

Provence Siblings

Sam Provence's siblings

*Interview conducted by
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in 2015 in Plainview, Texas*

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Disability Studies Minor
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Biography

in this article, the three Provence siblings talk about Sammy Provence, his experience of polio, his disability rights activism, and tell personal stories that happened throughout his lifetime.

Topics discussed

- Polio diagnosis and adapting to everyday life
- Mildred Provence
- School and hobbies
- Handitran, Arlington Handicapped Association, and Handicapped Student Association
- Community reactions

Rose

This is Sarah Rose.

Engel

And Trevor Engel.

Rose

With Joe Provence, Sara McCorkle, Freda Provence and Louise Provence-Lane on November 7, 2015 in Plainview, Texas.

Louise

How do you want me to start?

Rose

<topic>Polio diagnosis and adapting to everyday life</topic>

Wherever you would like! If you want to continue with what you were saying...

Louise

We were talking about when Sammy first got sick and he spent ten months in the hospital; first at John Peter Smith in Fort Worth, then TIRR in Houston, Texas Institute for Rehabilitation and Research. This was back in the day when NASA was being formed and a lot of the equipment and stuff that Sam benefited by came through the research that they did down there at Houston. He started out strictly in the wheelchair, in the iron lung, it even had a bubble on the front of it that they opened that machine up it continued to breathe in that little dome because when he started out he could not breathe on his own at all.

Rose

How old was he when he got polio?

Louise

He was almost nine.

Rose

What year?

Louise

December 9, 1958 is when he went to the hospital. He was one of those later, plus he was too young to get those initial doses. I got all three because I was three years older.

Joe

Weren't the original doses given to third-graders as a pilot check thing?

When Sammy got polio our parents thought that Sammy had had them because Sara had had them in school. Our dad felt real guilty because Sam had not had the polio shot yet. Of course when he got it I was a sophomore in college out here, and they called me and said that he was sick. Then one of the deans called me in a couple of days later and said, "Is the Provence kid in Fort Worth that has polio, is that your brother that they're not expecting to live?" I finished out that semester which was just two or three weeks longer and came home. They really didn't know if he would live because he had a combination of spinal and bulbar polio. He couldn't breathe on his own.

They moved him to Texas Institute for Rehabilitation and Research in Houston, and as soon as that semester was over.... It was almost impossible for our parents to move to Houston, so I finished that semester in college and moved to Houston and got a job, and visited him in the hospital every night. In Fort Worth, before they moved him, you didn't know what to expect...he went to the hospital and they quarantined Sara for a month and our friends could not come to the house, she could not go out. That was a devastating blow to a twelve-year-old, he was just so bad and we couldn't imagine him being any worse. When they moved him to Houston, and I moved down there, there were others that were just as bad or worse. The kids that were in his area down there, there was one kid that was a little bit younger than Sam whose mother was there every time that I went to the hospital. Her husband could not understand why she was spending so much time with this kid and I think they finally got a divorce. There was another one that was about four or five years old, he was in the process of being adopted when he got polio. The people just turned their backs and said, "We can't do this."

Sibling

There was a lot of that in the early days...one of the questions was how people reacted and stuff, it wasn't very good. I had friends I never had any more just because Sam had polio. Parents were afraid that I was gonna have it happen too. When he started out I ran and beat up more one kid when he first came home. Looking like that, like a turtle and all more than once, even back in our day kids could be very cruel and calling him names.

Joe

Today he would be a pacesetter as a ninja turtle. (laughs)

Rose

How old were you when he got sick?

Sibling

I had graduated from college in **Mesquite**. I had already dabbled with special needs kids. I would move back and forth and so on.

Rose

He was really the baby of the family?

Sibling

He and Sara both.

Joe

One night, I sorry I teared up on that last one. One night when I had gone up to the hospital to see Sam.... The other kids, almost every night somebody would come see them. This little boy that had been turned back during adoption was sharp enough to realize that all of these other kids were saying, "Mama would you do this, mama would you do that?" I went in one night and was visiting with Sammy and he said, "Joe, Joe come here!" I went over there, he put his arms around my neck and he said, "Would you be my mama?" That was a hard thing.

Rose

You were maybe nineteen or twenty?

Joe

Yeah.

Sibling

Sammy always had a good attitude. He was the only one around him that didn't realize he was handicapped, we never treated him handicapped, everybody encouraged him and, "You can do anything you put your mind to." That was our mother talking, mother was a go-getter. She was always his legs and hands. She should've had two degrees from UTA because you can't count the hours she was in the library with him doing his research and taking notes. As far as the classes went and all, he was real smart. When he got up there at UTA and started doing classes, he would look around the room in his classes and figure out who he thought was the smartest in the class. He'd supplied the paper and carbon paper and then the original on the clipboard and whoever he'd figured out, "Hey, this will go well." He'd figured that out for all his classes and he'd give them the original and he'd take the carbon copy.

Rose

Basically early notetaking accommodations?

Sibling

Absolutely. Then he had people in his classes that he called his pushers because he didn't have an electric wheelchair back then and he couldn't use his arms and wheel himself. He always picked out good note takers and big old strapping guys that could push him from class to class.

Rose

How did he get the idea with the carbon paper for notetaking?

Sibling

That was back in the day when you used carbon paper and the McGrath machines. He just thought about it. There was so many things he couldn't do, but he adapted what he had and worked it to the max. He never met a stranger. One of these clippings, the headline is, "Smiling Sammy Comes Home." He always was smiling, always smiling.

Engel

That's something that I noticed looking through the yearbooks, every picture I saw all him in, he was just beaming.

Sibling

Always smiling. All of his expenses, that was back in the day when polio was March of Dimes and it was costing them about \$60,000 a year to keep him alive that the March of Dimes was shelling out.

Rose

Did they pay everything or did your parents have to?

Sibling

Most everything came out of, his equipment, his first wheelchair was way too big for him. It had to be padded. The lady who was in charge of March of Dimes at that time was the one that said, "Hey, we're gonna save that for Sam." She must've been at the hospital in Fort Worth to visit him and got acquainted with him. She was really in his corner for equipment needs.

Rose

Do you remember her name?

Sibling

It's way back in the saw dust, we're talking a long time ago for all of us. March of Dimes. Think the Lord, after polio disappeared, March of Dimes had to have a new gimmick to stay in business or a new cause. It was the president of the March of Dimes in Fort Worth the year that Sammy got sick. You might be able to track them.

Rose

What other kind of equipment did he get?

Sibling

The iron lung, his first mobile was the seventy-five pound machine.

Joe

We tried to never let his restrictions restrict us from helping him do whatever he wanted to do. He'd never been to Six Flags. When we were down there, we took a little red wagon and pulled the seventy-five pound motor and it was connected with this hose that was about six feet long. We had to keep his wheelchair and that motor all within that distance. Traveling through Six Flags with that, we were up there and one of my high school friends saw us and came up and said we were in one of the lines, and he said, "Come around this way, I'll get you in the exit." He went around some of the other places there and told them to, "Be sure and get him in the back door." That was great.

Rose

Wow. Did he go on the rides?

Joe

Oh yeah, some of them we did. They took him out there another time and got him on the stagecoach. He learned to do something called frog breathing, which would gulp in the air through his mouth and he could do that for a while. He thought that was great. Then because of NASA, they condensed that motor down to a thing that would go in a **Samsonite** makeup case. It would sit the back of his wheelchair.

Sibling

He had the Numa belt.

Rose

What's that?

Sibling

It was like a corset and it had air chambers in it, the hose went into his pocket and helped him breathe.

Rose

A compression?

Sibling

Yes. He had a hole in his left-hand pocket on everything, and there was a hose connected to a Numa belt, then that hose that stuck out.

Joe

That way he didn't look any different when he was sitting in his wheelchair. Then at one point they came up with an iron lung that was, what was that fiberglass one? Who did it?

Sibling

The people that lived down the street from us, Mr. and Mrs. **Garbo**, they had a daughter that had muscular dystrophy, **Vertie Mae**. She was in a wheelchair and all like Sam, they were best buds. Later, mother and daddy were wanting.... Sam couldn't travel very far. Mr. **Garbo** worked at General Motors and he, some friends and daddy built a fiberglass portable iron lung in his garage that was compact enough that it would fit in the back of the station wagon or when they finally got a van. It was fiberglass.

Rose

Did your house have to be modified for the iron lung?

Sibling

Oh yeah, we had to cut a new door just to get it in. Originally it was in his bedroom, I think momma and daddy may have been in there. They had to cut a big door to remodel because they couldn't get that iron lung down the hall. They would have to widen everything, that's how they got in the house. In order to get a bath, you couldn't get Sammy in the bathtub, they took one of those big horse trough things, the fire department may be helped with that. He was set up out in the garage for his baths and stuff, added that heat.

Rose

How did they handle breathing while he was being bathed?

Sibling

They installed a generator in the house because if we lost power after a little while Sammy would be dead. He had to have a generator, and they put that in.

