

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Ray Roy

COLLECTION: 4700.1743

IDENTIFICATION: Brother of Alvin Roy, co-owner of Alvin Roy's Gym

INTERVIEWER: Petra Munro Hendry

PROJECT: McKinley High School Oral History Project: Social Organizations

INTERVIEW DATES: June 14, 2005

FOCUS DATES: 1940s - 2000s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3445, Side A.

Ray Roy is the younger brother of Alvin Roy; Ray was born February 13, 1931; attended Catholic High in Baton Rouge, graduated in 1948; went to LSU for two years then spent four years in the navy and served in the Korean War; came back to Baton Rouge and went to work for Alvin in 1954; parents Joseph Thomas Roy and Lula Marie Major were both from New Roads; father worked at Standard Oil, they lived on Pocahontas Street; Ray youngest of seven children, five boys and two girls; Baton Rouge was small, still had streetcars when he was young; most of the people in his neighborhood worked for Standard Oil; he went to Saint Anthony church and grade school; neighborhood was friendly; Alvin was a good athlete; Alvin graduated from Istrouma High School in 1940; he was second in the state in pole vaulting and was on the all-city basketball team; Alvin got into lifting weights when it was part of his rehab after he broke his collarbone; Ray got a set of weights from Alvin and that's what got Ray interested in strength training; Alvin in the service from 1940 to '47, fought in Europe; Alvin and friend Lloyd Johnson helped to organize the Allied Track and Field Championship in Berlin Stadium in September, 1946; Alvin came back to Baton Rouge in 1947; Alvin became close with gym-owner Sigmund Klein during a trip to New York, Klein gave Alvin a manual on how to run a gym; Alvin decided to open a gym in Baton Rouge which was unheard of; Alvin was taking a big risk, along with his financier, Clifford Ourso of the American Bank and Trust; Alvin purchased the old WJBO building on Oklahoma Street; Ray describes the main building and the shack in the back where he and Alvin lived; description of the interior of the gym – dressing rooms, steam room, showers, the gym with the weight equipment; name of the gym was something like "Alvin Roy's Slenderizing Studio"; later the name changed to include "Turkish Bath"; Alvin and his wife were trainers; the gym was for women and men; they had separate hours for women and men to come in and train; it was hard getting clients but then prominent people started coming on their lunch breaks; advertising was a problem at first; men and women came in for different reasons, building muscle, losing weight, getting in shape; turning point was

when they got involved with athletes; set up weight training program for Istrouma High football team; Billy Cannon was on that team; LSU players started to come in; nobody in college or pro sports did weight training at that time, Alvin's gym started it; the peak of the gym was 1955 through the late 1970s; anyone who came to the gym was personally trained; method was helping athletes develop explosive power and strength; Ray was basically the manager; they had thirty-eight franchises of the gym across the country; franchising came about because of Alvin's work with Tom [Fisdale?]; after Tom died the franchises fizzled out; original gym was purchased by two dentists who ran it for four or five years; Ray owned or partially owned other health clubs; Alvin died in 1979, he was born in 1920; Alvin was hired by Sid Gillman to work with the San Diego Chargers in 1963; Alvin then worked for the Kansas City Chiefs, the Dallas Cowboys, the New Orleans Saints, then the Oakland Raiders; he died at a Raiders coaches' meeting of a heart attack; Alvin was married twice, he had two boys and two girls; Alvin was unbelievably charming; it took a lot of time and energy to keep the gym going in the early years; Alvin had to learn a lot of business and finance tips that he wasn't aware of before; Alvin's greatest contribution was introducing weight training into sports; Bob Pettit came to them for training after his first season in the NBA, he wouldn't train unless Alvin or Ray was there to supervise him; Alvin was a weightlifting trainer for the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki; prominent body builders Lloyd Lerille and Boyer Coe trained at Alvin's; description of the neighborhood around the gym; names of business in the area of Nicholson Drive and Highland Road; white and black neighborhoods in the area; the gym was integrated possibly as early as 1968; so many of the buildings near the gym have been torn down; Italian families like the Constantinos who owned the Cotton Club;

Tape 3445, Side B.

The Chicken Shack was on Lettsworth Street; Alvin and Ray would go there often; po'boy place that may have been near Reddy Street School; discussion of black schools in the area; he doesn't know how many members they had; early dues were twenty-five or thirty-five dollars per month, cheaper if you committed to three or six months, \$120 for a year membership; gym had massage, steam, whirlpools, salt scrubs; their first masseur came from California but he doesn't remember how they got him; Ray and his wife Glenda married in 1962; Ray sold his stake in the Baton Rouge Health Club in 1980; Alvin had a TV show that ran on Saturday mornings, it was a live show where he would work out with local figures like Billy Cannon or Johnnie Robinson; the show ran for a long time; Alvin wrote a book about weight training when he was with the Chargers; Alvin was internationally famous, he's in several halls of fame; Hendry asks Ray for any articles or photos he might have; Hendry explains purpose of interview and documentation; attempt to get the gym on the National Historic Register; discussion of athletes who trained at the gym; Ray remembers Ricardo Montalban working out there; unclear when the building was built, Alvin purchased it from WJBO; neighborhood around gym has changed drastically; Ray doesn't know how many members they had during the gym's prime; Alvin died in Oakland, California, but he's buried in Baton Rouge; discussion of where other Roy family members are buried; Alvin's three children are still living; Alvin's first son was with his first wife who he divorced after returning from WWII; his daughters are from his second wife who was German; football dynasty of Istrouma High; coaches James and Ellis Brown known as "Big Fuzz" and "Little Fuzz"; football rivalries in Baton Rouge before integration; Glenda had no clue about sports until she started dating Ray; Istrouma coach Coon Porter; Hendry was raised in Chicago, Alvin sent Ray to Chicago one winter to learn from Tom [Fisdale]; Baton Rouge has changed

fast; before integration, whites and blacks didn't associate with each other and that's just the way it was; South Baton Rouge used to be a nice neighborhood now people are scared of it; efforts to revitalize that area; Nicholson Drive used to be a nice drive to and from LSU, now it looks like Harlem; several beautiful old building have been torn down; end of interview.

DIGITAL AUDIO FILE: 1 (T3445) **TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 15 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 79 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: None

RESTRICTIONS: None