DON NOVEY
INTERVIEWED BY DAN MORAIN
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Don Novey grew up all over the world, but his Sacramento roots led him back to a lifetime of work building the California Correctional Peace Officers Association into one of the most powerful unions in state history.

Part I: After following his father into the army, a young Novey follows him again onto the guard line.

Dan Morain: I’m Dan Morain, here on behalf of Open California Oral History project funded in partnership with the California State Library. Today we’re going to be interviewing Don Novey, former president of the California Correctional Peace Officers Association. Don and I met when I was a reporter for the Los Angeles Times. And he was among the most influential people in the Capitol. It was at times a fraught relationship but we came to know one another. So, I’m sort of looking forward to this conversation. Don, tell me where you grew up?

Don Novey: I grew up all over the world. I was born in Sacramento, 1947. The Baby Boomers era, I guess, in America. Spent my first few years in a place called Fort Bragg, North Carolina. As a child, spent two days in a hospital. I stepped on a Coca-Cola bottle [chuckle] and basically severed half my foot and they spent two surgeries in replacing the problem I had in my foot. I was able to go onto a pretty decent sports career and... But it was my first tragic incident. And then from there I followed my dad and my mom’s military career around the world.

DM: They were both in which service?

DN: No, she was the wife and he was the soldier in the United States Army. He went from private first class at Fort Ord to Sergeant-Major in the Eighth Infantry Division at the end of his career. He served in Korea, first helicopter unit there before M.A.S.H., and he also served in Vietnam and had a pretty outstanding career in the military.

DM: And one of your grandfathers was quite a boxer in his day.

DN: Yeah. Frankie Novey fought in the 1920s, a pretty legendary character in Sacramento for many years. Close friend with the sheriff because during prohibition, my grandfather was a very well-known beer maker. The sheriff had arrangements for the beer to be dispensed at the proper locations. Very close with Max Bear, Jack Dempsey and the whole crowd actually. And I met many of those professional fighters when I was a child. My grandfather, Grandpa Novey, he also served in World War I, as did his grandfather. And his name was John Nowakowski. And so I think about the only one in Sacramento that had their grandfather and great-grandfather serve in the great war, World War I. Matter of fact, my great great-grandfather was the first one in our family to receive a Purple Heart. Kind of a prestigious thing. Fifty years later, my cousin John Novey as well received two purple hearts in Vietnam. Exactly 50 years later, 1968.
DM: So your family came over from Poland on your father’s side?

DN: Yes.

DM: And do you know roughly when they came over?

DN: When the boat went. Probably about the depth of it. It was early 1900, 1901, 1902 basically, the other...

DM: So they came through Ellis Island?

DN: Yes. They did. And Grandma Novey’s family came over via a covered wagon and they arrived in Sacramento in 1853 and Great Great-Grandpa Westervelt became a blacksmith up in the Placerville area, we now call Hangtown, which is the other way. [laughter] The irony is that there’s a legislator in Sacramento whose great-great grandfather also was living in Placerville at the same time as great-great grandpa Westervelt, and his name was Pat Nolan.

DM: Yeah. So you were in the service as well.

DN: Yes.

DM: Tell us a little bit about that.

DN: I was drafted by the New York draft board, whereas [former CA Attorney General] Dan Lungren wasn’t drafted anywhere.

DM: We’ll get to that.

DN: That’s another story. But the Freeport draft board picked me up. I was going... I had just transferred out of American River College, going down to San Jose State in my junior year. And the New York draft board says you’re going in and I had basically no choice. I could go to Canada, of course, but since my dad was a Sergeant-Major in the military, it wasn’t too conducive to future family environment. So I was finishing up at American River, heading down to San Jose State, wanting to get on the boxing team. I went down to the Oakland, took a battery of tests, did fairly well on the language test. Aptitude was questionable from my perspective, because I didn’t understand some of the crazy questions the military asks anyway. Wound up at basic training in the state of Washington. Then I realized I was going to go to a school from there and I had to sign a paper up in Fort Lewis Washington basically saying I’m going to have to give two more years to the government if I want to go through these schools. So I went in the middle of the night from Fort Lewis Washington into a place called Washington D.C., and they drove me out to a place called [Fort] Holabird, which I did not know anything about. It was an intelligence school and they put me in the counter subversion and espionage class because they probably knew I was going to get out and come back to California and it was probably something you’d do every day here.
[chuckle]

**DN:** And it paid off later on in my career because I learned a lot, I learned how to interview, interrogate, and deal with foreign objects.

**DM:** So in other words you were a spook.

**DN:** Yes.

**DM:** And you were stationed in?

**DN:** Everywhere. I served in 21 countries.

**DM:** Europe primarily?

**DN:** Yeah, mostly in Europe. I did some Far East, Middle East. I did what they call KWOLs for about six months. It was tough. Knowledgeable AWOLs with access to top secret material. And we would bring them back, interrogate them and somehow, they wind up in a place called Leavenworth. You don’t do the adjudication, you just handle the client.

**DM:** I see.

**DN:** And I visited a lot of prison facilities overseas when I was a young agent. From there I was promoted to special agent in charge of a field office near a place called Freiberg, which was the home of a guy named Elvis Presley, and also it was the place where a guy named FDR went for his baths every year.