Sibling

I think maybe the fire department did that. He had to go outside to get to the garage; we had to take him in the wheelchair, out the back door, it was a step down, and then you had to turn to go through the garage door. One time when I was doing that, one of the front wheels got off the edge, I flipped him out in the backyard in his wheelchair and thought I killed him. He started turning a little blue, so I knew he was still breathing.

Sibling

It didn't matter if it was twenty degrees outside, he was gonna have a bath.

Rose

Every day?

Sibling

Not every day, but yeah. We'd get the garage all heated up and then take him out there. He had lots of adventures in his wheelchair.

Rose

Did you have to ramp the back door, front door, all of that?

Sibling

It was back out the front door. 20:45

Sibling

We brought him around and go straight in his room, that was with a little walkway beside it. He had lots of mishaps in his wheelchair. We used to tie a seatbelt kind of thing, like the use in therapy for gait training. They wrapped that white thing around you to lead you.

Joe

When Louise and her husband were living on the west side of Fort Worth they lived in this apartment house. We were going over there one night to surprise Louise for her birthday and we had parked on the other side of the building so that we could get Sammy in the chair, and unloaded and strapped in his wheelchair. Thank goodness he had a high backed wheelchair. We were going around the building and we there were four or five little steps down from this level and the steps were just about eighteen inches wide. I was being very careful and that wheel flipped off of that and turned his wheelchair upside down, and he was just hanging by that seatbelt. We got him back up.

Sibling

Things like that happened a lot, especially in wheelchairs. I'd be pushing him down the street to somebody's house or something, and one Halloween I was pushing him down there and he had slid down. The rubber on one of the little wheels on that chair came off. The friends in the house Ronald and Donald, I hollered at them and they came out. We took Sammy out of that wheelchair, laid him down in their front yard, flipped upside down, got that wheel back on, picked him back up and everything. Wheelchairs can be an adventure.

Joe

He got to that frog breathing stage and he could really do it for a long time. As a matter fact, Sara was telling me the other night that he was going to fly somewhere to Austin or something to talk to some legislators. He couldn't fly with this motor so he frogged all the way there.

Sibling

They didn't know he couldn't breathe. He said, "They'll never let me on the plane." So he did his little frog number all the way to Austin.

Rose

We heard that, we heard DC, Austin makes a little more sense.

Sibling

He flew several times, but that was one of them. He was willing to go talk anywhere to anybody at any time.

Rose

Do you know what he was testifying about some of these times?

Sibling

There was a meeting down in Austin. It was a general meeting for things of disabled people. This is before the big push to get it going.

Rose

Early '70s, maybe?

Sibling

He was never afraid to ask anybody for anything. One time he had gone to a meeting, the big head honcho of RadioShack. This guy and some of his worker bees got through he was saying, "Well, Sam, we mean it now. If there's anything we can do to help y'all..." He just started rattling off, "The computer stuff and all. A printer would be nice, a fax, and all this." You have to speak up.

Rose

Did he get the stuff?

Sibling

He got the stuff.

Sibling

He also applied for law school at Baylor and he went down to talk to them and they realized how handicapped he was so they denied him admission because they didn't have any place where he could live. Am I telling that correctly?

Joe

Yeah, then he applied to St. Mary's in San Antonio. They accepted him, but then when they went down to campus to visit they didn't have a place so they said, "We just can't be responsible." That's when he came back, enrolled for his masters in history at UTA

Rose

Because it was accessible?

Joe

Yes, and he liked history. In the meantime, between those two, he got his stockbrokers license.

Sibling

ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union], counsel people? That's in there, I'm not sure of the dates.

Rose

Wow. That's really cool.

Sibling

Our aunt Betty was helping him write one of those grants.

Rose

Who is that?

Sibling

Our aunt Betty who is living with him, to get money in hand for Handitran.

Joe

Yeah, he worked on the grants to get Handitran started. **This day enrichment Center** at one of the churches in Arlington. A brochure from the AHA.

AHA was the forerunner for HRA, every year for a fundraiser they volunteered to wrap Christmas gifts at Barnes & Noble. We would all plan our Christmas vacations to include going down and wrapping Christmas gifts at Barnes & Noble.

Sibling

Somewhere in all of our pictures, there's a picture of Olivia and mother at the desk where they were having the rest of us wrap Christmas presents at Barnes & Noble. He talked them into.... When he was getting himself run out in the street to call attention to curb cuts...he got most of the city council in wheelchairs for a day.

Rose

The city council? Not just campus.

Sibling

One at different times, you bet, in wheelchairs for a day.

Sibling

He would tell the pushers, "Drop them off those curbs, don't let them down easy, get the full effect."

Rose

We know there were two handicapped administrators day, one with just Wayne Duke showing up very early on, Jim Hayes was on campus. Then a second one where president Nedderman and a bunch of other people with. We had no idea about the city council members, that was Vandergriff?

Sibling

Yeah, it was Vandergriff, a long time before he became a judge. That was when he was mayor of Arlington. After all that started happening he was on all kinds of committees. He was telling them where to put curb cuts, where to put lower water fountains, stuff they needed to do for access in and out of doors. Every time they were planning something new Sammy was one of the ones that looked that and said, "No, we need it here."

Rose

The city? Not just on campus?

Sibling

Yeah.

Joe

They would probably say, "Check with Sam Provence, and if you don't, he'll be in here bitchin'." (Laughs)

Rose

We talked with Laura Kelsey-Raney, Jim Hayes's sister a couple of times. She said for him there was a nurse at the rehab hospital that said, "You can go to college," and who helped him, maybe he was at home or something. He wasn't out of rehab center for a long time, we know a lot of people who had polio were, there's a lot of community. How did he start learning about pushing disability rights and saying, "You need to do this?"

Sibling

It was the time and the period. Everybody was pushing. In the '50s and '60s, my goodness, a lot of things took place. He was around a lot of people.

Sibling

I'm sure that from the time he was nine until he graduated from high school he was pretty well homeschooled. When he went to UTA and he ran into some others that were handicapped or challenged and he got to meeting with them, Sammy suggested "We need a Handicapped Student Association." That's when Joe Rowe was there, John Dycus and several of them.

Sibling

I discovered here in these notes that also Allan Saxe.

Rose

We interviewed him a couple weeks ago.

Sibling

He was another one that Sammy really confided in and talked to.

Rose

There's a really funny story, did you know Allan Saxe had polio? He said he never told Sammy. Because he has post-polio now, so he's sitting down for his classes, he came and talked to my history disability class about it. He was really quiet about it, and there was one person in the library named Loretta, she's retired now. She progressively went from crutches to wheelchair or scooter, apparently Allan Saxe never told her either. He's open about it now and has some pain from it. He never felt comfortable telling your brother.

Joe

I'm sure that those people were thinking we can have an association if it began to spread. The way Sammy was was just thinking, "We could do this and this and this if we can just get some people to help and support us."

Sibling

I'm sure that Allan was probably kind of a mentor to Sam, a ship disturber anyway, himself. Allan probably egged Sammy. They loved to argue, Sam was not quiet in his classes. (Laughs)

Sibling

Sam was an avid reader, tell how he read in his iron lung.

Joe

He had this mirror right above him in the iron lung, and he would use a mouth stick and would turn the pages and read it up there while he was laying down. Tell them about your book report that you helped him with?

Sibling

When he was working on his Master's degree, we were down there and he had to give a book report. He was giving it on the history of the dollar bill. I went down and he was dictating it to me because he had to hand out a sheet to everybody in his class. He opened his table of contents, and he started dictating his book report. At one point there was like six or seven enumerations that he had to give, he enumerated about five, he said, "Just a minute, I missed one." Immediately he gave me the other one. He didn't have any paperclips, he didn't have any sticky notes, it was just all in his head.

Rose

He had to learn how to do it? Was it more comparable both for him being in the iron lung than the turtle? If he was at home?

Sibling

He'd sleep in the iron lung every night of his life.

Rose

The turtle would compress him, right?

Sibling

Yes, the pressure, but he had to have the pressure in order to breathe.

Joe

What finally killed him was he got pneumonia. He was student teaching at Lamar high school and mother and daddy were on a trip, and they got back home and found that he was really sick. Mother went over there and said, "You've got to go to the hospital." They gave him oxygen, trying to get it to clear up, and the doctor said, "If he stays on that too long it will just turn his lungs to cardboard." That's what finally got him.

Sibling

It was so strange when we went to get him that they at the apartment to take into the hospital, I got him in the wheelchair and started up the ramp and he said, "I will never see this place again, I won't never be home. I'm not coming back." He knew how sick he was I guess. It was a terrible period. That was about a two-week stay, they had to do a tracheotomy.

Joe

That was one thing that we always said, "I hope Sammy never has to have that." During his initial time at Peter Smith and in Houston, he never had to have that, and he didn't have to have it until then. Would you like a cup of coffee?

[Recording breaks]

Sibling

I had gone for a job interview in October in '82, I was applying for an orthopedic surgeon in Euless. We got to talking and two or three years before that I had been at a friend's house in Euless and my husband called and said, "You've got to come home right now, Sammy has broken his leg." We got him all bundled up in the van and took off and went to Peter Smith, we thought, "Well, they'll have to keep him because it'll be a fresh femur fracture."

