

## **PBM Oral History Project: Interview with Homer Beaudoin**

Homer Beaudoin, a Pacific Bus Museum (PBM) board member, was interviewed by Evan Escher, PBM's summer 2016 intern, on July 20, 2016, regarding Homer's bus driving experiences.

Interviewer: I'm here with former bus driver, Homer Beaudoin.

So, what was your first bus-related job?

Interviewee: Well, in 1973 after a family discussion I took a ride on a Trailways bus from San Francisco to Los Angeles after signing on to learn how to drive at the Trailways drivers school for six weeks.

Interviewer: Was there anything that influenced you to decide to learn how to drive a bus?

Interviewee: Yes. Basically, I came out to California in 1957 with my mother and younger brother from a little town called Council Bluffs, Iowa. We took a Greyhound bus and I sat up in front and talked with the driver or drivers who brought me to California.

Interviewer: And, what did they tell you about the bus driving?

Interviewee: Well, they explained what they were doing and how they did it. A bunch of these guys are very old timers, so I mean they were really excellent with the gears and they just knew the road. And, at that time, the old I-80 use to be a two-lane road, so it was pretty interesting driving.

Interviewer: So, how old were you when you took that bus ride down to Los Angeles?

Interviewee: I was 27 years old.

Interviewer: Did you start learning how to drive a bus immediately then?

Interviewee: No, we went to class, had homework with testing on the map of the United States and all the states. And all the interstate roads and their numbering system. Also we were encouraged to go out to the buses and memorize the gauges and switches. Then we were taken out to places that had no traffic and was taught to drive an Eagle Bus.

Interviewer: So, while growing up was there anyone in your family that influenced you to become involved in buses?

Interviewee: Most of my family were railroaders. Basically Union Pacific Railroad, Illinois Central, and Burlington. And in the little town I lived in, we lived right across from the Union Pacific shops. My grandfather would go to work every day and come home and my dad didn't really work in the shop, he worked in the field as a rail lineman.

Interviewer: So, you already had that family background in transportation?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: So, when you first started out with learning how to drive buses, was it what you expected?

Interviewee: After graduating from driver's school in Los Angeles, I was brought back to San Francisco. All drivers started on the extra board where in the summer months you actually were assigned to do city tours of San Francisco, Sausalito, and Muir Woods. So, consequently it was back to back two times a day and then every once in a while you might get a scheduled trip to Reno if somebody didn't show up.

Interviewer: So, it wasn't that exciting at first?

Interviewee: Oh, it was exciting, but it got to be routine after a while. And, the people were more exciting than the routine.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And so, you would enhance sometimes as you go along and help people see more than what they really paid for.

Interviewer: That's interesting about the people, and of course living here you see everything more than once, so it shouldn't be that interesting to drive bus full of people past it two more times each day.

Interviewee: Well, every group was always different, and things change even though the scenery stays the same, the building stay the same, there was always something else happening. And this is the 70's and 80's in San Francisco, and in San Francisco, everything was moving and changing and, we would actually drive down through any part of town and there would always be something happening.

So, consequently it was interesting, and we would take them up to the Painted Ladies, drive them over to the Sutro bath house site, then we

would take the people through the city to the Golden Gate Bridge and every once in a while I would take them under the Golden Gate Bridge where the Fort is, so it depended on what the group wanted, what they were looking for. Each tour reflected what the people wanted.

Interviewer: So, you're saying there was always something exciting that stood out in each trip?

Interviewee: Oh, yes. It was interesting. I enjoyed it and some of the people were quite notable, I met quite a few people that were very interesting to talk to, each person had some notable experience.

Interviewer: What's your first major problem you encountered?

Interviewee: First problem I encountered, I was going to pick up for a city tour, and a gentleman tried to cut inside my bus on a corner driving a Volkswagen so consequently what happened was we made contact and his front bumper was broken off his car.

Nobody was on the bus, so I just grabbed my accident reporting book and went out and, he jumped out of his car, said, "Hey, my fault." Grabbed his bumper, threw it in the back end of his Volkswagen and drove off. I got his license plate number, so I to called it into the dispatch. This is before we had cell phone, so I had to find a pay phone so it took a little longer to report issues.

Interviewer: Fascinating. Were there any bigger problems that you had in your career?

Interviewee: Oh, yes. I had been stuck in a mudslide on Highway 50 with people on board. In fact, there were a couple of trips when I was traveling moving buses from San Francisco to Sparks, Nevada on Hwy 80, because that was our main route. We went to Sparks and turn around came back., There were times when I was on Donner Summit in deep snow or heavy snow I would be blinded where I just parked the bus and waited for the plow to come through and sometimes it would be all night, so I would carry extra cloths and supplies.

Interviewer: How were the passengers feeling in those types of scenarios?

Interviewee: Well, basically if I had problems with passengers I would just turned around automatically. But, when the company needed the buses somewhere, and I was dead heading empty I had to take that bus to where it was needed. Sometimes I make it through, sometimes I'd have

to stop, but most times the bus was put in service as soon as I would arrive.

Interviewer: Right. Speaking on problems with buses, what was the biggest problem in your whole bus driving career?

Interviewee: My biggest problem and setback was the deregulation of 1980. And, that actually ended my career with Trailways. Trailways laid off all its ABL drivers and stopped all east and westbound schedules.

Interviewer: Can you explain exactly what deregulation is?

Interviewee: Okay. Deregulation is when Government allowed the company to stop operating and get rid of all its employees the federal government made it so that anyone could drive a bus. Anyone could drive a truck for hire providing they had a license and insurance. Trailways separated us from the company, gave us our retirement pensions, or if you didn't have your ten years, then what the company would do is they'd give you your matching funds for the retirement.

So, consequently, I got my retirement and what happened was I was also working at Royal Coach, so I jumped from Trailways to Royal Coach, but Royal Coach had no benefits and had no retirement plan, and they didn't pay as much as Trailways. So, I stayed with them for a while because it was money, it kept the family going until I decided to go to Santa Clara County Transit later VTA

Interviewer: What year again was deregulation?

Interviewee: In the 1980's, it was probably between 1980 and 1981.

Interviewer: Right. And, so far with Royal Coach, how long did you end up working for them?

Interviewee: Between part time years and full time would be eleven years.

Interviewer: What were some of the experiences you had with Royal Coach?

Interviewee: Let's see, I've taken the Raiders to their training camp from Oakland, CA

Interviewer: In Napa?

Interviewee: No, Santa Rosa CA. And then, also I picked up the 49ers in Redwood City and took them up to Rocklin, CA their old Rocklin training ground. I got to meet a lot of football players and I met Coach John Madden.

So, a lot of drivers as they separate from the company they went out looking for jobs. This caused the wages to go down because of the amount of jobless drivers.

Interviewer: That's fascinating. You said you weren't making as much as Trailways, so when you're with Royal Coach were you looking for open positions with other bus companies at the time or were you committed to Royal Coach?

Interviewee: I was basically committed because this is a family operation and I really enjoyed driving their buses. They were the top of the line here in California. And, not only that, but the tips were okay, the tips helped carry me through most of the bad times. But, I needed retirement, I needed a medical benefit, and they didn't have that.

