

(Tape 1 of 2)

An Oral History Tape Transcription

Of

Interviewer: Sarah Swofford

Interviewee: L. Karl Grimes

September 25, 1979

SS: Tuesday, September 25, 1979. My name is Sarah Swofford. I'm having an oral history conversation with Mr. Karl Grimes at Sterling Municipal Library, Baytown, Texas.

SS: Ok, Mr. Grimes, what is your full name?

KG: Leland Karl Grimes.

SS: And where were you born?

KG: Ellis County, near Palmer.

SS: Ellis County, Texas?

KG: Ellis County, Palmer – Ellis County near Palmer, just south of Dallas.

SS: Um-hmm. Um, do you mind telling me what year?

KG: 1895.

SS: 1895. And how about your parents? Could you give me your parents' names?

KG: My father's name was Andrew Jackson, and he passed away in 1900. My mother's name was Lelia. L-E-L-I-A, Grimes. And I don't remember the year she passed away, but she was over 90 years old when she did pass – when she passed away. And after she was 90 years old, she worked her own garden and did her yardwork.

SS: You have a family of ...

KG: So that's the reason I look as well as I do. (Laughs)

SS: (Laughs)

KG: And I have a sister that's older than I that's up and able, does her work, and she lives by herself.

SS: That's wonderful. It runs in the family, then.

KG: Yep.

SS: Um, ok now, you were born there in Ellis County. What sort of childhood did you have? And you grew up on a farm, or ...?

KG: Well, of course I was an orphan at a very young age – five years old – and I grew up on the farm. And what schooling I got, I went to a little county school: Palmyra. P-A-L-M-Y-R-A. Palmyra. I don't know where it got its name. And, um...

SS: Was that the name of the little community, uh ... the school?

KG: And it's – the school.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And the school only went to the seventh grade. So I got a high school education. But when I quit going to school there, I went to Palmer school. They had a high school there that was about three miles. And the only way we had of going to school then was horseback on the ... and on mud roads. There wasn't any concrete roads those days. We either walked or rode horseback, and it was easier to walk

than it was to go catch a horse and feed and take care of a horse. So most of my schooling I walked about three miles to the school.

SS: That's why people kept in shape in those days.

KG: (Laughs) It is.

SS: Now Mr. Grimes, you were telling that you had – you went to high school at Palmer?

KG: Um-hmm.

SS: Well, after you got out of high school, did you work there in that community? Or, um...

KG: Well, I worked everywhere, you might say. At every kind of – every different trade. In the fall, I would work at the gins.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And during the rest of the year, prowling around, I'd work just here and there and yonder at different trades. I worked at carpenter trade, and – but I was mostly an automobile mechanic.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And in the army, in service, I was a mechanic. And I came out of the service, and I worked as a automobile mechanic for several years until I opened up my own shop, and I opened up a garage there, and I ran a garage there until ... I don't remember. But anyway, I sold the garage, and I went to work for the county commissioner. At that time, the county commissioner ran the highway department in each county. They didn't have the highway department, but the highway department didn't take care of the roads in each county. The local commissioner did, so I went to work for the commissioner there on the road; building roads. And I worked at that until I came to Baytown.

SS: And when was that about?

KG: 1925.

SS: 1925. How did you get to Baytown, now?

KG: How did I get to Baytown? In a Model-T Ford.

SS: (Laughs) Well, who told you about it? Or how did you come to work down here?

KG: Well, there was boy – young man – named Jimmy Adams working down here, and he got leave and came up there, and I don't know how long he had been up there – a couple or three days with his family. And I was talking to him...

SS: Now, where did he come to?

KG: Wait a minute, now. I've left out something.

SS: Ok, now you left something out that you wanted to add.

KG: Well, when I left – quit the highway, I went to work for an oil drilling contractor on a rig.

SS: I see.

KG: And ...

SS: Where was this?

KG: That rig was out from Palmer, about three miles from Palmer. And we got through with that well, and I told you about us shipping the rig to Borger and it freezing up. You remember me telling you about it freezing up?

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And I was there, and our rig was at Borger, and we couldn't work. And Jimmy Adams came from here up there, and I would talk to Jimmy about down here. And I asked him reckon I could make board, some eating money until things thawed out up there. And he said they was hiring 'em and firing 'em a hundred or so every day. So I came down here with Jimmy Adams. I had an old Model-T Ford, and we got in that Model-T just about daylight one morning, and we was about 10 or 11 o'clock that night getting down here.

SS: And you drove from Borger?

KG: No, from Palmer.

SS: Oh, from Palmer.

KG: Palmer.

SS: I see.

KG: I never ...

SS: The rig was up in Borger that was frozen?

KG: The rig was in Borger. I never did go to Borger, myself.

SS: I see. It took you from six o'clock in the morning till about ...

KG: About 10 o'clock that night to get here. When we got here we drove up to the boarding house where – our rooming house – where Jimmy... It wasn't, it was a dwelling. And the lady kept, I believe, four men.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Roomed four men. We drove, had to drive right up to the porch on there; water was up to the running boards on the old Model-T. And ...

SS: Was this in old Baytown?

KG: In old Baytown, yeah.

SS: What time of the year was this when you arrived?

KG: It was in March.

SS: Um-hmm. So it can still be cold and rainy.