Rose

How had he done it?

Sibling

Sammy could move hardly anything, but his left leg from the knee down. In fact, he had said all the time and he would jiggle that leg any time he was up in the wheelchair. He needed to cross one leg over the other and my daddy moved his leg, it snapped. We went to Peter Smith. This resident came down, they said I couldn't go back there or anything and I said, "Well you better call the police because I'm going, he doesn't breathe on his own." I was back there the whole time and this resident called the head of the orthopedic department and he said, "I know that we don't ordinarily cast fresh femurs, but we have to get this kid cast and send him home. We'll kill him over here." He said, "I don't think they've even got an iron lung in storage in this place anymore." That's what they did. They had to cast him and we had to bring him back home.

Sibling

When I went to apply for this job then in October of '82 the orthopedic surgeon and I got to talking, I said something or he did, and he said, "Oh my Lord, you're talking about Sam Provence, he's your brother!" Jay had never forgotten that, they were scared to death, he was telling his attending, "We'll kill this boy, we got to do this!"

Rose

Like he'd pick up pneumonia or something?

Sibling

He came back and he was in that like eight or ten weeks, but Jay had remembered. Of course I was due to start working for him, I was still late a few weeks because Sam was in the hospital when I've been over there. But Jay remembered that, he never did forget about the kid with polio sleeping in an iron lung and all this, winding up in the ER over there Peter Smith...small world, really.

Sibling

They had to go to the basement of the hospital to get an iron lung, it had been so long since they had needed one. They had to clean it up, get him in it, and then it blew up, meaning they had trouble with the bellows. Somehow an old pillow had been shoved back down in the end of the iron lung and was causing it to quit. That was another exciting thing that they had.

Sara

They quarantined me for month, I went right out. Mother and daddy were at the hospital 24/7 nearly, and one day our pastor came from the hospital and he said, "We're hearing on the TV and the radio that Sam has passed away today. I assure you I just left the hospital and your little brother is still alive." That was enough. I was quarantined all that time and there was times that I would go to the hospital with them, one of the nurses would have to sneak me into the polio ward to see Sammy. I spent a lot of time sitting and watching all the excitement down in the emergency room. I got acquainted with all kinds of doctors, nurses and patients.

Rose

Then you went into medical?

Sibling

I went into business and stuff. The first job that I had in medical was in medical records at a little hospital in Oak Cliff. The librarian told me then, "If this gets in your blood, you won't look anywhere else." So I didn't.

Rose

Freda, you were telling us a good story when we were on pause about Lake Arlington?

Joe

We had gone down there to visit one time and some cousins or kids or something wanted to go to the lake. We loaded Sammy in the van to take him over there to watch. We got over there and I was playing out in the water with the kids, Sam was just sitting in his wheelchair on the bank. I got out and came up to see if he was okay and he was saying something about the weather and I said, "Well, the weather is just warm and nice and all of this." He said, "Yeah, that would be fun." I looked and I said, "Well, you know if we took your pads out of your wheelchair, I could just roll you out in there." He thought that sounded fun so I took the pads out and started pushing him out toward the lake and Freda were just amazed. They were hunkered down and the water was up to here so they were just squatting down in the water. When I started rolling him out there he looked at them and he thought the water was that deep. The further I rolled him out his arms and his legs began to float up and he was afraid. I'm saying, "It's not that deep, it's not that deep!" I finally stood up and said, "Sammy, it's just this deep." He just loved it. He had the best time and we went home and we were telling mother and daddy what we were doing and daddy said, "Oh my Lord, I bet you've ruined all the ball bearings in that wheelchair!" He got out there and checked it out and it was okay.

Sibling

Then when **Arthur** and I were living on the west side of the Fort Worth, Sammy came and spent some time with us and I decided I would take him in the pool. We didn't have really any problems at all except that his lap board just floated up off of his wheelchair. We were trying to grab him and the lap board.

Rose

How was he breathing during this? Was it frog breathing?

Sibling

Frog breathing, he finally learned that he could frog breathe for quite a while.

Sibling

He learned that pretty soon, he was restricted to the iron lung for a long time. At some point maybe he was beginning to learn how to do that when he was in Houston. He would breathe the air in and swallow it, he could get the air in there, he couldn't get the air out. Then he learned how to do frog breathing. Wow, he was just hop, skip, and a jump then. He was really a go-getter, and our mother...

Rose

We want to hear about her, we've heard bits and pieces.

Sibling

This is an article where she was recognized as a volunteer and it tells about Sam starting HRA.

We lost Sammy and daddy died ten months a part

Rose

They died when?

Joe

<topic>Mildred Provence</topic>

Sammy died in October 1982, and daddy died. What was something, that summer of '82 was very stressful for all of us because mother found out she had cervical cancer, had surgery and had to go to Fort Worth for radiation treatments that whole summer. That was in '82, and daddy passed away in '83, just ten months apart.

Rose

How long did she live?

Joe

Tough bird, she was ninety-three when she died.

Rose

What year?

Sibling

2005.

Joe

We were up in Maine. Louise traveled in a motorhome full-time from the time that her husband died in '89, then she was always saying, "Mother why don't you come and travel with me? Why don't you come and travel with me?" Mother said, "Oh no no no." Finally mother said, "Okay, I'll go for two weeks." They traveled around and two weeks turned into two months I think.

Sibling

She must've done that about four years.

Joe

Yeah, she did that for about four years and that time would extend. When Sara's husband died in 2002. Freda, Sara, and I decided that we would fly somewhere and meet mother and Louise. They were going to be in Sacramento. We flew out there to Sacramento and one of mother's cousin's husband picked us up at the airport. They had a place up in the high Sierra. We went up there and spent a few days and had fun. Then we all flew back and Sara decided she would like to travel with them.

Sibling

They'd been trying to get me to quit my job and go on the road with them. That was while we were up there at Sacramento.

Joe

Sara called in a few days and she said, "Well, I made a decision." I said, "What?" She says, "I put the house on the market and I'm going to quit my job and travel with mother and Louise." Y'all traveled...you just started before mother's last trip. Y'all came out here for Thanksgiving, and Christmas, and then y'all started traveling. They had gone across the South and spent time in Florida. As it warmed up they went on up the East Coast to Maine. After they got up there, Freda and I said, "Are we going to go up and meet them or are we not?" They called and said, "Mother has been having some problems, she had coughed up some blood." They took her to the doctor and he said, "You've got a mass in your lungs." Said, "I want to send you to an oncologist in Portland." She said, "Well you can send me down there and find out how long I have or something, but I'm ninety-three years old and I'm not going through treatments or upsetting my family. Just keep me comfortable." she said.

Sibling

That's exactly what Dr. Alamo said.

Joe

We decided that we would go up there, so we made our plane reservations and flew up there. We got in on Friday night and mother had already gone to bed by the time we got to **Boothbay Harbor**. We went in and visited with her a few minutes.

The next morning we got up and she had rented this old sea captain's house at the top of the bay. We went in, we were sitting and looking at the picture window. She was talking about the boats, the flowers

and how pretty they were. This boat was made by this person, this one by this one. We had a real good visit that morning and she said, "I think I need to go in and lay down for a little while, I'm beginning to hurt." She went in, took a pain pill, went to bed, and the pain got worse. We called the ambulance and had them come get her and take her to the hospital. She got up there and it got a little bit easier, they were going to keep her. Before we left that night she said, "Now I want you all to promise me that you will stay in that house and you will finish this vacation." She said, "When I get to feeling better I'll join you and do whatever I can." She said, "Now promise me you'll stay in that house and finish this vacation!" Early Sunday morning they called from the hospital and they said, "Your mother's pain is worse and we've had to start her on morphine." We went up there and stayed all day.

Sibling

We were getting smart, all four of us were in that room. Pace ourselves.

Joe

We stayed all day and that night about nine or ten o'clock all of a sudden mother opened her eyes and raised her hands and started praising Jesus and said, "Thank you for my wonderful life, thank you for my kids!" and then she pulled each one of us down and hugged us and told us she loved us and then it was just like turning the light off. She was back out. The nurse said, "This may last a day, it may last a month, it may last a year. You just can't tell what's gonna happen from here."

Louise said, "Y'all, we're gonna have to pace ourselves." She said, "I'll take the first shift, y'all go on home, get some rest." We did that and then I came back and relieved her, then I took her home and got Sara, and it's just like, "What do I now?" Freda was going to take the shift from four to seven that night or something and she said, "I knew that Mildred was going to leave us on my watch." Sure enough, I got back to the deal and made some phone calls and all of that. Some of our friends from Boothbay Harbor had gone up to the hospital and were there checking on mother and visiting with Freda. They called and they said, "Joe, we think y'all better get back up here." We jumped in the car and went back up there. She had died. Freda said, "I knew she would do it!" We told her, "She knew that you were the only one strong enough to handle it." We were hanging around, and Sarah and I went out to wait for Dr. Alamo, her doctor to come.