I was on my wife's medical plan, where she work at Paine Webber. And then, also a retirement, all I did was put a little bit of money here and there into the fund that I had set up a good retirement for myself.

Interviewer: The time that you arrived at Royal Coach from Trailways, did the people at Royal Coach view you as a veteran or did they just view as like any other bus driver?

Interviewee: They were quite interested because they never dealt with Trailways drivers and a lot of them liked the way I drove. A lot of them enjoyed going on trip with me as I would point out special features along the way. I started out as a part time driver, so they began to know me actually when I became a full time driver and would request me for their trips.

Joanne Smith Christiansen is the one that hired me and she seemed to like how I interacted with the people on the buses plus I took care of the bus.

Interviewer: So, what happened after Royal Coach?

Interviewee: Well, basically when I finally had enough to where I needed to go ahead and move, I put my application in with Santa Clara County Transit at. And I accepted it right away.

I took their test and I went into their training department to learn how to drive a transit bus which there were several other friends that went with me when they found out that I gone to county transit, this made our boss at Royal Coach a little upset to say the least. There were four of us from Royal Coach that went into Santa Clara County Transit. The training was good and I enjoyed meeting everyone.

Interviewer: And, you mentioned it's going to be treat to learn how to drive a transit bus. Tell me about the differences between a charter bus and a transit bus?

Interviewee: Okay. All of the charter buses have air conditioning. Transit buses didn't. Other than that, the transits have the same type of power source which is a diesel engine only smaller, they have transmission which is an automatic, and some of them have power steering. In the buses I drove at Royal Coach, they were all either standard transmission or automatic, but they had power steering, they had a baggage bin underneath where the transit buses didn't and the seating was much more luxurious at Royal Coach. Plus, Royal Coach Buses have a bathroom at the rear of the coach. The Transit just had seats.

Interviewer: In terms of actually driving the bus – the brakes the wheels and the steering wheel – is there any differences between the charter and transit buses?

Interviewee: Transit buses turn sharper than a charter bus in a lot of instances. The charter buses at Royal Coach were made by MCI and had a larger turning radius. The transit buses were made by Flxable, Gillig, and New Flyer. They were made to do basically pick up and drop off work around town and were doing multiple turns and the suspension on it has a different type of air suspension than it was for the over the road coaches, which had bigger bellows and a very smooth ride.

Interviewer: I think a lot of what we were just talking about has to do with the fact that the charter buses are obviously longer than...

Interviewee: Actually not.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Interviewee: Yeah. You had multiple types and lengths, the charter buses mostly were 40-foot at that time, the transit buses they ranged from 30-foot to 40-

foot, but most of buses I drove was on the main lines for the 22 or the 23 and they were all 40-foot buses.

Interviewer: That's interesting because when you are on a charter bus, maybe it just feels longer because you're higher up or something like that.

Interviewee: It's the way the seating is and transit buses are made to pack in the people standing and sitting in it without any problems, where a charter bus they sit anywhere from forty to forty nine people depending on the configuration of the bus. The party buses that Royal Coach had – for executive travel and special events, most people we put on those were about eighteen people and that was it. For 40-foot bus they have executive seating, everything was just gorgeous inside.

Interviewer: I guess you could say riding a charter bus is like flying first class on a transoceanic flight?

Interviewee: Oh, yes. At times you have hostess on board to cater to the people. There were sinks and microwaves and refrigerators in those buses. Plus, the vanity and bathrooms are just unbelievably beautiful. Royal Coach had some really nice buses and, tips were good too.

Interviewer: So, there's Trailways, Royal Coach, VTA. Which of those three periods was your favorite to work in and why?

Interviewee: Trailways actually gave me a lot of satisfaction. In fact, I would say more than the other two. It's like my first love, your first girlfriend that you danced with, and you took out on the first date and all the other good things that happened when you were young. Plus I had some really good clients and standard requests. Like American Express for travel through California, Arizona, Nevada every fourteen days with travelers from overseas.

But, VTA was consistent, the people sometimes were a little hard to get to settle down, but once they knew who you were and they knew what you expected, there were no problems. You probably heard about the twenty two being very, very rough and some of the people sort of course. I didn't have that problem after a short while because after about six months, everyone knew who I was and those on the twenty two line knew what to expect and they knew what I expected of them, so we had no problems.

Interviewer: So, you started in the late 70's and comparing it to now what are the similarities and differences in the bus driving industry?

Interviewee: The bus driving industry has gotten smaller. And, they've had to become more exacting in what they do.

There are no big companies anymore to speak of. Greyhound is not half of what it was in the eighties. We have new buses coming in that are bigger, faster, stronger, carry more people. Most of the buses are made outside of the United States of America.

Interviewer: Mega bus?

Interviewee: Mega bus which carries 82 people.

Interviewer: It's double-decker and has Wi-Fi for their customers.

Interviewee: Yes. So, it's that bus and you don't have to get your ticket at a bus depot, you can have it printed off your computer or you can stop at the bus stop when the bus comes to that stop and the driver will cut you your fares.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Back in the old days, we used to cut fares also. We'd pick people up on the way and cut the fares for them, so that they wouldn't have to worry dealing with ticket lines at the depots.

Interviewer: When I leave to go back to school in San Luis Obispo, I take the Amtrak Thruway Bus, sometimes operated by Silverado, and we buy our ticket online or at the Amtrak station. That's a fun ride. And, I think the Silverado drivers and Amtrak drivers share similar experiences that you had at Trailways, it's a lot of driving up and down the coast.

Interviewee: These drivers still have to keep a schedule and it is an every day trip most of the time.

Interviewer: And they stop at various designated stops – such as a rest stop in King City.

Interviewee: Yeah. Royal Coach had the contract to carry the government employees, i.e. the soldiers and we go through King City, Kettleman City to the Fort there where they would take their training out in Nowhere Land, so, yes, inner coast.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: I think it was Camp Parks or Camp Something. It's been a while since I've been there.

Interviewer: I think I know it. I can't remember its name. So, how long were you at the VTA for?

Interviewee: I was there for little over sixteen years. Part of it was as a driver, part of it was as a trainer, and part of it was as a field supervisor. At ten years I had already moved into the training department. It was about nine years when I started to make my move from driving to management. I was actually a trainer for VTA. They call them a tech trainer. And, you started out as a line instructor and then went from there to technical trainer. You had to pass a bunch of tests and be qualified as a third party trainer/tester for the state of California to become a Technical Trainer.

It was a little hard because the camaraderie in the group of drivers was like, "You're abandoning us – you've gone to the dark side to become management," which wasn't true at all. But, when I became a tech trainer, I trained for a couple of years and they were going to lay us off, but they had a couple of positions open as Field supervisors, so I moved that position.

And, that's when everyone said, "Oh, you're really in the dark side now," so that I was one of those guys who was out there watching the drivers and train people, and granted I had admonished a few people. I think I've written one person up in the whole time I was there. But basically I was out there to help protect these people because if they got in an accident and they'd be so emotionally charged and upset that I would have to sit them down and run them through how they should fill out their accident report.

You would have to sometimes coach them by saying, "don't say that, you may want to reword it to say this, put it in your own vocabulary, but you want to say this."

Interviewer: So, play the role of an English tutor.

Interviewee: Yes, basically. And, this helped the drivers out, and I wasn't there to beat on them, I was there to help them.

