade and then when you graduated from the eighth grade, you went to Van Nuys High School. The high school yellow bus would come in to the McKinley Home grounds and pick us up and take us to Van Nuys High School for ninth through twelfth grades, that's where we went to school.

MILNER: So the high school was a public school.

PITTS: It was truly public; a very public being co-educational and so forth. It was quite intimidating to go from this environment of McKinley for eight years, where you slept, ate, went to school, and then into this public school, which truly was a public school. It was quite a – we felt out of place, a lot of kids did, but a lot of kids did pretty well.

MILNER: Was there a lot of emphasis on sport at McKinley?

PITTS: Yes. That was probably the main outlet, if you will, for all types of our energy. There was much encouragement to participate in sports, there plenty of facilities. There were no demands that said you must be on a football team, or anything, but the kids just got into whether it was an organized team that they would practicing with or training for, or playing together on the grass, you know, touch football or handball or what not. It was just a natural. The kids were attracted to anything outdoors with all the space to run around with skateboards, scooters, or a bicycle, if you were lucky enough to

have one. There were handball courts and running here and there. There were wide-open spaces – plenty of outdoor sports. Indeed, it became a focus. Kids that were particularly good athletes did tend to get respect and looked upon and popular with the other kids.

MILNER: Did they do some gardening or farming on that 250 acres?

PITTS: Yes, they had their own farm. In fact, at the time I went in in 1934, it was called the McKinley Industrial Home for Boys. The word “Industrial” was in there, and it conveyed that the Home was self-sufficient and totally operated by growing all its own produce and its own cows, and the kids were all working and doing things to be self-sufficient. We had beef cattle and a print shop and a laundry to do laundry. It was a self-contained little community, and it faded away from that with time, but we all had jobs that included working, maybe, in pulling up carrots or milking cows or working in the hospital or helping with cooking in the kitchen. Everybody had a job as well as the jobs that had to do with maintaining the cottage you lived in.

MILNER: It was truly an industrial school then. About how many hours a day or a week would you put in as a child, working in the industry?

PITTS: Oh, that of course depended on your job. I worked at the hospital for some years, and I would guess we were working down there at least three or four hours a day, help get the breakfast ready, cleaned up, get ready for school, come back for lunch and then handle the dinner.

MILNER: What time would you get up in the morning to get the kids up?

PITTS: The kids all got up at six o'clock. The guys that worked in the barn to do the milking, of course got up much earlier. They were the barn crew. They were a

unique group in themselves (laughter). The whistle would go off and wake up everyone in the San Fernando Valley – the steam whistle at six o'clock.

MILNER: What time would you go to bed at night?

PITTS: Depending upon your age and what cottage you were in, the oldest kids in the high school cottages went to bed at nine, the lights were off at nine, and then it would be earlier than that depending on the younger children.

MILNER: The younger children, uh huh. You really put in long hours.

PITTS: Oh, I don't know. Six to nine was probably what was normal. They would allow you, if you were in high school, to stay up if you were in the library to do homework until lights would be out there. In general going to bed and turning the lights off in the dormitories where you slept was nine o'clock. Sometimes there were kids who did stay up.

MILNER: When you were in high school, were you encouraged to do the things that other kids from outside did in high school, like participate in the activity like drama or music or sports at that school?

PITTS: No, there was none, one way or the other. I don't recall any encouragement in that direction.

MILNER: Were you allowed to?

PITTS: Oh, yes, we could have done drama class or signed up for glee club, which some of us did – join the glee club, and go out to sports, yes. A lot of the kids went out for sports at Van Nuys High and did very well.

MILNER: Could you go to social things in the evening, like have a date?

PITTS: Yes, yes, that was not always so easy to arrange. It was not like going to see the girl across the street or something, because McKinley was sitting there – it was a big place, but yes, kids had dates. They might get permission or not get permission, and they would hitchhike in to go see their girlfriend or go to some school gathering. We hitchhiked around a lot both with and without permission. As we got older, we realized that was how we could get around. We'd hitchhike into Hollywood and it was a big deal to see a movie.