Engel

That was his name?

Sibling

Yes, Dr. Alamo. Several summers before she and I were up there, she needed to have a visit with the doctor. She went, "Oh, okay." Mother couldn't understand people with accents. "That's bound to be a good Texan doctor with a name like Alamo." Alamo was Filipino but he was the sweetest thing.

Rose

Did he have an accent?

Sibling

You could understand. Mother was just stunned when she saw him.

Joe

Anyway, we're waiting for Dr. Alamo and the parking lot so we started back in, got near mother's room and he was with us and we just heard this laughter rolling out of mother's room. We went in and what had they said? Was they talking about the bunt pan? We were at mother's one time and I was going to make this bunt cake, mother didn't have a bunt pan and she said, "I think so and so next door has got it." I went over and borrowed one. They were talking in the room as we were coming down the hall. Louise said she had called Mrs. Johnson, and Louise said "That's the bunt pan lady." Our Maine friends thought she had said "The butt pan." Dr. Alamo just looked like...

Sibling

He was talking to Joe out the hall many open the door in the room was just...

Joe

We were waiting in there and the people, they talk about the hospitality of the South and how caring and sensitive people are. The ones in this little town, Boothbay Harbor, the people in that hospital were so so good. The night before mother had this male nurse that came in and was talking to us and he said he lived in **Denver's**. He and his wife had a sandwich shop up there and an ice cream parlor. We said, "You know, used to when we would go to mother's and visit she would always say "We needed to have a Blue Bell break."" She had the stemmed glasses that we would get out and have our Blue Bell in for a Blue Bell break. We were laughing about that, talking about it the night before to him. After Dr. Alamo left and pronounced mother, we were waiting for the funeral home to come get her or something, this nurse came in and he said, "Well I guess this is not a good time, I brought ice cream for you all."

Sibling

Mother was still there when we were eating that ice cream.

Joe

Her body was.

Sibling

She was gone, but I can tell you Mildred was thinking, "I left before I got my ice cream!"

Joe

She said, "This is the perfect time to have it." He went and got the bowls, ice cream, he brought two or three different kinds because he didn't know what our favorite was and we said, "Any of it is our favorite."

Sibling

Dr. Alamo said he would be back. He said, "I'm gonna go fill out the death certificate, but y'all save me some ice cream."

Sibling

We were just laughing and talking and we said, "Mother would've loved this."

Rose

That's a really good way.

Joe

We were saying, Louise didn't know whether she should take the motor home back to Texas or just fly down there. We needed to change our flights and everything, Sarah finally said, "Y'all, mother made us promise. She knew what was coming, and she made us promise that we would stay here and finish this vacation." We finally said, "Well, that's true."

Sibling

"Mama said."

Joe

The funeral home came and got her, we had her shipped back to Texas.

Sibling

First, we had the discussion about the hair. Mother's hair was always very important.

Joe

Oh yeah, the funeral home took her and got her dressed and we went and looked. The hairdresser had done an excellent job, they just done an excellent job. We shipped her back to Texas and because our aunt, mother's only living sister was here, we knew that we needed to have some kind of a memorial so that she would have a chance to see mother. We just arranged a gravesite and said, "We will do a memorial." When we get back to Arlington about a month, that's what we did.

Rose

Is she buried by your dad and Sam?

Sibling

Yeah.

Joe

In the old cemetery in Arlington.

Rose

Which one?

Joe

The one on Mitchell Street, just off Mitchell over by a ballpark. Trevor, you have to find it. You're the assistant! What is the name of that? (Laughs)

Rose

Is it Arlington Memorial?

Sibling

It was in Arlington, I don't know.

Engel

Yeah I'll go find it, I like cemeteries.

Joe

Cooper and Collins somewhere, just about a block north of Mitchell.

Engel

Okay.

Sibling

If it's still there, there's a baseball field across the street from it, not a big one.

Joe

We thought it was so fitting that Sammy was buried in the shadow of the bank, just north of the cemetery.

Rose

Why did you like it that he was buried in the shadow of the bank?

Joe

He would've loved it, his favorite color he always said when we asked him what he wanted for Christmas or his birthday, he said, "Well, you know, my favorite color is green."

Sibling

He decided he wanted to grow a beard and stuff, he always had a baby face. It got to where I was just calling him the "redheaded Abraham Lincoln." He didn't do that at first, the first couple pictures of the first year or two, but yeah he got with the program then. I said, "Boy, you just look like an old hippy." We told him our grandfather would call him an old hippy.

[Describing pictures]

Rose

<topic>School and hobbies</topic>

How did he wind up going to UTA? How did he know UTA would take him?

Sibling

You just get down to, "Where can I go?"

Sibling

Also his high school homebound teacher helped them. His peers were going to school.

Sibling

His high school diploma was from Sam Houston high school, you might check with them. I swear he finally got them to let him come to some classes, maybe his senior year at Sam Houston.

Sibling

By that time too, special ed had grown to include physically handicapped.

Rose

Yeah, but there was no right to go to public school at that point, not till 1975, and really not until 1978-ish for college and higher ed. There's the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, there's a lot of state predecessors, that's the first federal act that gives the right...

Sibling

We had special ed in Fort Worth, there was special ed here in Arlington.

Rose

But a lot of cities and states, it was really by if the principal or whoever was willing... Donna Anderson, the chair of the mayors community, she's blind, and Arlington was fairly pioneering in including blind students in the '70s in mainstream classes. She never went to a dedicated school. I'm curious about whether Arlington in general was more pioneering.

Sibling

Yes they were, so was Fort Worth. And then in '85 or whatever, I integrated not only with special ed but with black children.

Rose

'50s and '60s?

Sibling

Yeah, on the west side of Fort Worth. What was at school? I don't remember! In the back of mind maybe he had, I just know he got to go for some classes at Sam Houston high school.

Rose

We'll check that out, it's really pretty much if they were willing to make the classrooms accessible, put them on the first floor, could someone in the family carry someone up. That kind of thing.

Sibling

I assume that's probably the reason. He had two teachers from the time he was nine years old. He had one that finished him off for homeschooling until the high school years, and then he had another teacher. Boy, UTA and the experience of being with other people. My goodness, no wonder he did well.

Sibling

When he finally got that electric wheelchair, that's when he was freed. Man, he'd take off down off any street in Arlington and that. He would get out there on North Collins in that electric wheelchair, zoomy zoom, whenever he wanted to, that's when he really thought he made it.

Sibling

Then when he was able to move into his own apartment.

Rose

Do you know about when those were?

Joe

He hadn't been in them maybe a year before he died. He had pushed that and pushed that, found that apartment and house that would let him move in there with the care attendant.

Rose

We saw one article from the late '70s that said that there was an effort to get a mandate to have developers build some accessible housing. It was 1979.

Joe

Peach Street, they been there a couple of years. He got a grant or something, they got about five apartments that were renovated with walk-in showers and everything.

Sibling

It was the Peach Street apartments and it was up there, they used to be on Collins and Randall Mill, where the Cowboy's Stadium is. That area, there was at one time, wasn't it a Holiday Inn that was there? Then it became something else, and the Peach Street apartments were right just south of that. I'm sure they're gone now.

Sibling

Oh yeah, they knocked all that down when they were planning all this stadium stuff.

Sibling

That's where they were, and he would ride right down the middle Collins.

Rose

Was that because there were no curb cuts on the sidewalks?

Sibling

Oh yeah, he was right out there by then. They had done a lot. My son Brad said that, one of his buddies wasn't disabled, but he played on...

Rose

Wheelchair basketball?

Sibling

Mhmm. When the team really got going.... Down on Cooper Street, that red light, it was kind of like the west side of the campus was just the stepchildren, then they finally had that walk across and all over there. One of those basketball guys got hit out there...

Rose

Andy Beck.

Sibling

In his wheelchair. Then they went to work and there's not a lot there anymore, all that's underground to get you across there now.

Rose

Cooper. The University was trying to sink Cooper from the '60s and there was this fight with the city council and also the department of transportation for the state, the Regents.

Sibling

It took so long, that campus was really cut up when Sammy started up there. We had a friend that was a retired professor from up there and Sammy had an old Arlington State College sweatshirt that he loved to wear all the time from back in the day. Used to that campus was real split up.

Rose

Wayne Duke, the Dean that worked a lot with Jim Hayes and Sam Provence apparently said they used to joke that someone in a wheelchair would have to get killed, it was true.... Really morbid.

Sibling

More than once he had somebody push him out in the middle of Cooper Street to that red light to get attention, if you were in a wheelchair and you can't wheel yourself across that big old, wide street in three seconds. He pulled stunts like that more than once.

Rose

Didn't you say there was no stoplight for a long time at Cooper?

Sibling

That's right. That campus was started prior to the '50s, wasn't it?

Rose

1890s, really small for a long time and then went from the A&M system to the UT system in the '60s and then really started growing.

Joe

They probably got 40,000 students now, don't they?

Rose

Over 50 [thousand] if you count online, I think it's 36 and 38. We've heard only history and accounting had accessible classes in accessible buildings. How did he get to his classes for business?