And, also we have accident investigation, we had to do two parts on that as supervisors. So, consequently it was a very, very endearing job to me in some respects. Dealing with the public, you have people that wanted to complain about the driver, eating on the bus while he's driving or he's drinking on the bus or is talking on the phone while driving.

So, you would have to, from time to time, go and check on them to say, "Hey, Driver, what's that in your ear? Oh, that looks like, yes, it is, you know, it's an earpiece. You're listening to the radio or you're talking on your phone, you know better, put it away. You know next time I'm going to have to write you." You threaten them with write ups and days off, in some instances it does come to fruition, but most of the time, it didn't come to days off. Most of the time if you handle it right and you did it with a little bit of finesse, you got your message through to the person who becomes another driver that does it right. That's the important thing!

Interviewer: Now, you're mentioning a couple of times how sometimes the manager, management, supervisors side is referred as the dark side, when you were a bus driver is that how you viewed it?

Interviewee: You know what? I didn't. They were just regular people. You know they're doing their job to keep me out of trouble or to keep me in the line of advancement. If I was not doing something right, they would warn me. I've waved at them when they're sitting doing schedule checks of the buses. And, basically I was always either on time or ahead of schedule. If I was ahead of schedule, I'd stop I'd wait and then I continue on when my time was due to leave out of time stop.

So, it's your attitude, it's what you make of a job, it's what you make of what you're doing. And, if you put yourself into it in a proper manner, you have no problems. The people loved me, they'd asked me, "Well, are you going to be on this run next sign up?" I would respond. "I can't say." Sometimes, as I got more seniority, I could say, "Yes, I want to be here for this day this time and I'll be off on Wednesdays and Thursdays," and these people knew exactly where I'd be.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: They like that dependability. It's the dependability of the job and driver. The driver makes the passenger happy, the passenger makes the driver comfortable, so it's a win, win.

Interviewer: Very interesting there. Do you think that because of your kind feelings towards the management and passengers helped you out when it came to management?

Interviewee: Yes and no. There were a lot of times that management had to enforce what they were told to do from their superiors and, they would do it. And, on furloughs or layoffs, they would have to lay somebody off or furlough somebody even though he may have been a great driver or good with the passengers. Seniority prevails.

In the union setting, there were people who were consequently in that range of people that had to be laid off. Same thing with the management people, if you were in a certain slot that had to be laid off, you would have to go, so you had to be versatile. And you always carried yourself with dignity, you never carried yourself with madness or bitter attitude. That's not professional.

Interviewer: That's interesting there, what you were just talking about can apply to almost any job in reality ...

Interviewee: I was laid off three times at VTA. I went back drove Peerless and Royal Coach, and then when VTA rehired me, I said, "fine, let's go." To hang up the suit for Royal Coach or Peerless and grab my suit for VTA – I'm ready to go again.

So, when we technical trainers were being furloughed or we were laid off, we had a choice to go other places with our knowledge and credentials. And, you didn't want to do road supervision because that can be very hard. You put four days in ten hours a day and then, if they need you for an emergency, they would call you and you'd have to come back. And since you weren't actually driving professionally, you couldn't say, "no, I'm off duty, you have to get somebody else." No, you came in and you did the job. And, if you do the job that you pushed to get, then you do the job. That's it.

Interviewer: Interesting. What are some of the reasons why you're laid off at VTA?

Interviewee: Basically lack of work. Every time you're laid off it's either a lack of work or a downsizing of the workforce because of lack of work, so we understand that. You know in the industry if you work enough like I have to know that, in the winter months when I first started at Trailways, I worked all summer long saved my money and everything, come winter months, I would be furloughed or laid off.

So, consequently I would go work other companies, part time here part time there, use a generic type uniform and wait until they call me back. And when they call me back, I'd hang up the generic uniform, put on a Trailways uniform and away we go.

Interviewer: So, when the times you were laid off, it was never actually your fault, it was just something that had to happen?

Interviewee: Yes. Lack of work. That's what they put on the furlough forms, lack of work. Now, if you got into trouble, they'd give you time off, but I've never had time off for being in trouble, so I didn't really deal with that.

Interviewer: So, at what point did you officially hang up your coat at VTA?

Interviewee: I became very ill and that was approximately eleven years ago, I had an ulcer in my colon, I've had it since 1969. And, things just got bad to worse. I wore myself out working as a supervisor, and I was not a young man anymore.

So, consequently the colitis flared up and I just couldn't take it anymore, and they put me on Prednisone which is a drug and so, I just said, "No, I can't do this it's unsafe," and so, I retired.

Interviewer: Were there any times before that where it had affected your bus driving?

Interviewee: A couple of times, but not really bad. I could always work my way out of it. I was young. I have a very strong body anyway, and I eat right, I drink mainly water. I don't drink alcohol I don't smoke. So, consequently I could escape through it and have no problems. Plus, I tried to make sure I had plenty of sleep.

So, supervision was just a little different because you had no logbook where you got to sign in and sign off and show how many hours that you sat how many hours that you were off. Here at VTA, the drivers were given shifts according to regulation that was set down by the federal and state governments.

So, consequently, they would have their hours and they would have so many hours off. What they did on their off hours is their concern as long as you take care of yourself, you can come back to work.

Interviewer: Now, what could you change about the way you worked during your career?

Interviewee: Nothing I would change. I was happy. This to me was the best thing in the world. I mean it was like Alice in Wonderland. Every day I had a different adventure and every day there was something else new, every day there was more to learn and I just loved it.

Interviewer: And, did your colleagues think the same way towards you?

Interviewee: A lot of the people liked me because I had a real easy way of when I was training the people. In fact, a lot of the drivers that I trained, have over a million miles safe driving. So, consequently it's how you treat the people, how you address what their needs are, and make sure that they know how to do the job properly.

A lot of trainers never talked about how to drive the bus and handle the passengers properly, and so a lot of the other drivers who never met me or trained under me would come up and ask me questions because they needed to know.

Interviewer: What do you see in the near future of bus driving?

Interviewee: Well, multi-modal systems are on the rise. As you know they're linking buses with trains with light rail and in fact, VTA has the ACE train which now travels from San Jose over to Stockton up to Sacramento and they're now planning to go down to Fresno, so this is one thing that opens up the central valley.

Another thing is they're always expanding light rail, it takes them a little bit of time, but light rail is expanding. And, in fact, when I left they had put their first full grand turning system in by the Children's Museum.

Interviewer: Yes.

Interviewee: So, they could go other places with that. So, consequently there are bus companies that drive through the airports. We drive through the airport, we have the number 40 that goes into San Jose Mineta Airport. We could take people anywhere in Santa Clara County to be able to go anywhere in the bay area and beyond. Probably it's the same way at Muni, I never checked on it because I was so engrossed with VTA.

As far as the airport shuttle services I'm sure there are some. SFO used to do that, but they got out of the business of shuttle service for the airports and got into Google. Google transfers most of its people around by buses because they have lost so much money by losing the person to an

accident in their own car. So, they would rather put that person on a bus and have one professional driver drive that bus and the people to where they need to work at.

Interviewer: Right. So, back to what you're mentioning about light rail. When you were at VTA did you have any involvement in light rail?