KG: It was cool.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: However, we didn't – I didn't, like I told everybody – the first winter I was here, I didn't wear a coat all winter. And I've froze ever since.

(Laughter)

SS: Well, now you came and got at here at – in the middle of the night. And what were your first impressions when you woke up the next morning and looked out at this countryside that you ...

KG: I don't know if I had any impression. I don't know if, whether there was anything that impressed me. Of course, the refinery was a large outfit. Was a large – it was a large refinery at that time.

SS: Was it?

KG: And they were building the cracking coils, and they were working – I don't know how many men – but they were working lots of people. And there were lots of people coming and going all the time. And it was just a – it was like a boomtown.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And it was a boomtown.

SS: Were the streets paved?

KG: No.

SS: Just dirt roads?

KG: They, uh, shell roads. Shell.

SS: Uh-huh.

KG: And the road they – from Baytown to Houston, there was a shell road to Crosby. And I guess it was to Highway 90 where it crosses the Trinity River there, you – just on this side of Crosby. And you went up and you went there and crossed over that road, and went to Houston; that's the only way you could get to Houston. Either that, or go on the railroad. They ran a mixed train, passenger train, on the railroad. You'd go to Dayton, change, catch the main line into Houston. The majority of people at that time before I did came down here, that's the way they got here. They would come on the train to Dayton, and then catch a mixed train, then – you know what a mixed train is?

SS: No, I was gonna ask you what a mixed train was.

(Laughter)

KG: Well, a freight train, they – instead of having a caboose, they had a passenger car for a caboose.

SS: Oh.

KG: And they hauled passengers in that car.

SS: I see.

KG: And of course the train crew, also.

SS: Um-hmm. Were there many automobiles in town when you got here?

KG: Not very many.

SS: How did people get around from, uh, the refinery to their homes, and ...

KG: Well, there was a crowd that walked from Goose Creek over to Baytown.

SS: Oh, really?

KG: And they would walk down the railroad track, and they'd cross the stream of Goose Creek on the railroad bridge, and come over here. Then there were jitneys they had jitney – we called 'em jitneys. They're called busses, taxi I guess is the proper name for them.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And they ran, and they ran a regular schedule on shift. They had a regular fare that they would carry. Just like when I lived over in Goose Creek, the majority of times – of course I had a Model-T that I could come myself – but the majority of time, I'd ride taxi.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And if I'm not mistaken ... I believe it was 10 cents that it cost ...

SS: Ten cents to ride from Baytown to Goose Creek?

KG: Baytown to Goose Creek. And of course the taxi driver, he would have about six men that would ride with him regular, and at shift time, he'd get those six men and take 'em over there, and then he'd stop and he'd wait for six more men, take 'em back. And that was three times a day that he got called – well, he'd get 12 men, that's a dollar and 20 cents, and he'd get that about three or four times a day giving him three or four dollars. Well, you take – we only make – I went to work at the refinery, they were paying 40 cents an hour. That was \$3.20 for working eight hours. So, you know everything else is down low.

SS: Now, when you came here did you go and apply for work the next morning?

KG: Yeah.

SS: And when – did they put you on right away?

KG: Well, the next morning I went and down applied, and uh ... they had a line up on one of them pass by, and they'd take your name, and ask you questions: age and where you was from, what you did, and so forth. And in the lineup, why, they called me alone. The line passed, and I was one of the last ones in the line. And I was one of the first ones they called up. They first told me they didn't have any work in my line, and I told 'em I didn't want any work in my line, I just wanted to go to work.

SS: (Laughs)

KG: So they put me to work. And of course I went from there over in the hospital, they had a little hospital at that door there – at the gate there, and I filled out application blanks and so forth, and taking physical examinations and tests, and so forth and so on. Went to work the next morning.

SS: And you started working there at the hospital?

KG: Um-hmm.

SS: Uh-huh.

KG: And ...

SS: That was with Mr. Culver? Was he there at the hospital?

KG: Culver was at the hospital; he was a super-, hospital superintendent at the time.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Dr. ...

SS: Aves? Was it Aves?

KG: No, Dr. Aves had just left here. There was a doctor – by the way, there was a doctor from Bristol, about eight miles of my hometown. There was Dr. Garrel.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: I don't know; I'm getting so crazy, I can't even think of his name. Pipkin. Dr. Pipkin.

SS: Oh, uh-huh.

KG: And you might remember him. Do you?

SS: I think so, uh-huh.

KG: He was here. And well, he's from Bristol, Texas.

SS: Uh-huh.

KG: And Bristol is an inland town. Now, in – on the land out of the map, or Macon/Ellis County, Bristol was supposed to have been the county seat. When they built the H&TC Railroad, the Railroad missed Bristol by about six miles, so Bristol was an inland town. Well, this Dr. Pipkin and his people lived at Bristol, and he came from Bristol. He was already down here when I came down here. He was a very fine fella. I thought – got acquainted with him, and like him. I knew all of his people up there and like him. He was a fine fella.

SS: Now, how long did you work in the hospital? Uh ...

KG: How long did I work in the hospital?

SS: In the hospital?

KG: I didn't work in the hospital at all.

SS: Oh, well you were filling out forms, uh ...

KG: Taking examination tests and so forth.

SS: Oh, I see.

KG: It didn't take you long. It ... oh... well, there were so many of 'em, and so ...

SS: So that was for employment?

KG: Yeah.

SS: You were filling out forms for employment?