Sibling

He had pushers.

Rose

Were there stairs and stuff?

Sibling

At the end of the class someone else would push to another building and the elevators. They changed some classrooms for him, and I remembering that right? I think so, or there was other people there.

Sibling

The veterans were coming in, and that helped him a great deal.

Rose

Vietnam veterans? Were there veterans in the Handicapped Student Association?

Sibling

I think, maybe. I don't know that. I just know that there were quite a few veterans that were trying to go to school there.

Rose

Who had disabilities? Interesting. We haven't heard that before.

Sibling

You haven't?

Rose

Not that period, it's helpful to know.

Sibling

Quite a few people in trouble coming out of Vietnam, Lord knows since then there were so many.

Rose

Do you guys remember anything about the process of working with Jim Hayes, the other students, and Wayne Duke to make the campus more accessible?

Sibling

Ask Dr. Saxe. Allan ought to know about some of that.

Rose

He didn't. We got a great deal of information about his childhood, and his experience with polio. He talked about your brother very fondly but didn't remember a lot.

Sibling

They were comrades. I'm surprised Allan didn't tell him about his polio.

Rose

He was very firm about that, I think he didn't want to say because it affected like a foot and he felt uncomfortable with your brother.

Sibling

There were people that had later affects.

Rose

We're curious about your perspective when he got polio, you were in Arlington? Louise you were out of the house?

Sibling

Oh yeah, I think I was teaching in New Mexico that year.

Rose

You were specializing in disabled kids?

Sibling

No, that was before I made the big flip-flop. I had done one year in Arlington, parents had formed the first class for retarded children and that was in that little house on Center Street. It's long gone now. They widen that street. Anyway, I had a terrific class and that was when I really began to lean over.

Rose

That was after Sammy had polio?

Sibling

No, that was before Sam had polio.

Sibling

When did you go to Chicago?

Sibling

1955. In '55 I graduated and when we all went to Chicago.

Joe

It was next year, your second year when you went back to Chicago.

Sibling

The first long vacation we had was the family vacation, we were gone a week and a half, two weeks? Anyway we had a ball. I went to college in Belton. I had a friend who was from that part of the country and she said, "Oh, well, our teacher is retiring this year. Maybe you can take her place."

Sibling

What was it, drama, English?

Sibling

They called it auditorium class. (Laughs) We put on shows every day. Chicago, beautiful little town, gorgeous trees, where the zoo is.

Rose

I know where that is.

Sibling

You were in Chicago when Sammy had?...

Joe

No, she missed that by two years when you went from there to **Carlsbad**.

Sibling

Didn't you teach a year in **Carlsbad**?

Sibling

No, I taught that special class in Arlington. They had the **preventable's** still in private schooling. That was so fun.

Sibling

You were actually in Arlington when he had polio?

Joe

No, she was in New Mexico.

Rose

Then you were in the house? Do you remember what happened? Before he wound up at John Peter Smith Hospital?

Sibling

They first thought Sammy had a cold or something, and that rocked them for a little while. One day at the doctor's office they whisked him off to John Peter Smith in an ambulance. It was during the school day, they came to the junior high. I was in the seventh grade. Mother's best friend and her husband came up there and they called me to the office.

Joe

She thought, "What have I done now?"

Sibling

"Who's the rat today?"

They took me to their house, everybody else was at the hospital... Kept me for several days and then I went back to the house. It was a scary time. We had a wonderful Christmas tree, nobody was in the mood, I don't know where Bubba found that old tree and painted it gray. We had angel hair put on there, and little bitty blue balls. That was our Christmas tree in '58. Did we take that up to Peter Smith? And put it in his?

Sibling

I have no idea, it's been a couple of days.

[Recording breaks]

Sibling

It was a 24/7 job to take care of Sam.

Rose

Who did the care after he got home?

Sibling

We did.

Rose

You, your mom and dad?

Sibling

And daddy. It was hard. We finally had a lift that you could put under him after you pulled him out of the iron lung, just under the bed part and crank it up and move him and get him in the wheelchair and stuff. We had to do everything.

Rose

Did the March of Dimes and TIRR help teach you how? Getting a lift? I imagine a lot of the stuff had to be developed, and now people know about it.

Sibling

Oh yeah, I imagine you could just call and probably order a lot of it online.

Rose

He had to be fed?

Sibling

Oh yeah, fed, bathed, everything. Putting him on and off the bed pan was always a favorite.

Rose

He didn't have a catheter?

Sibling

No, he was lucky. You had all these people that are quads and stuff, he was so lucky he never had any trouble with his bladder or kidneys. Then when they got into the housing thing, nearly every darn one of

them, every time you turned around one of them was going to the hospital because of a bladder infection. Sammy never had that. He was dead weight, what you see is what you get.

Rose

He could move his head, his neck, and his left leg?

Sibling

He could turn his head a little bit, but he couldn't move his arms. He could keep time to the music, tapping that left leg, he'd just rocked that wheelchair sometimes. If he didn't have the brakes on the little wheels... (Laughs)

Rose

What kind of music did he like?

Sibling

Everything, he liked all kinds of sports, I think basketball, college basketball. He didn't like the pros basketball because he said, "They just take turns running down there and just slam dunking the ball. Why watch that?"

Joe

He wasn't a big NASCAR fan.

Sibling

We are. That was back when there wasn't that much NASCAR on TV.

Sibling

There's a page in here that talks about who all had cars. They must've had a car show to raise money.

Sibling

There was a lot of hot rods in Arlington.

Rose

Jim Hayes also had a deal with Moritz Chevrolet to help fund the Movin' Mavs. He would buy his cars there every year.

[Recording breaks]

Sibling

A lot of things were trial and error too about what to adapt to help with something on his chair. Somebody had to cut out and make that lap board. It had little brackets on the side to slide it on the edge of the arms of his wheelchair. Heaven sent. Cut out a board to go at the bottom of the wheelchair to set his motor on, then the battery pack.

Sibling

Then the book thing that he would read when he was sitting up, he would turn the pages with a mouth stick.

Sibling

It would have a pencil eraser on the end of it where it would grab the page. They have so much stuff now, every time we see some new technology I think, "Man, Sam would be in hog heaven."

Joe

Just like Freda and I are involved with a music group at the University to raise money for the music students in the music department, we go to all the concerts and the accompanists now, they don't have to turn pages. They use their tablets or iPad and they just have to touch the screen and it turns the page. I thought Sammy would just love that.

Sibling

He would've been a master at that by now.

Sibling

You bet, absolutely.

Rose

We've heard a lot about Jim Hayes, we know he worked with your brother...did you interact with Jim Hayes?

Sibling

Not a whole lot. Jim Hayes had the wheelchair basketball team. Mother probably had, everybody he ever came in contact with, she was the leg man, driver. I went to a lot of the stuff, but I was at school too.

Joe

Sammy dying one year, and daddy dying ten months later, mother just felt like her life was over because she had been so busy and so wound up in taking care of daddy and taking care of Sammy and everything. This article was when she was recognized for a volunteer service and that's when she had decided she needed to get out and do something for others. Freda still drives mother's little '93 Ford escort. It just now has 60,000 miles on it.

Sibling

I think when mother was about ninety, she twirled herself around on a wet street up there in Arlington.

Joe

She was on her way to the nursing home to visit those old ladies, she was ninety then.

Sibling

She was, she decided that was it. She was traveling with Louise at the time, just came home and went to go visit these friends, drove her car, and she just said, "That's it, I'm giving it to Joe and Freda." They wouldn't let her give it to us until it had 30,000 miles on it.

Sibling

My husband said, "Mildred, you can't let them have that car until you get 30,000 miles on it! It's not even broke in good yet!"

Rose

Was she working before he got polio?

Sibling

No.

Rose

So she was able to do a lot of the care and then go to college with him?

Sibling

He never had a bed score, never. She exercised him every day.

Rose

Wow.

Sibling

They showed her how to do that, and how important it would be when he was down at TIRR. She took it seriously. We all did.

Joe

Her prayer when Sammy first got sick was, "Just let him live, just let him live." Sarah said the other night she got her wish. He really had a very full life and at his funeral it was just packed at the church and they had state representatives, city council members, and a bunch of wheelchair people, Handitran.

Sibling

Buses lined up, and even where they signed in, some of them, they'd sign their name and they would put out there "Handitran driver." The church was packed.

Rose

Was it a Baptist church?

Sibling

University Baptist on Park Row.

Joe

Is this still University Baptist? Or second Baptist? It started out as Temple Baptist, it's close to the high school. On Park Row just a couple of blocks west of Arlington high, close to Arlington church of Christ.

Sibling

Unless they moved all that down, it's been a while since I've been down Park Row.

Rose

We found him in the Baptist Student photos.

Engel

Yeah, he was in quite a few of those.

Sibling

He was out there a lot. If he missed doing anything I can't imagine what it would be because he did enjoy his self.

Joe

When he finished his master's degree he started doing student teaching, he thought, "You know I think I'd really like to be a teacher."