Interviewee: I was trained to operate light rail. All Field Supervisors needed to know how to operate a light train and historic trolley

Interviewer: Oh, nice.

Interviewee: I was also an antique trolley conductor. If you're a supervisor for VTA you need to be able to know how to drive all the buses, know how to drive all the trains including the old trolleys, so they trained me thoroughly.

Interviewer: What are some of the differences between driving a light rail and driving a bus?

Interviewee: Light rail trains takes a long time to stop. Each traction point for a wheel of a light rail vehicle is about the size of dime and it's metal to metal, where a bus, each tire traction point is where the tire hits the road itself. Each tire is about 3 to 4 inches wide by 3 to 4 inches long and made of rubber. So, consequently you have more traction point on a bus than you do on light rail. And, they make it up with dynamic braking, they use track braking, so that consequently you can slow the vehicle down, but it's still going to slide down the metal rail faster and longer than it would be for a truck or a bus to stop.

Interviewer: Was driving a trolley something you learned while you were at VTA or did you know how to do it before?

Interviewee: They trained me at VTA to operate a trolley and a light rail vehicle. VTA taught me how to do the signaling for heavy rail and for the light rail train system. So, if there were problems with the train, I could stop the train, I could start the train, I could move the train to where I needed to have it moved to. And, if the driver couldn't do it, I was the one that had to do it.

Interviewer: So, you're involved in more than one field there?

Interviewee: Yes and switching also. I was a switch operator. So, if we start a single tracking where one track would be shut down with maybe a vehicle that was stuck on the tracks, that's a regular thing in San Jose. Some people U-

turn right onto the tracks in some areas, so you have to single track the train, so that means you have two separate switches. So both trains use one track and then move to their own track after single tracking.

So, you carry a book with a switch guide in it and you have to look at the switch and then you match it up. Some take two to three minutes for a throw, other ones you can just unlock and throw it right away, other switches you have to notify OCC to make the switch change which is the radio room for light rail. And, CTC for Union Pacific Railway a special 800 number. Before you step on to the right of way you call for simple protection from the control room and the controller notifies the trains in that area about your presence in that area.

But, each time you do that, you have to notify the control rooms or they notify you and then, when you make the switch you notify them back again to confirm. You always make sure you double check every time you do anything.

Interviewer: Now, for light rail you were mentioning the command center?

Interviewee: OCC, yes, Office of Central Communications.

Interviewer: And they control the signals?

Interviewee: Yes. And, they also monitor the buses too now, they have cameras on the buses and VTA has become quite adept to looking through the buses off and on.

And, they actually had several people arrested from the tapes that they have kept of people tagging the buses and wanted posters from the sheriff's department for wanted people and we have a fleet of sheriffs units for VTA.

If a driver called for help, they would be there at a stop and they'd be waiting for the person to come off the bus or to be sitting there on bus. The driver would drive up, the Sheriffs would wave at the driver and give him the high sign and one sheriff would go in the back door and one sheriff would come in the front door and the guy is caught.

Interviewer: Works out well.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: How many people are working in the OCC?

Interviewee: OCC? I have no idea at this time. At one point in time, in the train area you had to have at least four people working at the desk with the big rail map that they had. Now, there's probably more because of the expansion of the light rail.

On the bus side which I usually went up and address the various people. During the day you had upwards to maybe five, six people running the communications for the buses. Overnight, it would drop down to maybe four to five depending on if it was a weekend or not.

So, you always had somebody to talk to you. It may take them a little bit to get to you, but they would always keep you in the loop.

Interviewer: Right. What is the best advice you could give the bus drivers today or some that's just starting out?

Interviewee: Best advice. Learn from your instructor, ask questions, do what you can to make yourself a better bus driver. Look at what other bus drivers do, so you have a variety of actions to choose from.

Interviewer: The new inventions of Uber – and how we're going towards self-driving cars – what do you think about their effect on bus driving industry?

Interviewee: Well, Uber they're non-professional.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: And, they have had some problems. You have no overseer, you have no control. This person is out there doing what he or she wants to do thinking they are the best. That person has not been trained professionally nor do they have a commercial license. Uber – forget about it.

As far as the bus companies themselves, they're growing, they're adapting, and they're moving forward. VTA is exceptional at this. They're moving and they've become quite good at what they do which is move people. Now, that they've had experience with dealing with Levi's Stadium which is the newest 49er football stadium and also the Super Bowl, I'm sure that within the next several years, they'll have it down pat. Like I said, they're always growing and you're going to see a lot more interlining between the various bus systems which will be even better.

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Interviewee: To interline means that you would go from, say a VTA bus to an AC transit bus without any problem. We do it now, but it's getting better. As I see it, it's growing. You can reach more buses, you can go farther – right now you can transfer from Gilroy to Salinas and go down south to Monterey or you can transfer to a VTA vehicle, ride that bus into San Jose, take a light rail train and go various ways on light rail or you can stop at Diridon train station get onto the Peninsula train and go up the Peninsula.

I mean it's just beautiful. You don't need a car. It's just much like the European countries.

Interviewer: And that's how I got here. I took the 181 bus to Bart and biked over.

Interviewee: There you go.

Interviewer: Bus drivers today – how is their starting path any different from the way you started do you think?

Interviewee: It's the same as what I did with VTA. In fact, I have a very good friend that came in with me as qualified bus drivers who went up the ladder with me and is still there at VTA. We were like brothers. And, I'm still close to him today, he's now supervisor at the Training Department. I was a supervisor, we both were supervisors, we both went through light rail training, and we both went through bus training. And, he's a good man. He told me that the training is the same in essence, the buses have gotten longer (VTA has articulated buses), but once again, when you look over to the rearview mirror, the bus each time you look at it sort of shortens even though it's 65 feet long.

Interviewer: Compared when you started doing this are there more or less or the same amount of people interested in becoming a bus driver?

Interviewee: There's definitely more. I get questions all the time when they find out I'm a bus driver, and they ask, "Where did you work at?" And I'd tell them VTA – I never mentioned Trailways because no one knows what Trailways is anymore.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Royal Coach basically takes the drivers that are already qualified, they never train anybody that I know of. So, consequently they ask me about

going through the training course for VTA and then becoming a driver for Google. I say, "Well, that is your choice." But, right now Google has 300 buses.

Interviewer: Oh, wow, I didn't know it's that many.

Interviewee: Yeah. They're right over there in Mountain View right at the Shoreline Amphitheatre. You can actually do the Google satellite and look down at them, they're parked all over the place.

Interviewer: My dad worked there in the early 2000's. When he went there, he took the train and bike sometimes he drove. But, yeah, it's a good location there.

So, when you were first starting out with Trailways, did it take away from anything that was going on in your life, such as school or something like that?

Interviewee: No. I had gone to college after I got out of the service. And, I wanted to fly an airplane, I wanted to be a commercial pilot, but then I got an ulcer in my intestines and I couldn't qualify, so that was out.

Driving for Trailways was like flying at times because the Eagle bus was so smooth. The suspension was called a Torsilastic suspension which much like the old Chrysler torsion bar suspension. There was a piece of steel that was twisted so that it drove much smoother, it handle the curves like a Porsche. It just was a fantastic bus to drive.