MILNER: Would you take many trips, as a group, to the beach or to the mountains?

PITTS: Yes, lots of trips, lots of interesting trips of all kinds. We'd go to the beach, took a group of us scouts that did the – I forget whether it those that were further along in terms of progress in the scouts – took us to see the World's Fair up in....

MILNER: San Francisco.

PITTS: San Francisco. They took us up a snow trip up to McKiwanis in the winter to play in the snow. We got free tickets to see the Ramona play or to see some show. People were always contributing tickets, obviously, also to football games at the Coliseum and that sort of thing.

MILNER: I think you donated a photograph to the archives of a bus that was given to you by some celebrity.

PITTS: Yes, that was a beautiful, beautiful luxurious bus, donated by Wallace Beery.

MILNER: Wallace Beery, the old movie star.

PITTS: Yes. He had that built for a special vacation he had planned to take, and it was really very luxurious at that time. It had folding seats and so forth. He was not able

to take the trip for some reason, perhaps, health, and he donated that bus – it was a beautiful dark navy blue bus – to McKinley Home. I remember that day they had this gathering. Wallace Beery was there, and my friend, Chuck Saunders was the elected student body president, Dr. McGinnis, the superintendent, and they had this big gathering and ceremony and presented the bus to McKinley Home. That was the way things occurred a lot – through donations.

MILNER: Can you remember about what year that was?

PITTS: Well, that probably was about 1938 or maybe '40. We had a couple of real old buses. I don't know who donated them. Those things were – they were out of the War or something. They were really old. But they needed buses to haul these kids around. They were all bashed. I don't know what – they didn't have any windows. All the windows were all broken out. As we got older and started going to the high school instead of just being in the grammar school and isolated, and started getting exposed to the outside world of going to high school, if we had to go in that bus, let's say, to school or to a movie, a lot of us would just get down on the floor so we wouldn't be seen. It was such a ghastly looking vehicle. (laughter) We were ashamed to ride in it. We were becoming sensitive to the outside world.

MILNER: Were the youngsters from McKinley allowed to go home on holidays or for weekends?

PITTS: Yes, certainly they were. They would go home usually for holidays, like some days over Christmas or Easter. I don't recall whether it would just be for a weekend. That might not be the case, but it would be over a school break in connection with holidays. Once in a while, a parent or a relative might drive out to visit you.

MILNER: What were most of the kids sent to McKinley Home for, what reason for the placement?

PITTS: They were called – what they were called doesn't necessarily answer the question – but they were called underprivileged kids. They were kids who had been abandoned or kids whose parents had both disappeared, or who were both alcoholic, or died in an accident, or who were emotionally disturbed, or there was just one parent, quite often, the other parent having died or disappeared or been drunk or in prison, and the one parent was unable to cope with raising a kid and trying to earn a living – a family economically deprived. So there were kids that lacked adequate or any home setting.

MILNER: Were there any orphaned children in the Home?

PITTS: I would guess so. We never talked about this stuff – it's strange – among us. We never talked with each other about what parents or family were doing.

MILNER: Did you ever know of any youngster being adopted from the home and placed by another agency, but living in that Home?

PITTS: I have the impression that some kids came from other institutions or homes for different reasons. Sometimes, because they felt they would do better in this McKinley Home environment, but maybe sometimes a kid was removed and placed in from McKinley to Junior Republic, for the other reason that he wasn't doing well in McKinley and needed a more severe environment.

MILNER: The Junior Republic was another agency in the community, another boys' school?

PITTS: Yes. It was sort of a step away from going to jail, if you will.

MILNER: Yes. It was more for delinquent kids?

PITTS: Yes.

MILNER: That's the distinction between the two agencies?

PITTS: McKinley wasn't basically for delinquents, though it's pretty hard to draw these arbitrary lines and say this one is and this one isn't for delinquents. Sometimes there was a little dabbling, you might say.