Sibling

I had told him for years, "You have to go into teaching!"

Joe

He was sought after as a student, a fill in teacher in everything, he even taught PE. Those kids said they never had been worked harder in their life.

Sibling

He taught shorthand and they said, "Sammy, how did you teach shorthand?" He said, "Well, you know there are always a couple of girls that are above and beyond everybody else." So he just used them to write on the board and give the instruction.

Rose

Was he involved in church? Was he able to go to church and get into it when he was living at home? Before college?

Sibling

Not a whole lot.

Joe

Didn't he go to Meadow Lane for a little while? They were hosting the first day enrichment program. He would make it down there.

Rose

When he was fifteen or sixteen, how much did he get around outside the house?

Sibling

He went out quite a bit, but it was always a chore to get him in and out and around and all. For a while when we first started out, we had a '53-'54 four door Chevrolet. We had to take the back seat out to make room for that heavy motor.

Sibling

It was that green one.

Sibling

The one you went off to **Wayland** with the key to it or something one time? You had the car key!

Sibling

Then we had a station wagon so it was a while.... That didn't happen that fast. We were really sailing along when we got the van with the lift on the side opening. People think nothing of that today. They used to not have that. On the other side of Fort Worth, we took the van over there he's the one that measured and got it installed. Then he could ride in that van in the wheelchair strapped down and all... Except that one time we didn't strap it down because we were in a hurry

Joe

It is amazing, all of the steps forward that they've come with equipment. We have a friend in Lubbock who was injured in a skiing accident two or three years ago. He has since then married, they came up here. He has a Toyota van and he pushes the button and the ramp comes out. It tilts down in the back, he rolls his wheelchair and hooks it down and drives. It's just amazing.

Sibling

Pastor Victoria when we were out at **Lorine's** for the first time Louise and I ever saw one of those. It's amazing now, the technology.

Rose

I was curious when you were living down in Houston with him, did you see some of the treatments they did while he was in rehab?

Joe

Not a lot because I was working full-time at the bank downtown. We'd go out there when I got off of work or at night. We didn't have a car. Dr. Charles **Erindale** was at UTA teaching in the communications department for a little while when he died. He had been a real good friend, him and his wife, of mine here at Wayland when I was a student. Charles was renting a room during the summer from his aunt

who lived in Houston and that's where Charles was from. I went down there to visit him at first to look for a job. Aunt Florence says, "Well, you can rent a room from me." Which was a wonderful deal because she was a wonderful cook. Sometimes she would say, "Just take my car and go and visit Sam," so that was a great deal.

Sibling

I must've come down there that summer to stay with her and y'all. I can't remember how long, but I do remember waiting on the bus. (Laughs)

Rose

Were they trying to see if he would regain some capacity while he was staying down there?

Sibling

Absolutely, they really worked hard with him. You could tell the nurses all loved him, a little redheaded kid.

Rose

Did he stay in touch with anyone from that experience?

Joe

I do not know that.

Sibling

So many of my connections of died.

Rose

<topic>Handitran, Arlington Handicapped Association, and Handicapped Student Association</topic>
Part of what we were wondering, Jim Hayes just seems to have figured out stuff. I've wondered about your brother, there's a pretty strong community of polio survivors. A lot in California, a lot of the people who drove independent living, they're polio survivors also. It's contemporary. We've been trying to figure out where these ideas came from at UTA and for AHA. If you have any insights, we'll take them!

Joe

I know when he got to UTA and could be out with people his own age and saw others with handicaps or limitations, that he just thought, "Well, this is great, there's some others that have the same problems!" Goodness, I'm just sure that they sat around and just BSed some of their ideas.

Sibling

It was bound to happen. By that time too it was no longer a new thing. When he got sick, that was a new thing, but just look how many other things had been integrated by the time Sammy got to high school.

Rose

There was so many people who had polio and also Rubella epidemics. There's parents organizing classes, there were basically little clusters of people figuring it out. Do you happen to know how he found out about concrete ramps? There's a law passed in 1969 in Texas, following a federal law that was the first real disability rights law. Texas was one of the last four states to pass its own architectural barriers act. The law went into effect January 1, 1970. Your brother got the first ramps at UTA within nine months. We're really impressed.

Sibling

Sitting in the middle of the street did some good!

Rose

This is even before the city council. A lot of people at UTA think Jim Hayes, he's the institutional memory. We're like, "Wait it was actually Sam Provence who got the first ramps." What about Handitran? We know he was huge in getting paratransit.

Sibling

Oh yeah, he worked on that. Let me see what it says.... This resume is a good source for that stuff.

Rose

Was that partly so your mom didn't have to drive him everywhere? He wanted to be able to go on his own?

Sibling

He was raising cain about it, not only for the disabled, but for the elderly. He felt like seniors in Arlington was big enough and all that it should accommodate seniors too. Our aunt Betty helped him worked on one of those grants when he was raising cain about Handitran stuff and trying to get this information together. In the ACLU he answered phones, funnel questions and answered questions and stuff, trying to direct people to whatever service they were talking about. That's probably where he got a lot of his information.

Joe

In here it says from June '78 to '80 he was the founder and president of the Arlington Handicapped Association. Under that a point says, "Prompted the city of Arlington to establish five bus transportation service for handicapped and elderly, which makes 100+ trips per day for handicapped groups."

Rose

Do you remember much about the founding of the Arlington Handicapped Association? We know your mom was also involved too very early on.

Sibling

She looked at different buildings that they could use, I think even a couple of people from the church had a place they might look at. I remember going to a place that used to be across the street from Arlington Memorial back in the day to look. He was like a sponge, soaking up information and he wasn't afraid to speak up.

Rose

We heard that he was the "hell raiser," and John Dycus and Jim Hayes would go and clean up.

Sibling

That's probably true.

Joe

That's probably a good description.

Sibling

I think John wrote an article after Sam died and said, "Who's gonna take care of people now? Sam is gone? Who's gonna be the next hell raiser?"

Sibling

I've always wondered what Sam's IQ was.

Sibling

I imagine it was pretty good, sweetie.

Sibling

I imagine, he did a lot in thirty-three years.

Joe

Touching a lot of people, a lot of lives. The people and their families.

Rose

After he graduated college he was working on getting a stockbrokers license, and he worked as a stockbroker?

Sibling

Mmhmm. That was before he got in the apartments.

Rose

Was your mom driving him?

Joe

He was working a lot from home.

Rose

Was the ACLU, I imagine it was really hard to get a job where they would...due to the fact that he needed an accessible building, maybe he needed assistance with things.

Sibling

That's one of the reasons why he thought he would be able to get a job in the school teaching school. The kids would've loved him and that sort of stuff. He was great at counseling other people. I can't count the times he was talking to somebody that was ready to throw their hands up and give up. Wouldn't ever do better and stuff, especially one of the guys that lived in those apartments, they had a party, got drunk, drunk jumped in the shallow part of the swimming pool. Another guy, he had been shot or something, he was always counseling other people about, "Don't give up, blah blah blah, you can do it." He was good at doing that. He would've been good at counseling the high school kids, junior high kids.

Rose

There were people that were coming to UTA, living in those apartments from Indiana and Kansas. Jim Hayes was making sure they could get what they needed in school, and your brother was presumably making sure they could actually live independently. Which is really cool to see.

[Recording breaks]

Joe

We went to Arlington one time on vacation or for holiday, Sam said, "I have a project for you." I said, "What is it?" He said, "We need a logo for the Arlington Handicapped Association and I told them that my brother could do it." He had an idea so we came up with this design. He just loved it and I said, "Well, that's the sketch, now what do you want to do with it?" He said, "I need you to do a real big one, about 4 x 8' to use tomorrow at something." I think maybe the charity event out at the Parks mall? The Six Flags mall? They were going to have a big thing and that's what I did that night is paint that thing on a big 4 x 8' board.

Sibling

We had to cut it out too.

Rose

Did you paint in general? How did he recruit you?

Joe

I came to Wayland and I was going to be an art major, but the head of the department at that time loved for you just to put all this paint on your paintbrush and throw it on the canvas' and then name it. To me that was not art. I decided I was going to do something else, but in a required biology class we had to look through the microscopes at specimens and then draw it. My drawings were just works of art. My professor started talking to me about becoming a biological illustrator. I thought, "Well, that sounds interesting." I changed my major every semester nearly. I took another biology course here, and my third semester is when Sammy got sick. I decided to transfer to UTA. I thought, "I'm gonna become a biological illustrator" and I always hated math and science even though I had made great grades in it in high school. I transferred to UTA and took a class in chemistry I guess under Dr. Pope. I was one of the few dummies in the class. That ended my work as a biological illustrator. Anyway to make a long story short, after I retired from Wayland in 2007 I went back to art and have a studio out in the garage. That was the deal that Sam had come up with.

Sibling

Then they used that design. I remember we were selling T-shirts then, those T-shirts were orange.

Rose

UTA is orange.

Sibling

Sammy loved orange, he loved to stand out. He did. He'd wear these argyle socks, orange, just like he didn't need something to draw attention to himself anyway with the chair and all. Anything to draw attention to himself. He had his masters picture taken with a tie and a white shirt on.