**DM:** So this is in Georgia?

**DN:** No, no, no. No, this is before he became president. Franklin Delano Roosevelt went to a place called Bad Nauheim, Germany on several occasions because he had incurred his physical problem which the press never knew about officially. But him and of all people, Elvis Presley lived in a little place called Bad Tolz. I think is what the title was in German and a little restaurant next to it was the Edelweiss Inn... But it’s kind of interesting, two legendary figures from American history, Elvis Presley and FDR, stayed in this town for a fairly long time. Elvis Presley wound up marrying the colonel’s daughter later on, but I kind of admired the guy for the way he served his country. But I wound up being the agent in charge of that field office. It was kind of neat. We were responsible for the fold gap with the Soviets on the other side. They had like 40 tank divisions, we had two. But we had other tools supplanted that were placed in the ground that was able to negate their 40 divisions.

**DM:** And these tools would’ve made a big boom, I take it.

**DN:** Yes, nuclear. And they still exist today and we all know that, but it was an exciting period in my life.
DM: You were there for how many years?

DN: 33 months.

DM: And this was Army intelligence?

DN: That’s what they called it.

DM: What was it?

DN: Army intelligence.

[laughter]

DN: The higher up you went it got more exasperating, but I enjoyed it thoroughly. I did everything under the sun in reference to investigations. I even had a case of a lieutenant that was committing a subversion against the American armed forces over there, whose wife later carried the briefcase into San Quentin that held the gun that led to the 1971 riot.

DM: Really?

DN: Yes.

DM: They never proved that though.

DN: Oh no, he got off.

DM: Yeah.

DN: The guy that carried it. She brought the gun to the prison in the briefcase, her name was Vanita Anderson. Later became a community college instructor in Los Angeles in corrections. Kind of an interesting story there.

DM: Well there you go. So you come back to the states and you settle here, you settle in Sacramento?

DN: Yes.

DM: Why Sacramento?

DN: I love the place. I’ve been all over the world. Just enjoy the fruits of this state. We have the great valley out there. We have the mountains. San Francisco Bay. It just doesn’t get any better than this, whether it’s fishing, hunting or anything else. Family enjoyment. But, anyway, I came back home for that. You miss your country there after you leave, especially when you go to third world countries.
DM: And so, now how did you decide that you’re going to become of all things, what they called then and still call now many, a prison guard. Why did you want to do that?

DN: It’s pretty simple. Soon as I got out and cleared all my clearances, I applied for DA investigator in Sacramento County. Nice job. Could have handled it. And I had another application to the AEC in Tennessee, Atomic Energy Commission. I applied there too while I was waiting for those because I was told at least six months for the DA’s job. So I talked to my dad, who was on the guard line at Folsom. He said, ‘Go out and take the test.’

DM: So your father was an officer?

DN: He was an officer on the line. Yeah.

DM: At Folsom?

DN: Yes.

DM: Old Folsom

DN: Yep.

DM: Okay.

DN: And it still is old.

DM: Right.

DN: And he said, ‘Go out and take it.’ It was a tough test. I passed it. I think I took the test on December 1st and they hired me on December 6th, 1971. And the state had already gone through chaos upon chaos in the prison system. I was debating whether I should do that or not, but since I was single, I was okay.

DM: So 1971.

DN: ‘71 I started.

DM: These are fraught times on the streets and in the prisons.

DN: Oh yeah. We had a dozen officers killed within that year in the state of California. Matter of fact, the edict was issued on September 8th, 1971, which I did not know at the time, by Governor [Ronald] Reagan to hire new security officers for the prisons, high security prisons in the state of California, and they were to be trained in the machine gun of all darned things. Because the officer that saved San Quentin on August 21st 1971, Dick Nelson, carried that machine gun and fired 200 and something rounds and killed nobody, but he got everybody’s attention. And, on August 22nd, the new [Assemblymember] in San Francisco named Willie Brown got up and held a press conference and said, ‘I’ve reviewed the entire history of this matter and the officers did
their job.’ And that was the end of the press conference.

**DM:** So were you hired before or after that in ’71.

**DN:** I was hired afterwards.

**DM:** You said December, I’m sorry. You go into a prison system where they’ve already had the San Quentin riot, four officers were killed?

**DN:** Yes. And then...

**DM:** Why would you do that? I mean, that’s kind of heavy duty work.

**DN:** Well, my dad thought it was kind of lightweight even though he had a guy stabbed in front of him, an officer at Folsom, and then also the laundry officer was stabbed to death at that same time. But my dad says, ‘Hey, just be rational about stuff. And I think you’ve got the mettle to handle this stuff,’ he says. ‘We’ve got to upgrade intellectual capacity of this place anyway and go for it.’ So I did.

**DM:** And somebody had thrown somebody off a tier at Soledad, right?

**DN:** Yes. Matter of fact, it was George Jackson, and they had two witnesses. One white, one African American, that said he did it and he was...

**DM:** Threw an officer off the tier.

**DN:** Yeah. So we had to deal with that, and that eventually was going to go to court later on.

**DM:** And that’s why he was at San Quentin. So you’re working in the prisons, you’re at Folsom. There’s no right to organize in ’72. Doesn’t happen until Jerry Brown becomes governor. So how does it come about that the California Correctional Peace Officers Association comes into being?