MILNER: You mean you're a bad boy, part time?

PITTS: Yes. (laughter) Or you are doing mischevious things that some might consider inappropriate part of the time, but you're not necessarily behaving basically as a what I would consider a truant. I might have stolen an ice cream bar out of the store here or some candy there or whatever something one of the other kids did. But I'm not a delinquent and I wasn't a delinquent.

MILNER: No. After you got out of the Navy, didn't you work in another camp program?

PITTS: Yes, Camp Max Strauss, out in the outer edges of Los Angeles here, sponsored by the Jewish Big Brothers Agency. I worked there for, oh, all the time I was in college. I worked summers and Christmas vacations and Easter vacations. They would have kids up there. I should explain it was not a Jewish restricted camp, although it was sponsored by Jewish Big Brothers. It was mixed in races, black, Spanish, and so forth. The kids were all under the care – I believe psychiatric care throughout the year in their own places where they lived, and they would come to this camp for the summer and Christmas and Easter for breaks, but they were more emotionally disturbed kids that were focused in a more constructive, organized way for their emotional situations.

MILNER: Where was that camp located?

PITTS: I can't think of the name – Verdugo? On Verdugo.

MILNER: Off Verdugo Road in the Glendale area? A little north of Glendale?

PITTS: Yes. Big camp, very big camp. I did very well there, incidentally, in the sense that Milt Goldberg, who headed up Big Brothers, I guess wanted me to work there. I forget exactly how we became acquainted, but I'd become quite known because of my years at McKinley Home's camp, the McKiwanis, and the association gatherings they'd have each year of camp counselors, and you've got some interface. Anyway, they had different levels of counselors, and I knew I had some good experience at McKinley Home, and I just wasn't going to start at the bottom. And so I didn't go to work for them the first year they offered me the job, because the assistant said I had to start at the bottom. But the next year they came around said okay, you can start at a higher level and he and I became aware (end of side one)

MILNER: You were saying that you were aware of the experience you'd had and how this would apply to your job at Camp Max Strauss.

PITTS: I was very perceptive and unusually effective in dealing with some of the children, including emotionally upset kids. Surprising so, I had developed my own techniques. We had to write group reports for the caseworkers, for which I used circles of different sizes to convey relationships of kids to each other and to me. I recall how the social work staff found this quite interesting.

I just had this idea, but what really, I think, is worth mentioning is after I worked there during college, when I graduated from college, from Pomona College, I was offered the job of being the camp director for Camp Max Strauss. I declined the job. I think I basically felt I was really not mature enough yet to take such responsibility. I hadn't

really thought about that as being my field or vocation. I had thought about social work versus business, and had more or less in my mind that I was going that way. But I remember how surprised I was that I was offered the job of running this camp that involved a number of children and a lot of responsibility.

MILNER: It really was at that point that you thought of the possibility of being a social worker?

PITTS: Oh, it made me have to think it through, because there was a specific job offer with some real responsibility. The camp must have had 150 or more each time, but the fact that they were working in conjunction with social workers and caseworkers and that it was inter-racial, also, probably the first in whole area, was a very significant opportunity and I possibly was coming to grips with the social work as a, you might say, a natural course or vocation to be followed. I could see or sensed that I had the skills. But at the same time, I wanted to turn to the economic side where I could be sure that I made enough money that I would never be in a predicament like my father was in when I was little. I was very, very much dominated by this, "I shall never be in need. I shall never be without. I shall never this and that."

MILNER: Sent you to be in the business world or the industrial world.

PITTS: Yes.

MILNER: Because of that, you always maintained an interest in human services, along with your work in the industrial world. I know you had two or three jobs – we won't discuss those, because they were brief – in business, but then you went with a very large corporation: TRW?