KG: For employment, yeah.

SS: Ok. And then, what kind of work did you start doing?

KG: Started out as a boilermaker helper.

SS: I see.

KG: Now then, that's a misnomer. They call 'em boilermaker helpers, but they were structural steel workers, is what they were putting up structural, putting up steel.

SS: Uh-huh.

KG: And what we was actually doing at the cracking coil, and went to work. My first foreman was Ed Kenney.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: I don't – did you ever know Ed?

SS: No, I don't think so.

KG: And there was another one, a Poe. I worked, I think, about three months, and I transferred to process to the cracking coils. Went to work for a Bayne. B-A-Y-N-E. Was superintendent of the cracking coils at that time.

SS: Now, what were you doing over there? Was that, uh ... instrument-type work?

KG: No, I started in the firing. And ... I worked – I forget now how many months I worked at the cracking coils, and I got tired of it, and I transferred to the gas department.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And when I went to the gas department, well I was classified as a fireman, but there wasn't any firing to be done, there. I was a pumper. And pumpers there kept oil circulating through the system.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And he had to hold levels in certain tanks in certain towers he'd hold levels and circulate so many thousand gallons an hour, or the amount. And then on the products he made, you had to keep count, check on them on the tanks, on what we call rundown tanks. The final stream went into them. But on our job, the final stream went to the treaters, and they blended it. In other words, we didn't make any – everything we made or handled had to be kept under pressure to be in a liquid form. To put it to the atmospheric pressure, it'd turn to gas, and go up in the air.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And our final stream – instead of going to rundown tanks, it went to the treaters, and they blended it. I don't know how, but they blended it into gasoline. Give gasoline easier starting.

SS: Well, now you ...

KG: Which was butane.

SS: I see.

KG: At that time. Later on, we made practically everything.

SS: Um-hmm. Now, uh, I think when we talked earlier, you told me that at this time everything was done by hand. They...

KG: Um-hmm.

SS: Uh ... valves were turned by hand, and ...

KG: In other words, the level in the tanks you controlled this by either your inlet or your outlet by valve, by hand. And all your pumps – their speed – course, the amount of oil you circulated depended on the speed of the pumps, and you controlled the speed of the pumps by the hand throttle and so forth.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And we had a few, what they called liquid level controllers. But they weren't much success. They were – I don't know what you'd call 'em in other words you wouldn't understand it. But a level would build up to a certain point, and this control valve would automatically shut-off.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And shut-off until a level went down to a certain point, and then it would automatically open up, open wide open, and fill up. And your level was constantly playing between there. Well, to get results, you've got to hold that level constant.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Just like temperatures, you've got to hold temperatures constant.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And when I say temperature, you might say, "Well, you said you wasn't firing (laughs), so how did you have a temperature?"

KG: And the way we had a temperature, we got temperature by steam heat. What we called re-boilers; we done our heating with steam.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And we had automatic temperature control or recorders. And the controller was the same way: temperature would go up to a certain point, and it'd cut off and go down.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Well, therefore your products were jumping up and down all the time. Well, we continued to do that, and during time, as time rolled on, they made new instruments and bettered 'em and so forth and so on. And, in other words, it was a physical impossibility to make the products by hand that they make with instruments today.

SS: Um-hmm, um-hmm. Yeah, um... You worked at this job until, uh ... were you there during World War II?

KG: Um-hmm.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: I worked at the gas department until I retired in 1960.

SS: 1960.

KG: Give 'em an April Fool, April 1, 1960. (Laughs)

SS: Well, what kind of changes came about at the refinery as a result of World War II?

KG: Lady, it would be impossible to tell you the changes that was made, and the way they were made, and how they were made and so forth. The changes were made so gradual, and they were so – such enormous changes, that ... you wouldn't understand just what it was. For instance ... I forget now whether the LFU was built before World War II. Well, it was built after World War II. But at the time I went in the gas department, our main gas plant was over in the east side of the refinery.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: They were building what they called Number Two Gas Plant, which was a lots larger gas plant over west of what we called a reservoir. Well, when they got it built, that's when I went from a pumping to a helper stage.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Got a promotion, went over there to Number Two Gas Plant. And ... I don't know how long it was until they put in what they called a stabilizer. That was an enormous tower with walls two inches thick of solid steel, and it was 90 feet tall. And it was made in Germany, and shipped over here, and we made propane on that tower. And that tower ran at 250 pound pressure, and ... gassing I would say around ... I don't remember now what temperature, but it was hot. It was coiled, alright. And, there was – one helper ran that, operated that tower. The other one operated the plant, and then we had a still man went over the whole works. Well, after it ran a year or two, they built the LFU, which is Lighting and Fractionating Unit.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: It consisted of ... six towers.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: They had a concrete foundation; and enormous thing I would say that foundation was. Twenty-feet wide, and I'd say 200-feet long, and I'd say 10 or 15-feet deep. Solid concrete with an enforcement in it. And those towers sitting on top of that.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And then all the pipe work, and all the other instruments that went with it. Long about those times, we began to get these automatic control instruments that really worked, would work, and you didn't do so much hand controlling, you had to know how to set those instruments and so forth.

SS: Well, what I wanted to touch on, too, was the security that the refinery had to take as a result of the war. What ...