**DN:** Well, it was originally called the California Correctional Officers Association.

**DM:** You added the Peace.

**DN:** Yeah, that was a negotiation too. But about around 1975, collective bargaining was coming on to the scene. It’s a several years process. And [Governor] Jerry Brown in another one of his big mistakes, he hires probably the most brilliant person ever worked for him, named Marty Morgenstern, who just passed away last year. A brilliant guy. Marty starts the collective bargaining process. It weaves its way over a three-year period through the legislature and eventually becomes our collective bargaining law, the SEERA law, State Employees Employer Relations Act. And somehow, I got drawn into the union, the guard line union. There was four unions. There was Operating Engineers, there was the Teamsters, there was a California State Employees Association, of course. Then there was the California Correctional Officers
Association. And so a guy named Glenn Mueller got me into the union. He said, ‘Don, we gotta have somebody in here that can read and write on some of these issues, and you’re drafted.’ And I was just finishing up my secondary teaching credential at U.C. Davis. I wanted to get into teaching, and so this kind of blocked it. In around 1978, I was elected the chapter president at Folsom, even though the people voting there thought they were voting for my dad. I didn’t take it personal because he definitely was more respected than myself. I was basically a young loudmouth officer. Couple of years later, the president of the union wouldn’t let us publish our newsletter.

**DM:** President of which union?

**DN:** The CCOA, Arnold Thompson outta San Quentin. And it kind of... It got me pissed off.

**DM:** So what? You had your own newsletter at Folsom?

**DN:** Yeah, but he wouldn’t let us publish it under the banner of the organization and I thought that was wrong, so we challenged him. I went ahead and published it anyway, and so he wanted to throw me out of the union. And then the state knew we were publishing it, and they wanted to fire me for publishing a newsletter without their authorization. So I was getting hit from both sides.

**DM:** What was subversive about this newsletter?

**DN:** To basically give the straight story to the troops about what we did for a living, and where we should be in the law enforcement world, and how gritty and tough this job is. And it was a group of people who didn’t want to stand on their own two feet for reasons unbeknownst to me, because I thought it was a pretty proud profession that dealt with a pretty tough subject matter, career criminals. So anyway, we challenged Mr. Thompson. He lost office to another gentleman from Southern California, who said, ‘I’m only going to serve one year. Whoever in the hell wants this thing can have it.’ So a guy named Doug Block and I ran against each other. Right here in Sacramento was our convention. And I got up on the podium and I said, ‘When I’m elected president, the first person I’m going to fire is the general manager of this organization because the membership’s going to run it.’ And it was an eventuality that this gentleman was going to lose.

[laughter]

**DN:** And so we took over. The next day, I had met with the Attorney General’s chief lobbyist, a guy named Rod Blonien and he says, ‘Well, you gotta look at the Capitol too.’ And this is the day I got elected.

**DM:** So which day was this?

**DN:** July 19th, 1980. And a guy named, I think, Steve Merksamer was also involved in that, which I thought was quite ironic. They were looking at us when I was taking over. So on July 20th...
DM: So Rod Blonien, you said is the lobbyist for the Attorney General, who then is George Deukmejian?

DN: Yes. Correct.

DM: Okay, alright.

DN: And Merksamer was... He had three or four chiefs of staff. Deukmejian was pretty smart. And the irony was on July 20th of 1980, I went into the headquarters of CCOA, which was two offices.

DM: Located where?

DN: In Sacramento, downtown. And I looked at the general manager and I said, ‘You’re in my chair and you’re fired.’ And it kind of shook him up and he called a guy named George Deukmejian. He was very close to the governor. And I don’t know what him and the governor talked about, but he left the office.

DM: Well, of course, in 1980, he’s not the governor. He’s the attorney general.

DN: Yeah. He’s attorney general of the state. I’m sorry, yeah. But he called him. I’ve always called it for another reason, but anyway, I take over the operation. The secretary in there gave me a desk, which was a crown royal box of toilet paper and I put my paperwork on top of that, and I worked off of that for two years. From 1980 to 1987, I worked full time at the prison and I...

DM: At Folsom?

DN: At Folsom State Prison and I also ran the union. The secret word in my family was time. I worked probably an 18 hour day easily and enjoyed every minute of it. It kind of ground you down, but I was able to go through a process of doing something for my profession and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I went through two collective bargaining elections with CSEA and the Teamsters and the rest of the gaggle out there. Won both of them. This...

DM: So you... Well, it’s still California Correctional Officers Association.

DN: Association, yeah.

DM: But you’re also dealing with the Teamsters, and CSEA, and…?

DN: Yes. Oh, yeah. They...

DM: They haven’t moved out yet?

DN: Well, they can’t because the Teamsters put in $1 million and CSEA put in a million and a half against us and I had a budget.
DM: What do you say against you, what do you mean?

DN: I had a budget of $25,000 going up against them. We outworked them. We out-thought them. And I started learning the legislative process. And by the time we got around to the showdown on collective bargaining in the election, this guy grabbed me by my collar in the Capitol, named H.L. Richardson. And he said, ‘Son, you ever heard of political action?’ And he says, ‘I got a thing called computer caging. I want to run you out there because I’ve been watching you around here acting stupid probably.’ So I went out there with him and I learned somewhat the art of how this stuff works and how you raise money.

DM: So H.L. Richardson is a State Senator at this time, and he lives out in?

DN: He’s dead.

DM: I know he’s dead. But he lived out in?

DN: The foothills.


DN: Yeah. He had about 600 stuffed animals in his barn. It was called computer caging. I still remember the guy’s named Tim Macy was running that shop. And I was witness to a meeting between H.L. and a Senator named Campbell, Republican.

DM: Bill Campbell?

DN: Yeah. And Campbell was basically, and I’m surprised I was sitting there, but he said, ‘Just stay here. Richardson.’ And he said, ‘Watch how this goes down.’ And Campbell says, ‘I need that $400,000.’ And this isn’t in the Capitol, by the way. And Richardson says, ‘Well, you’ve really been kind of south on us on this conservative measure,’ whatever it was, I don’t remember. But the thing I learned out of it was that Bill Richardson could raise $400,000 in this mailing for a candidate and put him on top. Because that was a lot of money back then. You figured that period, ‘81, ‘82. So I started thinking about that in the background. I said, ‘I gotta find a way to get into this endeavor.’