Rose

When did he apply to law school? Was it right after college or was it later on?

Joe

It was right after. He started thinking about it and decided that would be something that he could do with limited physical access. He was just gung ho on that. That's what he wanted to do. Of course when he was rejected from St. Mary's he was kind of depressed for a day or two but then he said, "Well, I'm gonna go get my Master's degree in history." He'd done some substitute teaching. Louise and I had told him for years that he ought to be a teacher. He was going to get his masters in history, got that stockbrokers license in the meantime. He could pretty well do anything he set his mind to do. He was amazing, he really was an amazing young man.

Rose

I don't know if any of these names will mean anything to you, but do you know if he was in touch with...there's a big Texas contingent and push for Americans with disabilities act. We've been trying to figure out how and if the community around UTA was connected to national and state activism. Bob Kafka? He's worked a lot in getting people out of nursing homes, also on access to public transit. Justin Dart? Lex Frieden? Kafka and Frieden are still living. It's interesting because there is a national story that we're trying to figure out how UTA fits in. We know adaptive sports, UTA has a really big national impact. Clearly there's some hints that your brother was connected to some national networks. The article early on that he was involved in the protests...Your brother was involved in the protests in Dallas, this was this national move. We know he was connected, I assume it's partly from polio networks since because they're so strong. I don't know if you remember anything about this, but this was the first comprehensive civil rights regulation.

Sibling

He probably kept it a secret from us. Yes, it says one of the demonstrators was Sam Provence. I'm trying to find the date on that.

Rose

'77, the regulations came out....

Sibling

There were other people that could drive him, you can bet mother wasn't the driver that day. Sometimes other people would drive him in the van, give mother a break.

Rose

She wouldn't have been into this?

Sibling

I think if he talked her into it she would've been there.

Rose

Basically this is the law that then started requiring state universities, anything receiving federal funds to provide access. It's incredibly important, but it took protests and sit-ins. I was just really intrigued that he was involved in that. Do you remember some of his friends from that community in the '70s, late '70s '80s that we might want to look up? It's fine if you think about them more.

Sibling

I'll think about it some more, but right now I'm drawing a blank.

Rose

That demonstration was in Dallas, that might've been the day I was taking him to Dallas and the wheelchair flipped over.

Sibling

It didn't flip over, it tipped and I had to grab it. Headed up the hill and he wasn't latched down.

Rose

I haven't read anything about the demonstrations in Dallas, but it was every ATW office in the country.

Sibling

They were usually always running late because it took Sam so long to get Sammy ready to get in and go. He used to always be hollering, "Faster, mama, faster, I'll pay the ticket! Faster, mama, faster!"

Rose

That's really funny.

Joe

I know since the Dallas paper picked out and quoted Sammy, he's probably the big mouth in the group. "The BS hell raiser."

Rose

Or maybe one of the organizers? That period, there was a lot of national organizing. It was just a matter of figuring out how he connected to other people. Do you remember anything about when he went to testify besides Austin?

Sibling

Yes he went to Austin on some occasion.

Rose

Did he go anywhere else?

Sibling

I can't remember what year it must of been. I remember hearing about it, and him frog breathing. He knew if he got on the plane with his motor and stuff, he wouldn't have gotten on that plane. Have you talked with the Stuart Clark that's mentioned in the same article?

Rose

No, not yet.

Sibling

Regional director at that point.

Rose

He may be dead by now.

Sibling

Sammy would be sixty-six.

Rose

That reminds me, what are your ages?

Sibling

I'm the oldest, I'm eighty-one.

Rose

You were born?

Sibling

1934.

Sibling

'39.

Sibling

'46.

Rose

We need to label some of those before we leave, but not right now.

Sibling

Somebody that can see to write.

Rose

Your mom's name we know, but what about your dad's name?

Sibling

Mildred Marie Provence, Ernest **Irvin**. Mother was a Harris.

Joe

Daddy went by his initials E.E or Red.

Sibling

They were all redheads, but me. I was blonde.

Joe

The husband was blonde. (Laughs)

Rose

We need to preserve the historical record.

One thing that Trevor came up with, I don't know if you want to explain it. We've wondered why UTA was willing? We have anecdotal accounts that other schools really weren't serving students with disabilities, partly is obviously who was there. Your brother was there, Jim Hayes, president Nedderman was apparently very open-minded, Wayne Duke really got disability and pushed it as Dean of students. A lot of what UTA used was this architectural barriers act, and they got a grant that your brother and Jim Hayes wrote to start making the campus more accessible.

One thing that was really odd, we haven't gone through all the Regents minutes, they're detailed. They don't respond to the 1969 law saying that, "Things build with state funds have to be accessible." By about 1975 the Regents and the higher education coordinating board start saying, "Here's a form if you do substantial remodeling or a new building, at a state university it has to be accessible." Things were still being built at other campuses that weren't accessible, not so much at UTA.

One of the really interesting things we found, and I can find the letter. There's a letter from the Chancellor of the UT system, LeMaistre, writing to president Nedderman or Wayne Duke saying "Sam Provence and Jim Hayes have asked to meet with the Regents." 1973 or so. "We're glad to meet with them, we're really excited that they want to make UTA even more accessible. We'd like to know what UTA is going to do too." We've looked through the minutes for those years, haven't found actual records of a meeting, but we've been trying to figure out where this might've happened. We're working to talk to the archives in Austin also. Any recollection of them going down to Austin to meet with the Regents? The Regents met at different campuses, but we're wondering if they got the Regents to start enforcing the law saying that campuses had to be accessible. This is Trevor's theory.

That's a federal law, this is a state law. It's basically saying universities have to be accessible, it doesn't seem to be enforced for about six years. We know that your brother and Jim Hayes wrote and said, "Hey, we want to come talk."

Sibling

I don't know. It's probably more likely they met in the metroplex than going to Austin.

Rose

There were meetings at Arlington about once a year.

Sibling

Someone made the statement that he would sign the regulation.

Rose

That's a federal law. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, this is the Senate Bill 111 from 1969, it's what UTA used. Do you have any ideas of why UTA was willing to work with all these students?

Sibling

For one thing they may have been beat down.

Joe

Was John in school with Sam?

Sibling

John Dycus graduated in '71.

Joe

So John, Joe Rowe and Sam were all there at the same time.

Rose

And then Jim Hayes showed up in 1971, and then there was Bob Hester in '61, but he later became part of the disability rights group. He was using crutches, he has cerebral palsy. He was there early, actually Dycus may have been '69 I want to say, I'm not sure?

Engel

He was still there in the early '70s though, helping out with the newspaper.

Rose

He became an employee.

Joe

I think with that influx of smart students and pushy students...

Sibling

John wasn't very pushy, but Jim seems like it.

Joe

Joe Rowe was, that may have been the springboard for that.

Rose

Have you heard of a David Brock and Rena Williamson? '72 and '73 they were presidents of the Handicapped Student Association.

Joe

I don't recognize those names, but that may have been...when did Sam graduate?

Rose

'71, he probably knew them. How long did it take him to do his masters?

Sibling

It took him a little while.

Rose

Two or three years?

Sibling

He took a lot of different courses too.

Joe

His stockbroker license, he was filling in substitute teaching, all that kind of stuff.

Sibling

He worked for ACLU.

Rose

This is probably question for John Dycus, how did your brother find out about independent living? The concept of hiring his own attendant, choosing when he could get up?

Joe

He was just so focused on wanting to get out on his own and be independent. That was his main driving thing. Lord, when he got to live on his own apartment and got that motorized wheelchair he was like a bird out of a cage.

Sibling

They worked on that proposal for quite a long while. Finding an apartment complex that would agree to it.

Rose

Were there modifications that had to be made too?

Sibling

Oh yes.

Joe

I think there was a grant mentioned that they got to give to the apartments to do the modification.

Rose

Yeah, three grants for the housing coordinator.

Sibling

They shared aids, but there was somebody there 24/7. They had to rotate them.

Joe

They had an intercom system that anytime they needed an aide they could just call out.

Sibling

Sam had so many good contacts and aids whose name I can't remember. When he first moved in there, there was one that my memory, but no name for him. He was the one starting out was telling them what they had to be able to do and training. It seems like some agencies sent nurses or physical therapists over there to talk to him. His wheels were always turning. He observed a lot of things and a lot of people, when you can't just get up and walk off, you're sitting in a chair. He was pretty good at picking people out, figuring out who's smart and will take good notes.

Joe

This article mentions, and it just stood out to me in a sentence I read recently, it said, "I have to be able to get up and get out if there's a fire or something."

Rose

The Air Force delivered him back from Houston?

Sibling

Yes. In that little photograph I think identifies they landed at the airport in Fort Worth. **Carter**, that's what the article says.

Sibling

They were wrong because it was the old **Gregor Southwest** airport out on 360 about halfway between Arlington and Euless. That was the airport before they splattered it and built DFW.

Sibling

Since it was a military plane though, at that time we did have that base in Fort Worth.