Interviewer: Right. And, what year was this around?

Interviewee: I started in 1973.

Interviewer: Right. And, do you mind telling me what you did in the service?

Interviewee: I was an air force musician, I also loaded the band instruments on the planes most times

Interviewer: And, where were you doing this?

Interviewee: Okay, my first station after San Antonio was McGuire Air Force base in New Jersey and in fact, I was there when the lights went out in New York. I worked at General Electric for a little while before I jumped into bus driving. General Electric closed down and that's when I went to Trailways.

Interviewer: That's how it started. Now, when you were at Royal Coaches, so you're a charter driver and you got offered a lot of drives.

Interviewee: No, basically you had your assigned or dispatch runs, but then you also had request operations, in other words people would call in and say, "I want this driver," and I had a ton of request for driving to the point where, sometimes I had to call a group up and say, "Look, I can't take your trip because I've already signed on with another group," and then, they'd turn around and ask me, "Well, who would be a good driver for me," and so, I'd name a couple of names and then they'd make the alternate request.

Interviewer: Beforehand how they'd know who to request?

Interviewee: I would give out my business card after or during the first trip. It's a personable thing that you just basically call them up and say, "Look, I've already accepted a request earlier than you put yours in. So, I would suggest you using this driver here or that driver there."

At times the people would go to that driver and never come back to me which is good because you know that driver may need more work. He may be one of the newest ones to come in and needs the work.

Interviewer: It also shows that Royal Coach has trustworthy drivers.

Interviewee: Well, not only that, but they're personable, they had to be personable because that's what their business is about. They were a charter operation and at that time, street charter so their branding and their ability to take care of the people were on the line every day. You made or broke that company by being who you are and how you handle yourself.

Interviewer: Now, what are some notable groups of people that you drove with Royal?

Interviewee: Yes. One of them ordered the party bus VIP coach and the ladies decided that they wanted to have a party on the bus. And so, they brought food and drinks and they had chocolate mousse in a bowl and we went around a corner and it fell off the table because they didn't secure it. So while they were at a party I cleaned up the mess and made the bus look like it did when I picked them up.

Other times I've been on Irish bar crawls during St. Patrick's Day and I've had to take people and show them where the bathroom was or take

them quickly out of the bus and put them some place where they could relieve their anxieties for lack of better words. [Laughs]

But, you took care of the people – that’s what your job was. Sometimes it wasn’t glamorous, sometimes it stunk. You took care of the people. You made sure the people were safe and secure and happy in what they were doing.

Interviewer: It seems like a common theme throughout this interview.

Interviewee: That’s it. The people are the main ingredient for which a bus driver has to do his duties. If it wasn’t for people, you have no job period.

Interviewer: That’s true. Now, you were telling me earlier, before we started recording, that you drove Gorbachev himself, or people associated with him?

Interviewee: His people and his aides.

Interviewer: And what was the purpose for it again?

Interviewee: This was summit in San Francisco between him and Ronald Reagan. And we took them up to the Top of the Mark for their meeting and it was then we took them up to a restaurant at Fisherman’s Wharf and then back to the airport. We had to be at the airport two hours in advance so that they could check and go through the buses. They use dogs, they use mirrors, and they even had a guy on a creeper who went underneath the bus.

Interviewer: Just making sure there are no...

Interviewee: Make sure they’re all safe, they check everything, every nook and cranny of the two bus, so it was pretty interesting.

Interviewer: When they were doing that, did it stress you out?

Interviewee: No, it didn’t stress me at all. You have to take everything with a professional outlook. And if it wasn’t right they wouldn’t bring you to an outer area of the airport where you had to sit for two hours and wait for the plane to land.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Where they did their checking. There was FBI, the Soviet people, and you complied with them, you did the job and you took care of the passengers, you took care of your people because once they're on your bus, they're your people.

Interviewer: Right. Were there any other famous people that you or celebrities that you took around?

Interviewee: I had the mother of Mayor Moscone on the bus. I've had the 49er team on my bus. We picked them up at Redwood City and took them out to Rocklin, CA. The Raiders teams on the bus with John Madden. I picked Madden up at the Black Hawk and took him over to the where they pick up the players and then on over to Raider Organization, the Raider coliseum. And then, just did it in reverse.

Interviewer: Right. When you were taking around some of these teams on a regular basis, did you make friends with any of the players or coaches on the team?

Interviewee: It was up to them to make the first move.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: You kept your distance because some people want to be left alone. To them this is a business. When you're driving the bus, these people get on the bus because they have to go do what they have to do.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: They have to go from point A to point B whether they like it or not, they got to be there. It's up to them if they wanted to show some interest in what you're doing or if they wanted to present themselves to you, that's fine. You would present yourself by telling them, "My name is Homer Beaudoin. I am the operator of this vehicle. If you have any questions or any needs let me know. I will try to do my best to take care of what you ask of me."

And, once again it's up to them to step forward and talk to me, if not, this is a business trip and that's how it's handled.

Interviewer: Right. That's got me thinking about one of the differences between public and private transportation – in private transportation when the passengers come in and pay the fare you have to talk to them sometimes.

But, with these chartered buses they walk on and then take them to where they go.

Interviewee: You're the chauffeur of a very big large limousine. And, basically you always stand by the bus's door to help the people on and off the bus. But also if they have stuff that needs to be put in the baggage bins you open up the baggage doors. Your clients can drop their equipment, baggage on the side walk and I load the baggage. If they want to put it in there, they can. You stand at the door to help the clients on and off the bus. It's a matter of safety.

When they come to you and they say, "I'd like to put my bag under the bus. I can do that for you."

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: If they say, "Well, I'd like to carry this on the bus," you have racks above or, "Yes, we have room above for your items." So, you consequently can make them feel like, "Hey, I can do what I want to do," yet within a certain realm of how the driver wants it.

The service is always there. You want to make sure that you provide a service for them. If they come up and say, "Driver, I'm too cold," or, "Driver, I'm too hot," you adjust the climate accordingly. If they say, "Driver, the bathroom door is locked," you get out the key and unlock the door.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: There was one time where I had a group that were elderly people, and the woman couldn't get out of the bathroom. And so, I pulled the bus over and stopped and I took the key out and I unlock the door and she'd locked the door again and I unlocked the door and she locked the door again. And I said, "You know, young lady, if you would sit down on the toilet and relax for a minute, I'll open the door," and that's how I got her out. But, you got to be versatile in everything you do.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, it's an interesting trade and you've got to take everything with a grain of salt. And a little humor doesn't hurt also.

Interviewer: And so, serving their needs.

Interviewee: That's it.

Interviewer: And then, as you said, the driver makes the passenger...

Interviewee: That's it. Basically, it's both. The passenger makes the driver. See, you have to feed off of what you feel and what you see.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: If you see somebody that's withdrawn and wants to be alone, leave them alone, unless there's an emergency. When I was working for VTA in my early years there was this lady that got on the bus and being a new driver, I was doing the night runs for the 22 line. And, she sat down and she'd looked at window and see her reflection and she'd say, "Don't touch me." And you're driving all of a sudden you hear somebody say don't touch me, you think well, somebody's being accosted by somebody else.