KG: Well, the security was this: they had a military unit here, which I don't know very much about.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: They had several – I don't know what you would call 'em – but anyhow, on top of the main office they had machine guns mounted for anti-aircraft guns. Then at two or three, maybe more, different places they had built a drove – I would say these long telephone poles, creosote poles in the ground. They had these nests built up high, higher than tanks, and they had anti-aircraft guns mounted in all of them. Then they had enough soldiers here they taking care of those. Now then, what caliber those machine guns were, I don't know. All I know they were for anti-aircraft. And I don't know how many soldiers there were. Well, of course, now then, they had – then, they had their regular guards.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And ...

SS: Company guards? Company guards? Um-hmm.

KG: Company guards, too. Yeah.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And they got very strict on you, and you had to be very, very well-acquainted with guards before you didn't have to show your badge before you got in. They had orders to make you, every man show his badge when he came in the gate. But if you was well-acquainted with these guards – course sometimes you could get by without showing 'em. It wasn't much trouble if you had your pin on your coat or anything. Now, but if it's wintertime, you had on an overcoat or sleeves on, or one thing or another, you had to unbutton it. But they were very strict, and they went to carrying guns, loaded. I don't know whether they would have used 'em or not.

SS: Um-hmm. But you didn't try to find out. (Laughs)

KG: I did... (Laughs) I didn't try to find out, no.

SS: Well, now, wasn't there an ordinance work, uh ... that was

KG: Well ...

SS: associated with the refinery sometime?

KG: The Baytown ordinance was later on – I don't know whether – the war was going on, but I don't know whether we was in it or not. They built the Baytown Ordinance Works where – that's a little piece of paper that I rolled up.

SS: ...[Inaudible]

KG: Uh, the Baytown Ordinance Works, Dr. Frank Spuhler was over that.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And the main purpose was ... making toluene. And it is claimed that 90 percent of the explosives used in World War II could have been made in Baytown. And out there, of course I never did go out there because there wasn't any visiting in those days. They – you quit visiting, going from place to place, and you didn't get acquainted with so many people.

(Laughter)

KG: Just like me, I guess you – I don't know whether I told you I, that I – about being well acquainted with Jimmy Carrol?

SS: Uh-huh.

KG: You said you'd talk to Jimmy when – I was extra acquainted with Jimmy Carrol. I'd go around to his job, and he'd come over on my job, and so forth. But during the World War, we didn't do that; we stayed at our own plants. And all the control houses during the World War, during World War II, were blacked-out. In other words, they had lights in the control houses, but the doors we had – I don't know what you'd call 'em – more turn-ons built.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Come out, you turn and you go in until it was blind.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And we didn't have but very few lights in the refinery. The ones we had were shaded. Some instruments would have lights inside of 'em where you could just see the dial. And you had a flashlight, but of course you didn't use it only when it was absolutely necessary.

SS: And this was a protection against a possible air raid, right?

KG: Yeah. Yeah.

SS: Well, now, when we talked earlier, you mentioned something about the security around the ordnance plant: the dogs, and the ...?

KG: Well, now then around the refinery, we only had one fence like they got now.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Well, then when they built the refine-, the BOW, they put two fences. I would guess they were 25 or 30 feet apart. And they had guard shacks every so often built in that fence, and they had guard dogs that would help patrol in between those fences. And it is said that the guards had orders that if they caught you between those fences, they had orders to shoot ya. Now, whether they did or not, I don't know.

SS: You don't recall any incidents ...

KG: No, I ...

SS: ... regarding that ...[Inaudible].

KG: I – of all the security here in Baytown, I don't recall any incident that taken place about, concerning ... I guess you'd say the enemy.

SS: Yeah, or sabotage? That sort of thing.

KG: Sabotaging anything. I don't – of course, there might have been some of it going on, but if there was any I never heard of it.

SS: Um-hmm. Um-hmm. Ok.

[Long pause]

SS: Well, by this time, uh ... you were living in Goose Creek, you said?

KG: Um-hmm.

SS: And what area of town did you live in? Where was your home?

KG: Out on the east side. Uh ...

SS: Out in east near Cedar Bayou?

KG: Out toward Cedar Bayou, yeah. On James Street.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Well, I lived next-to-the-last house on, going out of town on James Street.

SS: Um-hmm. You had a family by that time?

KG: Um-hmm.

SS: And you lived out there?

KG: Um-hmm.

SS: What was, um ... what was it like in Baytown, uh ... during those days?

KG: Well, to ... being honest, I don't know how I would say it because I never came to town very much. I stayed at home most of the time. And – course, a shift worker, it is like sometimes they jump on me about not going to church, or one thing or another like that. I'd tell 'em a shift-worker got to where he didn't have time to do anything. And other – and on his days off, why, he'd go hunting or fishing or something like that. Maybe a little, what little recreation we could have.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: But that's when I would go my hunting and fishing is on my shift days. When we got to where we was having two days off a week, well of course I got in a little more hunting and fishing.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Than I did before. Now, we used to – used to when we was working four to 12, 12 o'clock at night we would come in and we would go over to the bay, East Bay, and go floundering. Did you ever go floundering?

SS: I never have, but I've heard a lot about it.

KG: (Laughs) It's lots of fun.

SS: Uh-huh.

KG: Lots of work.

SS: Uh-huh.

KG: And we would go floundering, you know, we would stay in that bay until daylight came, then we would come home, and lay down and go to sleep, and get up about two o'clock, get ready and go back to work.