Sibling

But they landed it out at **Greg Southwest** because it was closer to home. They delivered him that far, and **mowers** are somebody, and a big police escort and everything.

Rose

Do you know how they arranged to have the Air Force fly him home?

Joe

I'm sure they arranged that from TIRR in Houston because I saw him off in Houston.

Sibling

What airport did they use in Houston?

Joe

I have no idea, that's not important.

Sibling

Those pictures that you need..

Rose

I wanted to ask too, what was your mom like? I know she was really involved in the activism and supportive of him.

Joe

We just laughed and talked about mother. The TV character that we most relate to her is Edith on **Bunker**. Do you remember that character?

Rose

I've heard of the show, but I don't know. He doesn't know at all.

Engel

My dad would know. My dad is seventy-six, he would know.

Sibling

He ought to know.

Joe

Mother was just like a magnet. Any time that either side of the family, daddy's or mother's family had a get together in the years that our grandparents were too old to have it, they always came to mother and daddy's house. She's the one that would put things together and organize it. We had a big birthday party for her when she was eighty. She says, "Oh my gosh, you've let people know that I'm eighty years old, it's just downhill all the way from here."

Sibling

Mother never looked her age.

Joe

No, and she was so active pushing Sammy around and taking him places. She had cancer when she was seventy-five.

Sibling

Well, it was in '82. However old she was in '82.

Joe

They did a biopsy, or a removal for a pathology report and they put her age on it. The pathologist called and questioned, said, "This is tissue for a woman twenty-five years younger." She had no wrinkles when she died, she never used soap on her face, she used all these creams and stuff. She had a beautiful complexion.

Sibling

Always wore gloves.

Sibling

When she says she wore a hat, she doesn't mean a pillbox, she always had a sun hat or something when she went out. She was a real stupid like her son has been.

Sibling

She was always the caregiver. She taught all of us to be caregivers, and to treat every body like you wanted to be treated.

Sibling

Wonderful Christian, she had a wonderful wonderful faith.

Sibling

To solve the question about where the plane landed, it landed at Carter Field.

Sibling

That's not right, but if that's what they put on it I'll run with it.

Sibling

It says, "Sammy Provence managed to cheer up a smile Monday just after arriving at Carter Field from Houston. Watching over Sammy is one of his many newly acquired friends and Air Force nurse who made the trip with him."

Rose

What about your dad?

Joe

Dad was very quiet, he never had a chance to say anything in our house. He could repair anything. How old was daddy when he died?

Sibling

Seventy-five I think.

Sibling

Seventy-one I thought.

Joe

Early '70s, he was diabetic. He had kind of gone downhill because he was diabetic. This was back before they had the treatments and the medications and all today.

Sibling

He had a stroke. It took from the time he started dealing with the diabetes he just slowly changed over the next eight or nine years.

Joe

As Louise said, he was the type that could repair or fix anything.

Rose

Did he work on all the equipment you had for Sam?

Joe

Yes, at one point when I was down there.... I can sure relate to this now. But when I was down there, we were taking the doors off of the closet in the back bedroom, or putting them back up, I can't remember which. Daddy came back there and we were gonna do that, and he said, "You know, I could've done this five years ago or something in ten minutes." He said, "I just can't make things work like they used to." I was always the one that held his nail or his hammer for him. I was the one that was having to do it that day. Anyway, he was always a hard hard worker. We never really had any money to speak of, and daddy never made over six or seven hundred dollars a month.

Rose

What kind of work did he do?

Joe

He worked for a butane fuel tank company. He never made that much money, but mother was so frugal and pinched pennies and everything, we never knew that we were broke. She later in life started, especially after Louise's husband talked to her, she started pinching things and investing in some stocks and in CDs. She would invest just about the time she would go somewhere, take a trip, one of the CDs.

Sibling

That was back in the day when they were worth more than two cents.

Joe

In the butane business, people would call on Christmas Eve and say, "We've got family coming in, we need some butane delivered." Daddy would get up and go. We would start lying to them on the phone and say, "He's not here." (laughs)

Sibling

Everybody would call and say, "Oh, we got a ninety-five-year-old grandmother here, a new baby, we're out of propane." Daddy was a hard worker.

Joe

Oh he was.

Rose

In other words, without the March of Dimes support, there was no way.

Sibling

Oh no.

Sibling

Without the March of Dimes, we would've managed some way. We had friends in the church and stuff. It's a long way to Houston from Arlington, and nearly every other weekend mother and daddy were going down there too, weren't they?

Joe

Well, before I finished that semester. They were back and forth pretty regularly doing that.

Sibling

She had lots of friends.

Rose

I was gonna say, how did Sammy support himself?

Sibling

Sammy didn't.

Rose

Did he get grants, later in the '70s? How was he paying living expenses?

Sibling

Handicapped started getting a little check a month.

Sibling

Social Security, disability.

Joe

Then his substitute teaching jobs, whatever commissions he made from his stockbroker business.
(Laughs)

Rose

I guess the ACLU for a while?

Sibling

Yeah. He constantly had a lot of support. At school, wherever, I wasn't here all the time, I don't know, but he always had people behind him working on projects with him.

Sibling

In one of these articles it talks about he devised this trashcan with wheels, he sold them and the man who wrote the articles said, "I have one of them."

Sibling

I forget who welded those, I don't know if **Mr. Garbo** did those, or Mr. Hemingway or who. He got a little commission.

Rose

You said he liked music a whole lot? What other kind of interests did he have? Sports?

Sibling

Sports, basketball.

Rose

Able-bodied, wheelchair, both?

Sibling

Both. He used to think he was the coach, he used to watch them both, the regular team and the wheelchair. He'd go to practice a lot, he would be sitting down there, he'd be hollering, telling them, "You need to run the bleachers again!" and all this stuff. He loved it.

Rose

That's really cool.

Sibling

It really does puzzle me that I cannot remember the March of Dimes lady's name.

Rose

We may be able to find it.

Sibling

She and her husband took us back and forth to Houston a couple of times. I remember at least once traveling with her.

Sibling

You'll wake up in the middle of the night, get your pencil and paper out.

Rose

You can email us.

Joe

Call Trevor!

Engel

I'll still be up!

Sibling

What else do we need to get done?

Rose

<topic>Community reactions</topic>

You said some people were not very nice to you about Sammy? How did people around him act? At UTA or other places?

Sibling

I think the people that were kind of ugly didn't really live on our block, the kids that I'd chase up and down occasionally.

Rose

You'd fight with them?

Sibling

That hit hard when they made fun of him, that was my little brother. I could run faster than some of them even though I'm a short person. I played football and everything, I'd tackle them in the front yard with everybody else in the neighborhood.

Joe

The neighbors were very supportive and very good. There's multiple pictures with whole bunch of neighbors greeting him as he got home, they had a real good support thing. Polio was so unusual anymore, just like the parents that didn't want their kids to play with Sara. They were scared and it was ignorance on a lot of it, just like we have a cousin and his mother immediately took him to see their doctor who was a chiropractor. The doctor said, "There's no reason to give him that vaccine, because get him to me quickly and I can cure him by popping these two bones." That to me is really ignorance. People naturally.... When we would take Sammy somewhere or something, they would stare and they would look. They just had never seen that turtle shell and us pulling that little red wagon.

Sibling

It was really fun at the zoo when we went over to Fort Worth to the zoo. (Laughs)

Joe

It was just something really unusual that they couldn't understand.

Sibling

That's been about a lot of diseases that have come along that people just freak out, but depending on the handicapped, it's still that way today. You can see people that are just put off by the way somebody with a disability looks or acts or something. It's just human nature.

Sibling

After Sammy broke his leg, Joe and I were down there and we were going to take him over to John Peter Smith for them to check him. That being a county hospital, there were all sorts of people there with disabilities, but when we took Sammy in, they immediately took him back to a room and he didn't have to wait out there with all the "dregs of society" so to speak. Joe and I stood out there and waited for him because we couldn't go back, but there were a lot of things there that day that I wanted to stare at. (Laughs) I didn't, I controlled myself.

There was a man there with a tumor on his head that was probably about this big around. Naturally, you wanted to look at him and say, "What is this? Do you know about that?" Many people there that day, and we were glad that Sammy didn't have to witness that, that they took him back to the examining room.

Rose

Did he have to argue for access at UTA at all? Were the faculty and other students pretty accepting?

Joe

I think they were pretty accepting and they would take him to class, sometimes carry his wheelchair up the stairs and all of that. I don't know of any rejection that he had or felt from UTA.

Rose

That's great.

Sibling

I think that they did move a few of the classes that he took because they were not handy for him to get to. What they were, I have not a clue.

Joe

They were kind of like the New York subways. (laughs)

Sibling

They're not friendly either. That's what Freda has said.

Sibling

The subways are once you get on them.

Sibling

Once you get up and down the stairs.

Rose

The DC Metro was built excessively because it was built fairly late, the New York City subway is still a huge problem.

[recording breaks]

Sibling

About the apartments and the grants, do you have that information already?

Rose

We don't have that article actually.