0:28:14.0 DM: The endeavor being raising money and spending it?

0:28:20.2 DN: I would say investing in the future of our element.

[laughter]

DN: But anyway, ‘82 comes along, and I’m still thinking along these lines.

DM: So this is a gubernatorial race between Tom Bradley and George Deukmejian.
DN: Yes. But before that happens, there’s a bill on the floor. Not on the floor, it’s in the P&R committee in the Senate. And I was witness to something I’ve never seen before. It was new to me and I was learning the game. So we’re in the committee testifying on a retirement bill that had just failed by CSEA, but somehow Senator Richardson placed our bill up on the calendar. And the chairman of the committee was Democrat, Senator [James R.] Mills, I’ll never forget him. He was also the former Pro Tem of the Senate a few months before. So I’m putting all this together, because I know David Roberti is the new Pro Tem. But what is Mills got to do with our retirement bill? Well, the bill got log jammed at two to two.

DN: Richardson stepped outside with Senator Mills. Senator Mills goes back in and votes three to two in our favor, to move our bill to the Senate Finance Committee. And I was putting two and two together real quick, like. We leave the meeting and I’m saying, ‘My God, CSEA got shot down on a retirement bill. Teamsters just got shot down on a retirement bill.’ Couldn’t even get it out of this committee, and we just got it through. I ran back to the office, got on a mimeograph machine, got our two secretaries sending this stuff up down the State of California. And lo and behold, we somehow upset the two major labor unions to win the collecting bargaining battle in 1982 on January 27th. And then that year, we had to face our first major hurdle, the Governor’s race.

DM: Well, before you go there. So what does your retirement bill provide? What did you get in this bill?

DN: I didn’t get anything. We didn’t get a damn thing. We got it out of the committee, and the two other major unions couldn’t even get it out of the committee. And I just put out a flyer along those lines saying, ‘Hey, if we can deliver and we don’t have the money these other big shots have, I guess, it’s about us versus the big guys in the union world.’ And it resonated with the troops. And we won the election. And that was the big thing. Getting it out of one committee. And that happens all the time. Happens today. And it’s a powerful thing.

DM: Well, so H.L. Richardson is a force in conservative politics. More conservative than Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan endorsed against his opponent. Big into, well, the creator of the Gun Owners of California and Gun Owners of America. So he’s among your mentors?

DN: Oh yeah.

DM: Oh yeah.

DN: Without a doubt. And I knew his politic and his philosophy, but he had also gave me some high signs that I picked up on very quickly. He knew about the Schrengost brothers, he knew about.

DM: Who’s that?

DN: They were two famous Aryan brotherhood leaders in the prison system who would always try to contact people after in the right of the Aryans, which is BS. But he knew the inner workings of the Black Guerilla family.
DN: He knew about *La eMe*, Joe ‘Pegleg’ Morgan and the Mexican Mafia. He had an understanding of the element, which put him on a little higher pedestal. But that didn’t mean that you totally follow his politic. Because if you did, you wouldn’t get shinola through that Capitol. And I knew that. But he had some great tools that other people should have been paying attention to on the other side of the aisle. And Willie Brown eventually told me, he was good opposition and that was a positive moment for my position at the time because we were doing other things later on with Willie. But subsequent to that, we had to do the governor’s race.

DM: Well, before we get there, I noticed you’ve got a photo on your wall of young Jerry Brown signing a bill. What was that about?

DN: It was our off-duty weapons bill.

DM: And this would’ve been in what year?

DN: 1982. He was running for the United States Senate against a mayor down in San Diego named [Pete] Wilson. And he didn’t want us to... basically, Jerry Brown was having problems in the prison system and he didn’t want the new collective bargaining representative for all the guard line to probably oppose him in that Senate race. And out of the middle of the blue, I get a phone call from a staffer, fairly high up in the Brown administration. And he basically said, ‘Are you going to endorse the United States Senate race in California? Wilson versus Brown.’ And I told him, I said, ‘Well, I gotta think about this. And I get back with our executive board and I’ll give you a call back and give you an answer.’ So I sat there for a while and since my vice president had just quit on me, I still sat there for a while.

DN: [laughter] and I called the guy back and I said, ‘We’re not going to participate in that United States Senate race.’ Which probably upset Wilson and probably made Brown happy, be my guess. So what really happened was that, through our constitutional bylaws, we were not permitted to participate in the federal elections anyway, but this guy didn’t know that. And so I flew down to East Los Angeles the next week. Ran into a good friend of mine, Art Torres. And Governor Brown signed the off-duty weapons bill, which basically cemented the line staff up and down the state youth authority and adult corrections. It was a big deal.

DM: Why does this... Why did this matter so much to your union members? Rank and file.

DN: Yeah. Working the line, you realize that a lot of these prison gangs, not just their leadership, but their fledglings out there, their followers, have a tendency to assault staff on the streets or their families, or friends. This was a tool that they thought they needed. And also it enhanced the spirit of the profession, having this weapon. And by the way, we never had a major violation once this was signed into law, which tells a lot about the respect for your tools of your trade. But there’s one group that understood the criminal element and had to deal with it on a daily basis. Giving them that added protection of the availability of an off-duty weapon. We’re not forcing it upon them, there are certain people that didn’t want to go that route, but most all did. And it also applied to the youth authority and it was a big, big deal.
DM: So in one year you get your retirement bill through a committee. You get the bill that Governor Brown signs that allows officers to carry weapons. And this helps solidify your position, but also the union’s position, right?