SS: Did you catch any flounder?

KG: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes we'd catch 'em. You gig the flounder – you had to gig.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And they'd be laying water all the way this deep. Well, odds always, you could see the sand bottom.

SS: But, uh, two or three feet, maybe?

KG: Yeah. Long as it was clear and the wind wasn't blowing you could see the bottom. And you had a light with you, and you'd go along, and you see that flounder. It's shaped just like a shoe. And you gig that flounder, and they were – they are good eating.

SS: I wanted to ask you, too, you mentioned the other day when we were talking about first Humble Day. Uh ...

KG: Oh, yes. Humble Day.

SS: Could you tell me a little bit about Humble Day? Uh ... in the early, early days of the refinery?

KG: Well, I don't know ... I don't know when they started Humble Day. I don't know when they started – when they started to build the refinery, whether they had it before. But my first experience with it was they would have a picnic, barbeque down there. And, of course, company paid for all of this.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: They would have a barbeque dinner, and they would have style shows, and they'd have dancing and so forth and so on way up until the night. And just a jolly good time. Just a bunch got together, and they have a jolly good time.

SS: Well, where did they have these?

KG: Over at Sylvan Beach.

SS: And how did you get over there?

KG: We went in a automobile, and at that – they had a ferry at that time. And down here – I don't know whether you know where the Ferry Road is or not.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Well, they had a ferry at that time, and we would go across over there. Up until they built that ferry, we went to Lynchburg and went across. And it'd take a good long while. Well, later on, they began to have these Humble Day picnics ...

(End of tape)

(Tape 2 of 2)

SS: Mr. Grimes, we talked a lot about the Humble Company now, um ... let's talk a little bit about what life was like here in Baytown just for the average citizen.

(Background chatter)

SS: Um... You had mentioned something about the problem of the Mexican-American children trying to go to school here. Could you tell me a little bit about that?

KG: Well, they had a school over in Baytown – De Zavala School – that the Mexican children went to. And they were not allowed to go to the other schools. The Mexicans didn't like it, made a fuss about it, and the Mexican Council came out to Baytown and had a meeting with the school trustees and the refinery officials. And they were told that the Mexican children could legally go to the American schools. But if they went to the American schools, Humble Refinery would not hire Mexican laborers. And that ended the conversation.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: They didn't go – they did not go to the school. But they could, after finishing the fourth or fifth grade in the Mexican school, then they could go to the – and did – go to the white schools.

SS: So that continued probably like that up until the Civil Rights Movement or something, I suppose?

KG: Yeah.

SS: Ok, um... Now, you mentioned that you like to fish and hunt. And I had heard that there were alligators in this area. Did you ever go alligator hunting?

KG: There's alligators in this country now.

(Laughter)

KG: Lots of them. Uh... A fella I used to hunt, go hunting with, he and I used to go up and down Cedar Bayou in a boat. And you go down the bayou, and have a spotlight at night – this was at night. Darker the night, the better it was. And you go down the bayou and you play your spotlight out on the water, and you saw a couple of pink beads sticking up out of the water.

SS: Beads, did you say?

KG: Beads, it looked like. It was their eyes.

SS: Oh. (Laughs)

KG: Sticking up out of the water they were pink. And of course the distance apart those were depended on the size of the alligator. Well, you could see them when you hold your spotlight on 'em, and you could run your boat right up beside them. Well, I had a 30/30 rifle, and we used to go, and we would run right up beside 'em, and shoot 'em. We killed several, and – I don't know how many. Not very large ones, two or three feet mostly. But we would, had a hay hook. Do you know what a hay hook is?

SS: I think I know what you're talking about.

KG: Well, we'd have a hay hook, and man in the front of the boat would shoot the alligator, and the man in the back then would grab him with this hay hook and pull him in. Well, one night we were going – this was in fun – and we were going. Well, I was doing the shooting, so I missed the alligator, and ol' boy grabbed his tail with this ol' hay hook. (Laughs) It was about three-foot, about three-feet long. And boy, did he drown us. (Laughs)

SS: Were there a lot of alligators...

KG: Oh, yeah.

SS: ... during that time?

KG: Oh, yeah. A lot.

SS: It was common to just walk down to the bayou and see 'em?

KG: Oh, they hunted 'em at that time, and sent several of the old ... oh, these people that done hunting and trapping and so forth, they had several of them get the alligator and send the skins off and have boots made of them. I knew several men that had alligator boots made out of alligator that they killed. I never did – I never did even skin any of 'em.

SS: You went for the sport.

KG: I just went for the fun.

(Laughter)

SS: Well, there are a lot of places around in Baytown that I guess we don't know very much about today. Um... One of 'em was this place – I have heard of a place called, "Skeleton Hill."

KG: Skeleton ...

SS: Can you tell me about that?

KG: Skeleton Hill – I don't know what direction you'd say – I guess it, I'd say it was on the left-hand side of the road from going from the Baytown refinery, going out towards Crosby on the left-hand side of the road.

SS: Bayway Drive? What's now Bayway Drive?

KG: What's now Bayway Drive. And it was called Skeleton Hill from the reports that several skeletons had been found in the woods there. And whether it's true or not, I don't know.

SS: Um-hmm. And that looked over the, what we now call the Ship Channel?

KG: Uh-huh.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Well, not so far out. You know ...

