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Nisby Family: James (Jim) Santana (Elder)

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JAMES “JIM” SANTANA

James Santana spent his teen years on a farm. Stressing self-sufficiency, his parents made sure he learned to cook, clean, iron, and even sew. Living on a farm generated chores most children did not have. James was responsible for taking care of chickens, rabbits, ducks, and turkeys. Despite being the youngest of four siblings, his workload was never lightened. During school breaks and summer vacations, he was expected to help his father, who was a carpenter, as well as keeping up with his farm chores.

It was a busy life for the young James, full of household and farm duties during the week and church activities on Sunday. He attended church services in the morning with his mother and father and sang in the choir. Playing drums was one of his favorite pastimes, and occasionally James played the drums for afternoon services at other churches in town. It was an indication of his love and appreciation for music.

He fondly remembers the time when his oldest sister took him at age twelve to see renowned jazz musicians Gene Krupa and Lionel Hampton. The concert reinforced a desire he already harbored to become a drummer and a music teacher once he became an adult.

After high school, James attended College of the Pacific. Being one of only seven African-American students enrolled, it was quite an accomplishment for him to even be at the college. To complicate matters, James met a fellow student, a young Caucasian woman with an engaging personality, and they soon began dating. Because of the social climate of the 1960s, when African-Americans frequently encountered open racial discrimination, the couple became the target for racism, criticism, and disapproving comments. Many advised them to stop seeing each other and tried to put a stop to the relationship. However, James and his girlfriend were determined to marry. They

received the blessings of family members and wed shortly thereafter, beginning a happy, loving marriage which, to this day, has stood the test of time.

But instead of going into music after college graduation, James did a stint as a soldier in the United States Army. After his discharge from the service, he let music become an avocation, putting aside his aspirations for a musical career and instead choosing a profession in labor management. James became a Maritime Ship's Clerk for the major labor organization, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, eventually retiring from the union as a Cost Benefits Specialist.

James is a man who has had the wisdom to celebrate the adventures of his life. His coming of age was also about **overcoming**—gaining the strength to overcome social barriers related to the color of his skin and to overcome unequal opportunities in housing, education, marital choice, and employment. These circumstances did not undermine either his spirit to prevail or his drive to succeed. In fact, they did exactly the opposite. At the College of the Pacific, he became President of his class; he has taken leadership roles ever since.

When asked what ritual marked the beginning of adulthood, James points especially to his marriage as separating boyhood from manhood. He is very proud of his bi-racial family and their history, as well as his own achievements. Today, he expects much from his children and grandchildren by way of manners and appropriate behavior. He has held high standards for himself, and he holds his loved ones to those standards, too.

James Santana is content with his life and would not change it. From where he sits, he has faced adversity—and came out victorious.

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Ethnic Group: African-American
Generation: Elder