DN: Yes, it does. And well, also that same year we win the collective bargaining war and it was a...

DM: When you say war, what do you mean?

DN: Well, all these unions were vying for the representation of unit six. They wanted the guard line. It was a big...

DM: Why? There are a lot of guards. [laughter]

DN: Well, see, I didn’t, yeah. I didn’t totally understand... They were looking at the political action nature of it. And they were much larger than the Highway Patrol or, Los Angeles Deputy Sheriff’s Police Protective League in Los Angeles. CSLEA, which was the representative of the state Department of Justice agents. All the big stuff in those crowds were substantive, but they weren’t big enough to play in the capitol. Their name meant something to a candidate, but when a candidate gave candidate gets the support of the element via political action, it becomes a different animal, big time. Realizing that early on it... So in late ‘82, it’s right after the governor’s race, we started up political action.

DM: So you didn’t contribute in the ‘82 campaign for Bradley versus Deukmejian?

DN: Correct.

DM: But you did endorse in that campaign, right?

DN: Yes, we did.

DM: And you endorsed who?

DN: We endorsed Tom Bradley for governor. He had worked the county jails. He really understood our profession. I thought it was a class act.

DM: He was a former cop.

DN: Oh no, but he ran the county jail. That was even closer and it was a big thing for us and very respectful.

DN: And by the way, that’s when we instituted, we made sure that we interviewed both candidates. It was a big thing to me. And we asked them both the same questions. We didn’t go behind the scenes and play politic. Because I set a policy once the election was over: we win or lose, I called both candidates. And let me tell you, that’s a tough call when you call George Deukmejian and say ‘governor elect, we didn’t, go with you, but I want to let you know anything
you need we’ll be there.’ And that was my toughest call. Commiserated with Bradley, but I figured they’d meet again, which they did. But the irony was to get back, and I had to find a way to get back into George Deukmejian’s graces. So my German was pretty good. My Polish was terrible, but I knew the governor’s legislative secretary’s mother was Polish. So I wrote a letter in Polish to the governor-elect and basically said, ‘You won, we lost. Here’s five pounds of Kielbasa sausage to your Armenian church, love Don Novey.’ And it was in Polish by the way. And so, Rod Blonien read it at the cabinet meeting and everybody started laughing, ‘that dumbass Polack with a hat, what the hell’s wrong with that guy.’ Governor Deukmejian from what I understood was very somber and said, ‘He’s reaching out.’ That’s all I heard was said by him, by the way. And all of a sudden that year, since we’re the exclusive bargaining agent for our element, all the membership expected us to get like 0 percent pay raise, and maybe a roll of toilet paper, I don’t know. And the Highway Patrol received a pay raise of 9 percent because they endorsed George Deukmejian, as did every law enforcement group in the state.

DM: Except for you?

DN: Except for us.

DM: Why do you think that is by the way?

DN: Because I’m not too bright.

DM: No, no. Why did they all go with Deukmejian?

DN: Well, because he’s the attorney general. Tom Bradley wasn’t. George Deukmejian had a great career in public safety and he reached out to everybody in the element. And even to us. And hell, I met his troops two years before. And the irony is that he didn’t win. I mean, and some of the questions he would answer in the showdown, he’d say, I can’t afford to do this now. Like maybe a larger pay raise or a collective bargaining issue in reference to officer’s rights. Or a retirement. And he says, ‘I can’t afford to do this. We have a negative budget.’ Whereas Bradley says, ‘I understand what you’re going through. I will work my best to achieve all these things.’ Now see, I didn’t understand all the subtleties. When I say not too bright, I did not understand the full field of politics. I picked up as fast as I could working a full shift, working a full day in the union. I was building all these things, and one of the things I put on top of my calendar was to build political action and also understand the subtleties of the Capitol. So I had to spend a great deal of time over there. And, that was very interesting. But anyway, all of a sudden we get a 9 percent pay raise and it shocked the entire collecting bargaining environment that year. And they said, how in the hell did they get a 9 percent and they supported the opposition. And I didn’t have to say anything. The guy that was my enemy in the collective bargaining wars, a guy named [Robert] Bob Bark, the head of CSEA’s collective bargaining crowd, wound up being the chief negotiator for George Deukmejian Head of department of personnel administration and his... He had sympathy for the officers. And somehow the governor said, ‘hey, these guys, we’re probably going to need ‘em down the road somewhere else anyway.’ And governors are a lot smarter than some of us in the labor movement. And by the way, he opposed a collective bargaining law, Deukmejian did, but he says ‘I’ll live with it.’ Which is a testimony to his goodness as a person. I really respected the man. So, off we went and we charged into the collective bargaining wars, the
next phase of my career and we developed a basic political action committee and the first recipient was H.L Richardson. He deserved it. He was the catalyst. But the next one was Willie Brown. I’m no fool. Bright man. I picked up on that early on.

DM: This is before he’s Speaker, right? ‘82, ‘83, ‘84.

DN: No, he’s Speaker by now.

DM: He has become Speaker. Okay.

DN: Yeah. That’s another... Well, the Leo McCarthy wars and everything else. Leo McCarthy’s the one that gave me my identification. Because I was wearing a cowboy hat. I was wearing a baseball cap. I was like the [former Sacramento Bee reporter] Andy Furillo of corrections. And I was wearing a fedora.