SS: It's in there around where Bay Villa is now?

KG: Um-hmm.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Um-hmm.

SS: Um... How did people get across the streams? Goose Creek and places like that ...[Inaudible].

KG: Well, the stream, the Goose Creek, the stream of Goose Creek, you crossed it between Baytown and Pelly on pontoon bridges. A pontoon bridge is a ferry as a barge. As long as the width of the channel is with a apron built on the end of the barge that let's down to the road. Consequently when you drove up there and drove on the end of that bar-, pontoon boat, one end of it would rare up and come up, and then it would dump over to the other end. There were several wrecks; I don't know of anybody getting hurt on it. And it was two there, both of 'em, one at Robert E. – no, let's see ... Yeah, it's one at Robert E. Lee School where, or on that road, and the other one from Pelly. But the main traffic, all of the traffic was through Pelly. Uh, it – I was just trying to remember – I don't believe that road between, across, in front of Robert E. Lee – I don't believe it was built at that time.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: But anyhow, when it was first built you didn't come and go plumb up through Baytown. You come up there, and you come up just across the stream of Goose Creek, and you turned to the right and went up the railroad, and you crossed the railroad and come in to Baytown on Harbor Drive, which is Mexican town now, I believe.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And you came down that way was the way you came. And this road coming through where the city hall is, there wasn't any road through there; that was all forest.

SS: Oh, well that was wooded area?

KG: Oh, that was wooded area. I don't, I think there was some – I think there's some widow lady in Houston owned that. I'm not positive, but I believe there were.

SS: Well, did people around here go into Houston very – now, I'm talking about back when you first came in the 1920's – did they go into Houston often?

KG: You didn't go into Houston very often because it was a day's, hard day's work to go to Houston and back, because you only had a shell road.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And you had to go to Crosby to cross the channel. And by the time you drove to Crosby, and crossed the channel, and went into Houston in a Model-T Ford, why, (laughs) it'd take you a good long while.

SS: Then you had to turn around and start back if you came in on the same day.

KG: You had to turn around and start back.

SS: Uh-huh.

KG: Now then, there was lots of people that would go into Houston and buy groceries. And ... when I first came down here, there was a boat – I never did see the boat; never did use it – that you could order an order of groceries from Henke and Pillot.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And that's Kroger's, now.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: You could order it from them, and they would load it in Houston, and it would come down the channel, and it was a – it would land at Bush Landing, which is now just below the bridge that crosses on Highway 146, on the stream of Goose Creek.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: It would land there, and you could get groceries. But groceries were so doggone high here that you could- ...

SS: Were they high?

KG: Oh, they was outrageous because ... these people that sold groceries, they didn't mind putting the charges on it, and it cost them a whole lot to get those groceries out here.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: They'd have to pay for it.

SS: And could the people really save money by bringing them in on a ...

KG: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

SS: ...and ordering a lot at one time?

KG: And the first chain store that went in here was ... oh, what was the name of it? It's almost out of business now. Some big chain, I ...

SS: Grocery?

KG: Um-hmm.

SS: Grocery chain?

KG: Yeah. It went in here, and they cut groceries down so low that there was some talk of running 'em out of town.

SS: (Laughs) Well, speaking of running 'em out of town, uh ... when you first came to Baytown, what about the law and order here? Especially around the oilfields. Where there...

KG: Well, of course I wasn't in the oilfields and didn't go to 'em; stayed away from there as far as I could. But it was rough. Rough and tough. So they tell me.

SS: Did they have many shootings?

KG: I don't know whether they did or not. They had a lots of gun whipping and so forth and so on, and arresting 'em and so forth, but I never was around that bunch. That happened mostly over in Baytown and Pelly, and I stayed away from those places. And ... is the thing running? Cut it off.

(Tape cuts off.)

SS: Now, Mr. Grimes, you were here during the prohibition days, uh ... what was it like in relation to that?

KG: Well, the majority of people made their own beer here. And it was ... the practice, when you went to a home, went in the home, the first thing they would do would get you a bottle of that home brew. And it was different strength – every place you went everybody made it in a different way, and it was different strengths. Some of it was awful stout, some of it wasn't very stout. (Laughs)

KG: And ... it, lots of it sold. They had bootlegging ...[Inaudible]. oh my – almost anywhere you went you could look and see a bootlegging joint. And some of 'em was good, and some of 'em was bad, and some of 'em was high priced, some of 'em was low priced, and different kind and so forth. But they had – I remember one incident that I'll tell you about. We had, I had a brother-in-law – lived in north Texas – that was a very strong prohibitionist. And he was down here, and I was telling him about the way they sold whiskey and beer down here, and he didn't believe it. I'd taken him to a place over on Main Street, over on Texas Avenue in Goose Creek. And we walked in, sitting on the back of the bar was pint bottles of whiskey. I pointed to one – I forget now the name of it, the brand of it, but it was a famous name of brand.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And I asked the fella bartender with, I asked him if he'd sell it to me. He said, "Yes, I'll sell it to you." And he quoted the price to him. And that convinced my brother-in-law that prohibition what it was supposed to be. (Laughs)

SS: Well, did they ever raid any of these places?

KG: Oh, yeah.

SS: Did they have federal agents coming in?