So, I looked up in the mirror and everybody's sitting down and doing their thing, so finally, after the third time of don't touch me, I was watching the mirror and driving at the same time and I saw her do that. And so, I said, "Young lady could you come here for a minute?" and she said, "No, I want to sit right here." I said, "Okay." So, at the next stop I got up and I walked back to her and I said, "why are you doing this?" and she said, "Well, the lady next to me is to close." I said, "That's window at night, you're looking at your own reflection." And she said, "Oh." The wheels were turning, but they were not making any traction, so I said, "Okay, I understand what's going on."

Interviewer: I've been on the 22 late at night and I've seen people that did similar things.

Interviewee: I was very caring for the people. I wanted to make sure the people are riding and being themselves and not hurting anybody or bothering anybody. But, even at night you still had all these little things going on, so.

And that's why I also was supervisor at night a lot of times, so I could come up and help the drivers. That's what is needed. It's a service-oriented operation.

Interviewer: Do you think it requires interest from a certain age or do you think someone could start driving buses whenever they want to?

Interviewee: Anytime, anywhere. A lot of my friends graduated out of college, went to do their first job and got laid off. So, they decided, "well, I'll be a bus driver until I get called back to my old job." "I'm only going to be here for two weeks or so." They retire with thirty years in.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: It's just like a bug that crawls under your skin and goes, "I've got you under control now." One of the young ladies that I drove with at Trailways, she started driving the Green Tortoise.

Interviewer: Oh, I've heard of that. That's the overnight one?

Interviewee: That was the hippie bus. And then, she went to Trailways. When Trailways got rid of us, she went to the post office and it really didn't sit with her, so she became a commercial officer for the CHP, so she could be close to drivers again. She since retired and now lives in Mexico.

Interviewer: Good living. Do you think that bus driving requires a certain educational background in college, like a certain major, or they can be applicable to anyone?

Interviewee: It could be applicable to anyone. Basically you have to be willing to provide a service for the person, be personable with anybody, be able to set some standards for the passengers if need be and follow it through.

Everything is done right there for you. And if you have a question now, VTA is very, very good at this. They say, "if you have a problem, get on the phone and call us and get support. Always try to get support before you do anything you're unsure of." Now, maybe in a seasoned veteran, I would call them in, but I would carry it through to where I knew what needs to be done. The average rider of a VTA or any transit buses is like 45 minutes at the max, maybe an hour on the bus.

Okay. So, they're in and they're out. If you drive a charter bus, you have them for upwards to seven, eight hours depending on where you're going. If you're going to Los Angeles, it's an eight-hour trip. I've had people on my bus for two days stuck in a mud slide in Tahoe. I used my own money to feed them because that's what is needed. And I don't look for reward because this is a service provided because you are the hand of that company.

Interviewer: Yeah, if you think about it, it's a lot like most services one way or another. You have to make sure they provide for the people, and as you were saying earlier, going through the process asking questions, and asking for help when you need it – that applies for anything when you're going through the process to do something.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: Moving on to the later part of your career again. So, after you stopped with VTA, how did you want to keep your involvement with buses?

Interviewee: I love driving bus and I was going to buy a bus, but I said, "no, that's too expensive, it will ruin my retirement." I knew about the Pacific Bus Museum from a friend of mine who was one of past presidents for Pacific Bus Museum.

And so, consequently I called him up and he said, "oh, yeah, it's down over on Shinn Street." I said, "Okay, fine. Will you be there?" "No, I ain't going to be there. I have some stuff to do." So, I said, "okay." I went down there on the first Saturday of the month I sat there and watched everybody work, took stock into everything, they came and ask me what I was doing and why I was here what I had done.

And when they found out I was a driver, the first day they put me behind a wheel of school bus, and I hadn't driven school buses that much. So, it took me a couple of minutes to get into it, but it worked out.

Interviewer: Nice. When you were with the three different companies: Trailways, Royal, and then VTA, where are you living during all these times?

Interviewee: Let's see. At Trailways, I was living in Fremont. At Royal, I was living in Fremont. And at VTA, actually Santa Clara County Transit, I was living in Fremont and Hayward.

Interviewer: Okay. So you didn't really have to move around at all because it's all pretty accessible?

Interviewee: It was all accessible. And, I didn't mind working at nights, I was always there early. Everyone could expect me reporting in there at least an hour early. One of the old supervisors who came down to visit me during an open house, he says, "you know what, we never worried about you. You were always efficient in what you did, you always took care of your

passengers, and sometimes you even repaired the buses much to the surprise of the road maintenance people.”

Interviewer: So, I’m going to ask about some specific facts. I don’t know if you have this at the top of your head, but maybe you could give me a ballpark estimate of with each bus company you worked for, how many miles did you drive and which route did you drive the most?

Interviewee: Okay. With Trailways, my main route was from San Francisco either to Reno or San Francisco to Tahoe. And that was approximately a four-hour drive both either Tahoe or Reno. Later years before Trailways let us all go I drove as a standard request driver for American Express through California, Arizona and Nevada.

With VTA, my main route I love to drive the most was the 22. If I could get a 22 made no difference what time it would be. I would drive that and that was approximately two-and-a-quarter hours from the station in Palo Alto to Eastridge Shopping Center. I liked it on Saturdays because I could do two-and-a-half trips and I’d be done for the day. I’d pull out from the division and do two-and-a-half trips and my day was done.

At Royal Coach, I was everywhere, you name it. If you wanted to go there, I went there.

Interviewer: When you’re at Royal Coach, did they have the yards on Stockton Ave.?

Interviewee: It was on Stockton Ave.

Interviewer: Still there today.

Interviewee: Still there today. It’s family-owned and operated. It’s not a company. She started back way back when, back in the 60’s with school buses. When I joined up with her company, meaning Joanne Smith Christianson who since passed, beautiful lady, she had put up with me, but anyway, she had sixty two buses and since then her daughter and her son have taken over. They still have the quality, but they don’t have the buses they used to. They got a lower amount of buses and they’re using different type chassis buses also, so.

Interviewer: Yeah, from my memory of riding on school field trips, they have the main high ones with the baggage bins.

Interviewee: Yeah, the 40 footer with the baggage there over the Royal Coaches.

Interviewer: I think they also have like the shuttle type.

Interviewee: Shuttle buses? Yeah. Sandy tried to put shuttle buses in before and it didn't really work out that well, but now, that is basically one of their things that they use now because she's now fully in charge.

Side note: she was once married to Bill Allen who if you don't know is the owner of Allen Transportation.

Interviewer: The name sounds familiar.

Interviewee: That's in Sacramento. It's a bus company, Allen Transportation, Amador Stage Lines. They've separated now, but I used to drive her, she's asked me to drive her to Sacramento where she lived, in one of the VIP coaches and then bring it back.

Interviewer: Tell me about the process of training drivers at VTA?

Interviewee: Okay. First off, you train the drivers for approximately six weeks. That way, they would have every bit of knowledge they could obtain. Most technical trainers that we have including myself at that time had gone through training ourselves with both the government and the state. We also took training where we were issued a third party DMV trainer and tester certificate.

So, all testing and training were done in the house so to speak. In other words, VTA, we would not only train the person, we test the person and then we would take them down to be licensed and our signature on the certificate would allow them to go and get their license.