DM: You were wearing a fedora?

DN: The day I went into Leo McCarthy’s offices I was wearing a fedora. I used to wear it in the intelligence corps when I worked overseas. And we did wear trench coats, too. But anyway Leo McCarthy says, ‘that suits you, you should need a moniker. And that’s the one.’ So a guy that’s on a downhill can come up with good ideas and it sure helped me. And I would use that the rest of my career. But I kind of liked them anyway.

DM: And I was going to ask you about the hat. So that’s the Genesis of the hat?

DN: Yeah, it was Leo. We didn’t get anything else out of the meeting. I guarantee you that.

DM: Yeah. Okay.

DN: It’s all... back to when you had to... When you had no leverage, it was all about I and me, and what are you going to do for me? The bottom line. I listened a lot.

DM: So you’ve got a union that doesn’t have a PAC, but you start building the PAC. So, how does that come about?

DN: I went to every institution, I addressed every chapter about the significance of this tool. And they’re going to have to help us build it. And it took me about a year. I didn’t just go to one meeting at San Luis Obispo or one meeting at Corona or CRC. I went to several and I just kept going and going. So I put it up for a vote amongst the membership. They supported it, and we implemented it. And I told them that you will be the bottom line on this PAC. Each and every year I promised them that the PAC will be placed into the budget and through your representatives, you will have full view of what the political action is going to be, let alone the rest of the budget.

DM: So each member of the union chips in a monthly stipend?
DN: Yes.

DM: Right?

DN: Yes.

DM: And?

DN: But they, they give it in their dues.

DM: Right.

DN: And that’s placed into the budget, whatever the maximum is, back then it was, like $6 or something. And realizing it was a fairly large group, the legislature finds out about two years later in 1984 that we had become influential. But that wasn’t enough. It just didn’t get us over the top. We were just like everybody else. So I said, how does this polling work? How can we find out where the hell all these folks are going? So I developed...

DM: Folks as in voters, where the voters are going?

DN: Yes, yeah. Why are they going here or there? And why should we be sending dollars to these other places where we could probably have a more of an advantage sending it somewhere else that could put us somewhere. So without telling a whole bunch of people I started developing a polling program that was used by Democrats and Republicans and the questions were usually similar. There was the differences of the parties, which I understood right away. So what I would do, I’d go to a Democratic firm and have a poll done. I’d go to a Republican firm, have a poll done. And then I’d bring in people that interpret those polls before even sending the poll out from both sides. And I would use people on both sides of the aisle, without getting into a whole bunch of names, but the crafting of the actual poll I found out was the real tool. And what happened with that poll was we realized we would get a pretty true, what we call, instead of 3 percent to 5 percent, we might get down to 1 or 2 percent.

DM: Margin of error. Really?

DN: Margin of error. Big time. And the guy that picked up on it down the road, actually, it was two people. One was a guy named Jim Brulte and the other was a guy name of John Burton. And certain people couldn’t get it at all, and that was okay by me. In my political world, the other unions in the state, the major groups, California Teachers Association, California Manufacturers Association, California Medical Association, all those groups out there, were doing traditional models. And I said, that don’t work. But since we’re thug huggers, they won’t pay attention to us. And it worked pretty well. I had a 10-year stretch where I would only say 99 percent of our polling was in within 1 or 2 percent. It got so good, you only use it when you really need it, and you don’t have to spend a dime. Think about that. So I would have governors, whether it was a Democrat or a Republican, whether it was a [Gov. Gray] Davis or a [Pete] Wilson, Deukmejian, whatever, they would say, what does this mean? I’ll give you a classic. I told this to Willie Brown. The Republicans are going to win this Assembly, and this guy Brulte will probably be
their leader, even though Curt Pringle is going to cut them up. Because when I leave this meeting, Willie Brown called Pringle and cut a deal.

DM: This is ‘94?

DN: ‘94. It was a big... It was the top of, the creme de la creme move on our part as an organization because we knew exactly who was going to... It was some minuscule little guy down in the central valley who was a famous Triple-A baseball player at one time or something, who upset the Democrat down there.

DM: You’re not talking about [Brian] Setencich are you?

DN: No, no. Geez, no. Some other guy. An older gentleman who later died. But it was down in the Rusty Areias area is the best way I can explain it. But anyway, it was a big upset. The Republicans got on top, but Willie Brown outsmarted them in the long run and got this co-leadership thing set up in the Assembly. But I just thought it was... It just let us know where in the hell we were at for the future. We were really on top of things. And the guy that appreciated... The governor thought it was okay, whichever governor it was, because they were... And I understand that they were superior people. They were governors. They were on top of the chart. And I can’t remember the city with a fedora coming he was kind of... you gotta remember the element he represents. They can’t be that sharp. But I knew it was really good when Jim Brulte, I’d give him a couple of tidbits on some races, and he’d run her right into Pete Wilson and tell him. And it was interesting, because Pete Wilson would tell me that, ‘Hey, you know, Brulte came in and told me what you told me earlier.’ It’s just a different world.

DM: Well go back to 1990, because before we started talking was flipping through this book, J. Moore Methods, which is the polling you were doing in the 1990 gubernatorial race. It’s quite a volume. All kinds of questions in there. And you decided to go with Wilson in that race. Why?

DN: Pretty simple. It was Prop 139, it was a difference between the two. She was a pragmatic Democrat, her daughter worked for me as an attorney. But, Dianne [Feinstein], on The Magic 13 Questionnaire, she screwed up on one question, Prop 139, the Inmate Work Initiative. She didn’t want to oppose the unions in the Bay Area or whatever. So she went negative on that one, where Wilson says, ‘I’m open’ or whatever. And they’re both essentially the same one to death penalty, which is interesting if you think about it?