KG: Oh, yeah, they'd raid 'em occasionally, but then the supposition was that the – like I said, they just paid a fine, and kept in business. They never did close any of 'em up.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Now then, they – I've read about 'em, and I've heard about 'em putting padlocks on the doors, but I never did see any that was padlocked. And the – I don't know now what the – I think the beer I think would cost you about a quarter a bottle.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And so forth. And, uh, what I made myself didn't cost me near that much.

(Laughter)

KG: But I never did make but two batches of it. I made two batches. I own up that I made two batches, but it was very good. But I don't know – I got to where I didn't like it, and ... I've just ...

SS: Well, to go on to something else, I wanted to ask about: there used to be an interurban here in Baytown, didn't there?

KG: Do what?

SS: An – there used to be an interurban.

KG: Oh, yeah.

SS: In Baytown? Now, where did it run?

KG: This Missouri Pacific Railroad, when it was built, it was built as an electric.

SS: Oh!

KG: Interurban. Harry Johnson – was he named Johnson? Or Jack? What was – Harry Johnson? I believe that was his name. Uh, he owned or bought some way – you know, long years ago that, oh, from Highlands all in this area was rice fields.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Well, there was a year that came a drought, and the San Jacinto River got low, and they got salt water in the canal, and it ruined practically all the rice farmers. And this fellow, Harry K. Johnson – I believe it was Johnson – come in and bought up a bunch of that land from Highlands on this side of the San Jacinto River, and he started fig orchards and strawberry patches. And they were very prosperous, not, not ... oh, I – maybe that word “very” is the wrong word, but they were prosperous. And he built this interurban line from Houston over here as an electric line, and it ran ...

SS: When was that built, do you know?

KG: I was trying to think of the year, and I was also trying to think – I don’t believe Harry K. Johnson ever finished it. I believe he went under, and Missouri Pacific bought it, taken it over, and finished it. And it ran as an interurban for a good many years. And I don’t know why they ever changed over to steam, but they finally just changed over to a steam road altogether. But empty Jack was the same road.

SS: Did people use it as a commuter train? Or was it more or less a ...

KG: Oh, it was a ...

SS: ... shopper’s train, or what have you?

KG: When it ran as electric, it carried passengers. It had runs like from Highlands; down here it had special runs during shift and carry shift men, and then from Baytown. I rode it for years.

SS: Oh, you did?

KG: Yeah, oh yes. And, uh ...

SS: Now, where did you ride it from?

KG: I’d get on at Goose Creek and ride over to Baytown.

SS: Over to ... um-hmm. How much did that cost you? Do you remember?

KG: Well, I don’t remember just exactly; we bought books.

SS: Oh. Oh, I see.

KG: We bought ... ticket books. And I believe those books ran in five dollar denominations. And I don't remember just what it cost. Not very much, though. And it was a whole lot better than driving your own car or bicycling.

SS: Especially over shell roads or something.

KG: Yeah. And now then, for your benefit, I'll tell you I kept better than bicycling. I'll tell you that during the war, during – not during the war, I guess it was during the Depression. Or during – maybe during the war it was a whole bunch of us rode bicycles. And I rode bicycles for two years from Goose Creek over to Baytown.

SS: You did?

KG: Yes.

SS: You must have kept pretty trim.

(Laughter)

KG: Well, everybody that would ride a bicycle that way kept pretty trim. But it was fine. It was nice to ride a bicycle. I really enjoyed it all but in bad weather; in bad weather, of course didn't. But traffic got so thick and heavy that it got so dangerous that, uh ... we quit.

SS: That you quit doing that?

KG: Yeah.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And then they didn't, there wasn't, wouldn't build bicycle paths like they do now. If they're riding 'em now, they'll build you a path along the side for you to ride. It'd be better. But ...

SS: Well, now you mentioned the Depression in your conversation just then. Uh... What about the crash? Do you remember, uh...

KG: I remember...

SS: Did it affect Baytown very much?

KG: I remember some of it, uh ... there at the refinery ... it got so bad that they laid off all the ladies that worked in the refinery.

SS: All the women?

KG: Except one. Raymond Powell's secretary, they kept her on.

SS: What was her name, do you remember?

KG: Well, I swear... German name. I knew her and I knew her ...

SS: That's alright.

KG: ... knew her well, and knew, knew him. If you hadn't have asked me, I would've remembered it. But anyway, uh ... the times got so bad, and they laid off so many men, and people got so bad they started what we called the 25 Cent Gang. You ever hear anybody talk about the 25 Cent Gang?

SS: No.

KG: You ask some of the old-timer's about the, if they remember the 25 Cent Gang.

SS: (Laughs)

KG: Uh, they'd taken a bunch of these men that they had laid off – they didn't have jobs, and couldn't get jobs – and they'd taken them out there in the refinery, and they used 'em, just doing anything. And they paid them 25 cents an hour. And ... that's all they did. And I forget now how long they kept 'em. They kept 'em a good long while, though. But, it was ...

SS: I guess at least for two or three years there things were pretty bad?

KG: It was. As the old saying, it was grub money.

(Laughter)

KG: In other words they could eat.

SS: Yeah, that's true. Well, do you think people, um ... Well, there weren't people in Baytown starving? Was it – was it that bad?

KG: No, I don't think there were. Uh, there were some that ... got down awful poor, but I don't think anybody – I don't think very many of 'em had to go on welfare. And ...

SS: So really, Baytown probably fared better than a lot of areas?