After they got their license, they also were given a VTT certificate, this was for vehicle transit training. In other words they carry their standard class B license, their passenger handling endorsement which we would sign for the class B license itself. They would take the test for the passenger handling endorsement and VTT. All the book testing would be at DMV and then we'd take it from there, sign them off after we trained them on their driving skills and take them back to DMV and they'd get their license. VTT stood for Vehicle Transit Training. It was for transit buses and the drivers had to have 8 hours a year in classroom for training and the 5<sup>th</sup> year was for safety programming.

Interviewer: Okay. So, I guess with training drivers, when they came in they didn't have any form of license?

Interviewee: They couldn't come in unless they had already passed the test for class B license and the passenger handling endorsement. They have to go to DMV and get that in order to prove that they could be trained to drive a transit bus.

Interviewer: That's kind of like permit test?

Interviewee: It's a permit.

Interviewer: All right. I heard there are these events with regional bus companies called bus rodeos. Can you tell me more about this?

Interviewee: Okay. Bus rodeos are made for drivers who want to perform in a more exacting setting. In other words they drive a bus all day long and they sometimes practice while they're driving on how to turn a corner. Even though you're trained on how to turn a corner properly by the company, there's also various ways of doing it so that you can move up the roadway in a more proficient manner.

The rodeo is that setting where you can do right hand turns, left hand turns, backups, and you do it basically by yourself, you don't have anybody backing you. Usually your company wants you to back your vehicle with somebody telling you when to stop. This, you have a right hand turn back in, a left hand turn back in, you have offset alley, you have, I mean a left and a right turn, then you also do bus stops.

And they're not long like the bus stops you have on the roads, they're short, they're concise. You have to be able to put that bus in to where you're no more than eighteen inches away from the curb. So, consequently it's got to be just right. Everything is exacting. Plus, the last part is the hardest. You have a hundred-foot alley, you've got to go down through these barrels that are set inwards so that the last barrel is right at just an inch or two away from the sides of your bus. In other words, you have a...

Interviewer: Squeezing into a tight space.

Interviewee: And you have to bring it up to 30mph to stop at a line and put the bumper on the line and you can't go over the line, that disqualifies you at the end of the alley. And for every inch away from the line, you lose a point.

Interviewer: How many people are involved in this competition?

Interviewee: It depends on the company. VTA has a lot of people that are involved with it. The training department is the one that runs it. And, they also get to do the run themselves. They set the run up, the tech trainers set the training the course up and they get to train on it.

[ You can practice on it, they usually put them up to about two weeks before the rodeo and people come in and they test themselves on the course to see if they could get their time down. And they make sure that they can do that part of the rodeo that is needed for them to do so that they could get their rewards which is you go from being the champion of say VTA to the champion of the area to the champion of the state. And then, you go to the national championships.

Interviewer: How are these competitions held without disrupting normal service?

Interviewee: Actually, they're held on Saturdays which is a reduced service time. There's always extra board operators to take the place of the drivers that want to do the rodeo.

Interviewer: Do they just take place in normal streets or?

Interviewee: No. It's at a division – Chaboya Division for VTAs where they have the rodeo there. Hayward Division for AC Transit, Cow Palace for the rodeo for the Muni buses.

Interviewer: That's big parking lot there.

Interviewee: Big parking lot. And, Chaboya's got a very big parking lot and so does AC Transit Hayward Division off of Winton Ave. I mean this thing is horrendous.

Interviewer: Yeah. Did you ever participate in one?

Interviewee: Oh, yes. I had participated in several, so I'm not as proficient as some of the drivers because basically that means driving a bus is okay, and I'm proficient in it, but I deal more with passengers.

Interviewer: Right. One thing they mentioned about the bus rodeos the backing up how they usually want someone to help you back up. I've always looked at the maps of bus routes, and I see at the place where it turns around – sometimes it will go like a full square block instead of doing a U-turn. And, I now I know why...

Interviewee: You either have a figure eight, a square, or as with the 22 line you have an area where you can go around a circular transit area to go back the other way. So, we never back buses unless you really have to. It's always best to ask for help.

Interviewer: Right. I don't know if I actually ever been on the bus that maneuver.

Interviewee: If you look in the rearview mirror, on either side you cannot see the back of your bus for over 265 feet.

Interviewer: That's a lot of ground.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: That you want to have covered.

Interviewee: Yeah. And you can't see it.

Interviewer: A lot different from driving a car.

Interviewee: Yeah. The same thing with over the road coaches, you always have somebody you ask to back you, another driver or somebody. And, if there isn't anybody that is a driver, you ask a passenger, anybody, "can I get your help, and somebody come and help me."

And then, before you back, they start backing you, you get your signal straight with them. In other words, hands up palms to your chest moving back and forth, that means coming. Stop is next, cross the arms. Okay, make sure stop is next. And, in order for them to see you and you to see them, then you have to see them in your mirror. So, you say, "Please stay in my sight, if you can't see my face, I can't see you." So, it's quite long and drawn out, but it's safe. Safety first.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that we haven't touched on this afternoon that you'd like to share with me?

Interviewee: Each bus that I've driven has different characteristic.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Interviewee: It's like personality. Each bus has a different personality. Each bus shifts differently even though it's the same – it could be the same gearbox and everything, one may take just a little fraction of a second earlier or later to make the shift back and forth on a standard transmission.

Automatics are the same way. Sometimes they shift faster or slower. Sometimes you can shift the automatic sometimes you can't. There are variables in every bus. Some of them turn sharper right then they turn left. Some of them turn left sharper then right. And, I mean within the same series bus. So, each bus is an entity unto itself, the only way you know about it is driving it.

Interviewer: Even if it's the same model?

Interviewee: Same model, same everything, same frame, same engine, same transmission type, same steering wheel. Some buses turn shorter on the right hand side and longer on the left hand side and vice versa.

Braking is the same thing too. Sometimes the braking one will brake harder than the other even though they've got power braking, the stopping distances you can see you feel. That's why the driver is like on the rodeo, they like to know what buses that are going on and they practice in those buses.

Interviewer: When you were driving, how often would you drive the same bus?

Interviewee: At Royal I had my own assigned coach.

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Interviewee: Trailways, the dispatcher would tell you, "You got bus number 12253," that could be going back to New York, so you never knew what bus you were to drive until given the orders for the drive.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: What you did is you went out you went through a general checkout and what you would do is one of the parts of the checkout is you would drive it forward and your hands lightly on the wheel and slam on the brakes this was to see if the front wheels pulled to the left or right Then, you drive it forward again, pull the parking brake up this was to see if your parking brake would hold the bus on a grade. That was part of the check out. You'll be looking around all the time. Then, you'd go out and you turn right out of the line or left out of the line depending on what you wanted to do and you would see what the turning radius for the corner going around the right side or the left side. Did the same thing for every bus I drove after that and it served me well.

Interviewer: What about with VTA, do you know how often you drove the same bus?

Interviewee: Not very often.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: See, a lot of drivers they want to drive the same bus over and over again but it doesn't happen because it's in for repairs and then out. In order for a bus to pay for itself it needs to be driven all the time. Not sit in the yard losing money.

Interviewer: And it doesn't need to happen.