DM: Well, what are the 13 Questions?

DN: Oh, I don’t remember of the top of my head. Seven were based on labor, always, by the way. And six were basically public safety. That’s the way we always composed it. But we’d have a slant lead towards the moderate side of society. In other words, not going overboard being a hard-right group or hard-left group. And it worked well for us. And that one question in the middle, like Prop 139 was the determining feature of that election.

DM: So jog our memories, what did 139 do?
DN: It was the Inmate Work Initiative, that put money in the budget to put inmates to work. Which I didn’t think was a bad thing. We didn’t ever have enough programs in a prison system anyway. And the guys in there that always had problems with that, in a nice way, it was like Vasconcellos because he wanted to help the inmates, maybe too much so from my perspective, but he wanted to help them. And he was perplexed about the issue himself, which told me it was a good question. So anyway, Prop 139 did pass. And so did Dianne. She passed and went on to become a Senator for 600 years. But anyway, that race... and our polling was right on, by the way. Right on. I mean, it was going to be Pete Wilson between 1 and 3 percent. And it was our first big, big move. But I also found out that it could have been our first big, big headache, because we might have lost two of these, like I lost the one in ’82. We’d have been toast in a way. We’d go back to whatever.

DM: Well, the prison construction boom really started, well, it started under Jerry Brown, it was the first one but then it really got rolling under Deukmejian. And Wilson continued it. So what was the significance of that for your organization?

DN: Well...

DM: So when you started there were what? A dozen prisons when you started.

DN: Twelve. Yes.

DM: Yeah, 12 prisons.


DM: All right. So there were 12 prisons when you started in ‘71. And then that changed.

DN: Yes. They went on a... As a matter of fact, it was under Jerry Brown.

DM: First.

DN: In ‘82, that $495 million bond measured by Bob Presley. Matter of fact, I attended a dedication with Jerry in Tehachapi, I think, the first one I had scheduled. But the irony was that it was going to get much bigger because George Deukmejian had a plan about getting tough on criminals. And I wasn’t a participant they needed for their internal discussion, which I thought was interesting. And I liked it that way. Because our job was to run the facilities, not to get people locked up because the laws change. And Jerry Brown had such a tough adventure with corrections for this determinate sentencing law versus indeterminate sentencing law. And it got totally out of hand and he lost it and he knew it. I said, I’ve sat down with him maybe 25 times over that over the years. When he ran for AG later on, after governor, when he ran for governor again, and we disagreed a lot, because his Prop 47, 57. But all that stuff aside, this prison construction stuff took off and it went through the legislature several ways, and then they get into the lease purchase scenarios. Rod Blonien was the genesis for that. He did a marvelous job on it for the administration. The other thing was that the solidification of the corrections agency was under a guy named [N.A.] Chaderjian, and Chad was an old Armenian, as I call it, political king
within his element. Grew up with George Deukmejian in upstate New York. Reminds me a lot, both of them do, of George Pataki in New York by the way. I worked with him in one of his campaigns. Just tough on crime type people.

**DM:** So prisons are getting built all over the state in the Deukmejian administration, and so how does that affect your organization?

**DN:** Well, outside of being something that I did not intend to grow as fast as it did. From my perspective, you’ve gotta figure... you gotta hire 15,000 officers, but you gotta hire 2500 supervisors, maybe 15 wardens, all these deputy wardens, programs classification. The whole structure has to be built from the ground without having riots. Without having places blown up. It was difficult, it really was. I thought the genius of it was the administration’s ability to reach across the aisle and get Bob Presley to chair it, and [Assemblymember] Jimmy Costa, down in Fresno, to basically lead the bullet fight in the assembly. But I had to proffer some dialogue for the Speaker. And what I mean by that is that... Willie would say, ‘I’m having difficulty maintaining these two seats in the Valley, and if your crowd goes south on them Don, I’m toast.’ And I said, ‘Oh yeah, that’s right, you’re the guy that told me you gotta learn to count to 41.’ And he basically told me he’s at 39, he needs help. It was a diplomatic way of putting it. So I adjusted.

**DM:** Who were the two who you supported?

**DN:** I can’t remember their names.

**DM:** Okay. Of course, you can.

**DN:** Yes, I can. But not I’m going to.

[laughter]

**DN:** Things grow out of those things.

**DM:** Yeah.

**DN:** By talking out of school, you don’t help yourself. I know we’re talking about our state’s history here, but Willie Brown was a legend in this state, and he did a lot of good things for the state and he worked across the aisle. Some people can’t figure that out, even in his own party. And the irony is that later on, my final big time retirement bill came to his desk. Willie Brown doesn’t forget. And the retirement bill went up on his desk and he knew of it, wound up out of the Assembly and went to the governor’s desk. And through two periods of the legislature, two different periods, we helped him out in protecting his leadership. And we both knew that but we didn’t go out and pound our chest. So what happened was that our retirement bill is on Willie Brown’s desk. He calls in our lobbyists, Jeff Thompson and Gavin McHugh, and I come in along with him. And he says, ‘You want this thing, this retirement bill on the governor’s desk?’ And I said, ‘Yeah, we sure would appreciate it. It’s cleared all hurdles in the Senate and everything Mr. Speaker.’ And he says, ‘I’ll get it there.’ And I said, ‘Well, this could cost hundreds of millions
of dollars.’ If you don’t be frank with a guy, you’re making a big mistake. So what happened was that he had something else in his mind, and what it was was, this is going to cost Deukmejian maybe $700 million. And he knew that George Deukmejian was a fiscal conservative manager. He would only put something like that in when there’s a whole bunch of money available through whatever in our society. The bill gets out of the Assembly, they made sure that one person opposed it. Just the way it works. And it gets to the old man’s desk and he signs it right away.