PITTS: Yes. Well, it's worth mentioning that first, though, I was in the foreign service for two years or so in the embassy in Warsaw and the consulate in Stuttgart, Germany. It was a great experience. That's what I had wanted to do, and had been waiting to, hopefully, somehow, get into the oreign service, and the bug of traveling was always been with me. Incidentally, while I was waiting to hear from the foreign service after I graduated from Pomona College, I worked for the neighborhood settlement. I can't recall the full name, but it was a neighborhood settlement activity that was headed up by Peg Mudgett (sp?) from Los Angeles for several months.

MILNER: Peg Mudgett still lives here.

PITTS: She does, yes. That experience, probably, was as much of a value to me as it was to the kids that we that we were helping, because I was hanging out in nowhere. I'd gotten out of college, my mom, the house that she had was gone, and I was floating. I had to figure out what to do and how to survive. So I did that instead of a job, and I remember doing it well while I was waiting. Then I did get an appointment with the counselor.

MILNER: What was your specific job in the settlement house?

PITTS: It was literally talking with – I sort of felt like I was relating to the kids, almost as though I was one of them, because my age didn't seem so much different, but to try to motivate and encourage them to focus on some constructive activities of what they might do with their time and so forth.

MILNER: Kind of a peer counseling.

PITTS: Yes, yes. They tend to relate to me easier than maybe somebody who was much older. Also, I probably shared with them that I had just grown up, too. McKinley

Home was that kind of place, and you can still do something with your life. I'd give them ideas of what they might do – just bull sessions.

MILNER: Can you describe the settlement? Where was it located?

PITTS: I don't really remember except it was in Los Angeles. It seems to be it might have been somewhere around Olympic Blvd. I don't really remember. It's fuzzy. It was kind of a nice little comfortable, but small, place, that consisted primarily of rooms and furniture that made it comfortable to sit around and have conversations with groups; small group meetings.

MILNER: What other kinds of activities did they have? Did they have a gym or any place where any sports could be played?

PITTS: No. So much for the neighborhood settlement. Even in the Foreign Service I got tapped for a little special assignment while I was in Poland. There was a young kid, a street kid who came in and wanted to demand refuge from the American Embassy because he thought maybe he was an American. He was 15, maybe 14 years old, but he was a problem in that nobody knew what he was or what he was up to. He was a delinquent sort, lived by stealing and had followed the soldiers during the Second World War. Anyway, the embassy said that somebody has to cope with this kid until we figure out what to do, and what his facts are. Anyway, I got that assignment of supervising him. I again found that I was very effective and was able to reach him, and communicate with him, whereas most of the others just couldn't seem to know how to reach him and gain a certain amount of confidence and cooperation from him, and keep from upsetting the embassy. It was a very rare experience.

MILNER: You had many interesting experiences on your overseas assignments.

PITTS: Yes. That one I mentioned, because it was sort of a social work.....

MILNER: Yes, I know, that's why I . . . After you returned from the Foreign Service, did you go to work for TRW?

PITTS: I went to work for a small company called the J.B. Ray Company first. It was a small electronics company. From there, I went into what was then Ramo-Wooldridge Corporation, in 1953 or 1954. That became TRW. That was in the very first stages of the Ramo-Wooldridge Corporation. I was very fortunate to be selected and hired by them to develop a program by the company.

MILNER: Yes, and your special assignment with the company was what?

PITTS: Well, the general field was in financial management. In time, I became the director of contracts for many years for what became Space Technology Laboratories out here for a number of years. But that evolved into a later assignment that was more of a government relations, public relations, customer relations type of a job and went to Washington for ten years for TRW. It was there I did get down to a special loaned executive assignment to the National Alliance of Business.

MILNER: You say to a special loaned executive position. Describe that.