Interviewee: Yes. It doesn't need to happen because they may put the bus on the 23 line one time, the 22 the other time, you know, the 68 on another time or whatever line needs a bus. It's just it never happens. If it does happen, usually after somebody else has driven it, it feels a little different anyway.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: That's how it is. And, for special occasions at Royal, I drove another bus. Whatever they had me for that special occasion, it didn't have to be my bus.

Interviewer: [Laughs] It probably makes it better for the drivers, they learn more about each of the different buses get more knowledgeable of the fleet.

Interviewee: Well, it's not only that, but when you make relief. Okay, another thing you do for the driver coming on taking your place on the bus. You tell him, "This bus turns wide right or sharp left or sharp right. The brakes may fade if used too much. They're starting to give me problems. You always let the driver that's relieving you know what's going on, so that consequently he could take stock in it and if he doesn't like it, he can call it in and ask for another bus.

But, then, again, sometimes you get another set of problems with a new bus. So, it depends on how you feel about it.

Interviewer: All right. Tell me about some of like the awards or prizes that they often give out to the drivers?

Interviewee: Okay. It's not really a prize, it's actually something of value and esteem to the driver because drivers like to be recognized for their prowess behind the wheel, their ability to safely get that passenger up the roadway.

Now, usually they give you miles or years. They start out with years and at Santa Clara County if you drive twelve years without an accident or a passenger fall or an incident that could be chargeable, you get a million miles. That's the way it is.

At Trailways I did an actual one million miles. At the County you don't make that million miles because your runs are so short.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: So, consequently, twelve years is a million-mile pin. One of my fellow drivers that went to school with me and he's still driving has got two million miles. One of my students – I trained him about twelve years ago, he's got one million miles. No, he's been there longer than that.

Anyway, he gets a million miles every twelve years no matter what. He's got two million miles patches.

Interviewer: It's very impressive.

Interviewee: That's really impressive especially with the fact that they put it on your shirt sleeve and since you're a driver you have your badge number. And you have two million miles safe driving on there you know. And if you're a line instructor, you get all these little awards that you put in, that's recognizable. That means this person is safe, he's courteous, he's a senior operator.

Now, at Trailways when you had your million miles, everything changes from silver to gold. The first million miles you change your hat band on your garrison cap, the band that goes across, that's gold. Your tack on your uniform are changed to gold, everything is gold. You look like a Mexican general maybe because you had all these little things going on.

Trailways never really put anything on the sleeves or anything other than across the pocket or they gave you a Trailways million-mile pin that you put on the tie clasp. You know you got the tie clasp that said million mile driver stuff like that. But, VTA does it for recognition.

Interviewer: Right. They deserve it.

Interviewee: Yeah. That's a long time. And, like I said there's drivers out there that's got their million miles, they worked for thirty six years or thirty eight years. That's a long time. So, to garner those awards is very impressive.

Interviewer: And I'm assuming they don't really like show it off at all or anything?

Interviewee: They don't have to. It's on their sleeve already, they just don't have to.

Interviewer: I mean some the people riding the bus don't know unless they're really...

Interviewee: Most of the riders if you ask the riders you say, "Do you know of any million milers?" "Oh, yeah, I know this guy over here; I've seen a couple out there on the line you know." They do recognize it because when you walk up the stairs, here's the driver taking your ticket or watching you for your day pass, monthly pass, or whatever and it says right there on the shoulder, one million miles, you can't miss it.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: You can't miss it. That means he's a great, he's ready to go.

Interviewer: Very well. So for the drivers, it's not just about getting something at the bus rodeo, there's personal statures as well in your lengthy career.

Interviewee: In order to go to a bus rodeo you got to have at least one year safe driving.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: You can't just walk in with two accidents behind you and say, I want to win this rodeo, you're not qualified.

Interviewer: You're not going to get in.

Interviewee: You're not getting in. And they check you. You know when I was in the training department, we checked every driver before they came in. And say they had already two or three or four years of safe driving and they had their first accident, they don't go to the rodeo.

Interviewer: Right. I think all this is interesting how there's different types of recognition as all the bus drivers they can treat it their way. They're all thinking, "I got like this recognition, I don't need to show it off or if I want to I don't really need to prove it all because riders trust me." That's a nice way of how that works.

Interviewee: Yeah, basically when you get behind a bus driver while he's driving, you could see what he's doing. And, a lot of people for first time bus driver or a beginning driver, they're sort of nervous. They could tell by the number on their patch and if the driver looks in the mirror and he or she could see forty sets of eyes looking over the chair at them, watching them watching you drive. But after a while, people if they know you and they've ridden with you on several occasions, they know that they're going to get a safe smooth ride. They pull out their newspaper and they read their newspaper, they talk amongst themselves, granted several times, they'll turn around on a commercial vehicle on a transit bus you could turn and talk to people and stuff, but you can't sit in the seats backwards in an over the road coach.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: Because in fact, that's against the law. So, that's another thing, drivers need to know the laws.

Interviewer: Just one interesting question that I have that's kind of specific. When you were with VTA, did they have the bike racks on the front of the bus?

Interviewee: Yes, they did.

Interviewer: Did you have any problems with those at all? Any specific moments?

Interviewee: Initially, yes. It's a learning process for bike rack on a bus. Once, a woman walked up with her son and he had a small little bike, one little bike 10 inches or so and, it took me a little while to secure it. So, I carried straps with me, so I could strap the bike down.

Interviewer: It did not fit?

Interviewee: It didn't fit.

Interviewer: It's too small.

Interviewee: It's too small. I had a bungee cord, I had a couple of bungee cords and I just bungeed it up into the front. It took me a little while longer but I could absorb it in my time. But, I've had people who've taken the wrong bicycle off my rack when I first started out and so I would match the face with the bike also.

Interviewer: You said to yourself, "Hold up."

Interviewee: And if they go to reach for the wrong bike I hit the horn and they would back up and look at me and I tell them, “no, it’s not this one, it’s this one with the finger pointing down to the one they’re supposed to be taking.” But, as far as incidents with the bicycles I only think I had two or three and that was about it.

Interviewer: What was it like in like when you were driving before they had the bike racks on?

Interviewer: Was it hard to get the bikes on, did it take up room?

Interviewee: Yeah. What they would do is they put their bike on in the back using the back door. I control the door so the door opens automatically and stayed open until he got in. And I always made sure that the bike was secured and he was holding on to it sitting down before I close the door and start driving.

When you open the back door, it’s called an inner lock. Basically, what it does is it applies the brakes automatically, so you can’t move the vehicle even if your foot is on the throttle the brake and throttle are turned off, the inner lock takes it over, stops the bus, goes nowhere. So, consequently this is how I used to work and it worked really well.

Interviewer: I see. I’ve talked to my dad sometimes, he says that he rode the buses on VTA in the late 80’s early 90’s before they had bike racks on and also on the Cal train before they had bike cars on. He said sometimes the passenger hate you because you’re taking up a lot of room.

Interviewee: Yeah. There would be some animosity. At the most you could put two bikes on a bus. That was it.

Interviewer: That’s what it is now, two bikes on the rack, sometimes it’s three.

Interviewee: Yeah, now the Google buses are the ones where you can put four bikes on the back, but I’ve never seen any bicycles on them, but it’s there for their convenience.

Interviewer: Fascinating.

**End of Audio**