DM: Deukmejian?

DN: Yeah. Willie Brown, did not know what we knew. Because governor Deukmejian says, ‘you get this to my desk, I’ll sign it.’ And one thing I found out about governors, outside of one, they’re of their word. They give you their word, they’ll stand by it. And I’ve never, even when I’ve lost on issues, they always stood, ‘by the way, I told you Don I’m not going to support it. Yes, sir, I was talking to you today, but those happen. I only had 108 bills signed.

DM: 108, but who’s counting?

DN: Yeah.

DM: And how many vetoed?

DN: A few.

DM: A few?

DN: Yeah.

DM: Okay. Alright.

DN: Less than a dozen.

DM: Okay. So we’re skipping around a little bit, but 1994. You had brought up the Assembly, that Republicans take control of the Assembly that year, sort of.

DN: For a week and a half. [chuckle]

DM: Yeah, and the...

DN: Pringle.

DM: But that’s the year that the three strikes and you’re out initiative [Proposition 184] passes and CCPOA put $101,000 into it. What was the one about?

DN: It was a signal to everybody out there. I had been working with my wife, with the victim’s movement, for a long time. And the one thing that we’re kind of dancing around because a
supreme court justice wrote a decision and Joan Didion sat at his kitchen table, Anthony Kennedy, which tied in with all this. But I felt the killing of Polly Klaas by an inmate that received every advantage possible through programs - I think he was made an apprentice in a certain field – then he goes out on the streets and in less than two weeks, he reaches into this bedroom window and pulls Polly Klaas out, abducts her, abuses her, buries her in a shallow grave. And the trauma that family had to go through, it was tough. And there’s more than 101 reasons to do stuff, but sometimes it’s not the total dollars, it’s the significance of who put the dollars in there. Because for me that was real rough to do that. Because it looks like is we’re advocating locking up more prisoners.

DM: Right. That’s how it looked.

DN: It says that’s what we’re. That’s what it plays in the public’s eye. But it really was getting the most heinous off the streets. I knew all along. I told this to Vasco, I told it to Leo McCarthy early on, all these folks. That 25 percent of the inmates we got in the system, we can do something with them, you know, putting the proper monies in there for programs. But you gotta remember, these guys have been convicted of five felonies before they go to a state prison in a court of law. It’s a tough, tough ride. And if I could get the worst of the worst, because in 1987, Governor Deukmejian asked me a question I couldn’t answer. And the question was this: ‘How do we fix these prisons? How do we keep them from over-populating?’ And I looked at him and I said, ‘Governor, I don’t know.’ And in 1993 when the three strikes law came about, it was huge. I mean, Marc Klaas was out there, but him and...

DM: Well, he opposed that initiative. Yeah.

DN: Yeah, but him and Mike Reynolds didn’t get along with each other. And it’s the same tragedy for Reynolds as well with his daughter, Kimber. And then Harriet Salarno was out there. I had to deal with Doris Tate beating on me for five years in the Capitol. Brilliant woman. Whole family destroyed as a result of the Sharon Tate episode with the Mansons. And enough is enough. And that was the time we made the move, and I got other people involved, and I got other large amounts of money involved. And it wasn’t about locking more people up, it was getting the most heinous criminals off the street. Now, there was later modifications to that. The Romero decision, I think, down in San Diego that came into vogue later on, basically extenuated circumstances on one of the three charges. I understood that and I thought, naturally, that’s the way it should go.

DM: Well, the three major donors, or three of the major donors, I think they were the three largest was Michael Huffington who was running against Feinstein for the US Senate that year. He was the biggest donor. The second biggest, I believe, was the National Rifle Association. You were the third largest donor. So were you...?

DN: I wasn’t in cahoots with any of them.

DM: Yeah.

DN: Matter of fact, Huffington, Congressman Huffington to you and I, as he told me, we were
standing in West Hollywood when Governor Wilson signed the three strikes law in 1993. Going into ’94’s election. And Huffington said to me, ‘You know, Novey, I’m going to be that guy someday,’ and he was pointing to Pete Wilson. He was telling me that Pete Wilson was his goal to take his job. And I said to myself, knowing the game play, because one of my consultants was working for his wife on another issue. So, I was going to tell him, but I didn’t, ‘Ariana is going to be your problem, not me.’ But I was shocked when we flew back to Sacramento that day. I told Governor Wilson, I said, ‘What do you know about this guy Huffington?’ And he said, ‘Well, you know, he’s a big contributor, Don,’ and all that blah, blah stuff. And I said, ‘Come on, Governor.’ You know what I mean? ‘We kind of know each other.’ And he says, ‘Well, you know, I really don’t know a whole lot about who he is and what he really is.’ And I said, ‘None of us do and I think he’s a little bit different.’ And that tells me a whole bunch of different stories that I had only discussed with a Julie Brownstein or... I’ll leave it at that. That Huffington was just a little bit off, and he had a different perspective of life than we did. And most people didn’t know that their two kids were adopted and all that other good stuff. But for him to come out and say that, ‘That’s me someday’ and I just told myself, ‘This guy don’t even have the mental toughness for that job, let alone the one he has now, supervising his wife.’”