PITTS: Well, the National Alliance of Business is a non-profit organization that is focused on getting the government and private industry to work together on the hard-core employment problem in this country. And the President, each year – I should say, every few years -- each new President selects and asks and gets one of the chief executive officers of the larger corporations in the country to become the chairman of the National Alliance of Business. He, in turn, brings in a small staff, and he brought in Lloyd Hand from TRW, who was the Senior Vice President of TRW, to be the President of the

National Alliance of Business, and I was the Vice President there for Business Management at the National Alliance for Business. I was there for about three years, immediately before I came back to California. It was a very, very exciting, a very challenging and intriguing experience, because we were working with how do you better handle this unemployment problem in this country. You're working all the different racial elements that were involved, with the White House staff, with the top executives of the Board of the National Alliance of Business from large corporations and social leaders like Benjamin Hooks and Coretta King were on the board, and so forth, so this was quite a whole new exposure, if you will, of trying to work a problem and taking part in this to evolve an approach, and to see that these people do apply their thinking and do discuss and try to resolve and solve problems and come up with ideas. A board meeting wasn't just, "How do you do? Let's have some coffee," sort of thing. The board meetings were held in the White House, but came up with the idea that instead of having the government providing all these jobs for the unemployed, of having private industry step up to and taking a commitment and train unemployed, unskilled people in areas where they needed these skills, and to get them, hopefully, into the private sector, into the private business and, hopefully, on a long-term basis, become constructive private citizens instead of those just working on jobs created by the government to have jobs. That was the main thrust while I was there, that was the direction I was trying to accomplish. That and the legislation did get through and the program did get underway when I was there.

MILNER: Did TRW pay your salary to work in the public, joint program?

PITTS: That's correct. The Chairman of the Board put in a significant amount of his time as the Chairman, worked at getting new leaders, CEOs of other companies to

join me aboard, and led the National Alliance of Business to strengthen and create a structure throughout the country of what became known as Private Industry Councils to implement this concept at the local levels.

MILNER: Did they sponsor some programs for children at all? I heard you make reference to some of the agencies that were helped, and I didn't know whether they were under that or not.

PITTS: Are you talking about the programs of the hard-core unemployment programs that were focused on younger people, primarily. Yes, they were either kids who had not gotten adequate education or dropped out of school and needed to get some trades. Yes, it was focused on the younger structure of the society to try to get them turned around into constructive, private job people in private jobs earning money and developing into long-term citizens in a more formal basis, you might say. They were with many, many different agencies throughout the Los Angeles area. I became aware of this more closely, because after being in Washington where this whole program was legislated, and then coming back here to live, TRW encouraged me to be on the Los Angeles Private Industry Council. So I was able to become part of seeing what went on at a local level in comparison with the concepts that had been created in Washington about how they thought this all ought to work.

MILNER: Does the program still exist?

PITTS: Yes, the program still exists.

MILNER: And you haven't been associated with it for a while?

PITTS: I have until a few years ago. I was on the Private Industry Council, I guess, about four years.

MILNER: Did individual agencies apply to them for funds or services of certain kinds?

PITTS: Yes. Individual agencies would put forth proposals of how they would train for specific skills, and what they're expected output would be in the way of training employees, and then get funds from the private industry council to carry out these job-training programs. There were many agencies that were funded and had to meet criteria in order to get the funds and in order to compete again each year in the realm of the competition as to the effectiveness of their programs.

MILNER: In many ways you've been very effective in getting business and industry involved in human services.

PITTS: Yes, I happen to believe that that is essential in this country if there is to be adequate and real progress as well as more adequate services. I think private industry is more and more embracing that concept as the way in which we can best tackle many of our social problems. In some ways, I think industry could do much more in maybe helping to embrace how to improve the educational system and contribute to, through instructors and equipment and all sorts of things, as some companies do right now in improving the educational system in this country. I think the idea of government/industry partnership and addressing issues of environmental problems of pollution and social problems and homelessness, I think that day is here and will continue more and more to be critical for the future of our society.

MILNER: You were influential in getting TRW to become interested in the School of Social Work at the University of Southern California and doing some things for them. Could you describe some of this?

PITTS: That just happens to bring the very bell that I was just hitting. I heard that the USC School of Social Work was contemplating establishment of an industrial social work program which was to be focused on training certain of your graduates to be ready to work in industry and in private business. This was a concept that was totally for most of the business world completely unintelligible. What would a social worker be doing getting trained to work in industry? I also became aware that I'd been going around sort of in the closet about being a social worker. This would give me a more full embrace of social work in getting associated with the USC program, and since I was invited to join that industrial social work board, and with TRW's concurrence to put in a limited amount of time and their understanding that they were supporting, as a company, having industry work with community to improve the community, they endorsed this kind of effort. So that's how I went into the program of industrial social work at USC. Which turned out to be a very stimulating and very satisfying kind of experience. The program got well launched, and Frances Feldman was the director of the program, beginning when it was in the forming stages and went on for some time. I felt that I made good contributions.

MILNER: Yes. In addition to that, haven't you served on one of the boards of the University?

PITTS: Well, the Dean of the School of Social Work, after I'd been on the industrial social work side of things as one element or one project of the School, the Dean of the School of Social Work asked me if I would join his Board of Advisors. So, I was on the Board of Advisors for three or four years.

MILNER: What years were those?

PITTS: The 1980's. I'd say 1985 to about 1989. I still am a member, but I haven't been active since I retired. I've been roaming the world and haven't been there. I have to address that question about whether it's time for me to help locate another executive who could be as effective as I was, if I'm going to continue to roam around.

(laughter)

MILNER: Is there anything else in your experience you'd like to comment on?

PITTS: Well, I don't know. That's a wide open question.

MILNER: You've had a long career.

PITTS: I've had a varied career. Varied. I think unusually so. I haven't really gotten into that I've been a lawyer, doing certain kinds of legal work all my life. I've had a wide range. In my time in Washington, when I was in government relations for TRW, which was – this job was created. I was the first one in it back in 1970, to focus on government policy, including where businesses would be expected or should fit in or contribute, and all this sort of thing. I found that my experiences and being perceptive of people and a certain awareness that is hard to describe but that I have, was very valuable in working with some of the councils and committees I was on in Washington, DC, and including getting into the mixture of bringing government and industry executives together in a council to work on a problem. Sometimes that's very difficult. I found the insights that I had acquired through my experience at the Home as well as the social related work were invaluable in my work at TRW. I think it was because of that particular characteristic that I was looked upon as the right kind of person for the job. And it helped a lot.

MILNER: Yes. You kept friends with social workers through your life, haven't you?

PITTS: Yes. You happen to be a social worker, John Milner. I guess you were not the first real life social worker, but the first real life social worker that I really felt I had some time with, I knew him. Rhea St. John at McKinley Home, but our contact at Camp Max Strauss, when I was a counselor and you would come in periodically, along with the – I believe you call it caseworkers, advisors. That was the start of a long both professional and social friendship which, of course, has meant a lot to me. I guess I never really understood social work until I got exposed to it with you, and became aware of it at Camp Max Strauss. I still think, incidentally, that social work is not very well understood in the private industry arena. Some executives began to understand and appreciate more and move in and embrace wholeheartedly the idea of government/industry partnership. I think that there's a ways to go in clarifying and helping others to see that there is a deep commonality in many ways of focus on long-term objectives in the viewpoint of the society. More and more companies are now doing employee counseling – problems with drugs and alcohol and such programs. TRW took on two of the interns from your industrial social work program. I was the catalyst to help those parties become aware of you, and indeed have hired one or two of your graduates in the field of industrial social work to work at TRW. But it takes some doing for them to at first have people understand that there was a connection, that this wasn't some artificial merging of two disinterested parties, but that there was a connection. I think that it's going to take time, but it's definitely moving in the right direction, that the top leadership of private industry is more and more aware of not only the need, but probably the responsibility of business to step up to what I call their role in this partnership of solving and addressing the social issues.

MILNER: Donald, thank you for the interview. If you'd like to add something a little later, you can.

PITTS: Of course, I have all sorts of names fly through my head like Elizabeth McBroom and Bob Roberts and so forth, but I realize this is not an endless bull-session we're trying to have. I hope I've not been too verbose.

MILNER: Excellent.