KG: Well, the ones – the people that kept their jobs that was on regular employment and kept their jobs, of course, had – they kind of, they spent all that money they made, and they kind of kept things going.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And at that time, Humble was practically the only industry in Baytown. And everybody in Baytown depended on – either depended, well either directly or indirectly they depended on Humble Refinery to keep 'em going.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Just like all the idol people: the cooks and the things, and the waiters and waitresses, and stores and so forth, depended on the Humble employees for their business. Well, of course that kept on. Of course it shrunk; don't misunderstand me. It shrunk a good deal, but then just like – well, take myself for instance. I never was – my pay never was cut.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: I worked the same hours all the way through. Well, of course what money I spent that was – helped 'em. And if I knew anybody that wanted ... that was in need and wanted work. Now I know of several, several colored boys came over to me, and I hired 'em to do yardwork and I'd have 'em to come over there and work in my yard when my yard – when I really should have been out doing it myself.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: But I'd pay them to do it on a count of ...

SS: Helping them out.

KG: Helping 'em out that way. Well, lots of people done that.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: Lots of 'em.

SS: Well, what about politics in Baytown? Um...

KG: Well...

SS: Was it a very political place?

KG: I never was. I never was very much a politic – politician. Uh, but politics used to get hot and heavy.

(Laughter)

KG: Uh... there was a for several years here that they tried to run Houston Light & Power Company out of town and build a – build a generating plant here of their own. And they tried this, that and the other, and there was lots of politicians, and they claimed that Goose Creek was going broke, going bankrupt and so forth and so on, and so on and so forth, and so on. But, uh, cut the thing off and I'll tell you ...

(Tape cuts off)

SS: Alright, Mr. Grimes, you told me an incident one time about, uh... seeing a possum somewhere?

KG: Well, it was one night we... uh ... carload of us – it was my car, and it was three men riding with me – was going home, and on Texas Avenue, why, we saw a possum cross the street. So we stopped and had a possum hunt.

SS: (Laughs)

KG: (Laughs) Right on Texas Avenue, which at this, at that time was right up in town, which now would be right about the center of town – of the business part of town. Of course all the buildings weren't built there, there was skips in there where the ...

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: ... would go, but we caught that possum. After that I saw a good many possums along there, but we never stopped and caught 'em.

SS: Just running up and down the Main Street?

KG: Just running up and down Main Street at night, you know?

SS: What other kind of animals did you see frequently around? You mentioned the alligators and ...

KG: Well, now then, I remember out at the refinery we caught a nutria at one time. And ... put him in a box, and was gonna – someone was gonna take him home, but he chewed out of the box, got (laughs) it got away from us.

SS: Got away? (Laughs)

KG: Well, we caught several muskrats out there at the reservoir at the refinery, but we never did get to take them home because every time we'd put 'em in – we didn't have anything but pasteboard boxes to put 'em in. Every time we'd put 'em in one they'd chew out of it; they'd get out of it. But I guess it's a good thing we didn't, because it's a wonder they hadn't eat our fingers off.

SS: (Laughs) Well, that's true. Well, uh, do you have any other recollections that you, uh ... that you'd like to ...

KG: No, I don't.

SS: I think we've – I think we've covered quite a bit here.

KG: Um-hmm.

SS: We appreciate your taking the time to do this.

KG: At the – I'll tell you this – at the time they put the ferry across to Morgan's Point, um ... they built a causeway across there, and they call it Massey's Folly.

(Laughter)

SS: Massey's Folly?

KG: Yeah. And Massey's Pier, so forth. Now, Massey was a County Commissioner, and when he – there was lots of objections to building it across there. They didn't – didn't want to build it across. Cost too much money.

SS: Now, was this out to Hog Island?

KG: Yeah, the Hog Island Ferry.

SS: Yes, I remember.

KG: You can see the old, old causeway that went across to Hog Island; from the mainland over to Hog Island.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: But, uh, it was a blessing. It was wonderful. People enjoyed it and so forth. They give a ...

SS: What was there out there? On Hog Island?

KG: Well, the ferry run from Hog Island over to La Porte.

SS: Oh, I see.

KG: And you went across the channel there, and went on to Galveston, or to Sylvan Beach, or anywhere across the channel you want to.

SS: Um-hmm. And before that you had to go down to Lynchburg?

KG: Yeah.

SS: To cross?

KG: Uh-huh. Well, I'll tell you this – it's still running, isn't it?

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: I'll tell you this when I first came down here coming out of Houston down by the Shell Refinery where those refineries is from there – well, from La Porte on to Houston along that road 90 percent strawberry farms.

SS: Strawberry farms?

KG: Yes. And strawberry seeds, and you could go along there, and if you could talk Spanish you could buy strawberries. If you couldn't talk, why, you couldn't buy 'em.

SS: (Laughs)

KG: These commission merchants would come out of New York and buy 'em by the crop.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And you go along there, if you couldn't talk to those Mexicans, well, they wouldn't sell 'em to you. But if you could talk to those Mexicans, why they're ...

SS: You could get some?

KG: They'd bootleg 'em to you. (Laughs)

SS: Was there any other kind of farming in the area? You said there was rice farming, and uh ...

KG: There was rice farming, and...

SS: And they grew the strawberries.

KG: And strawberry farming is about all. Now several years after I was here on this interurban line between Highlands and Goose Creek there were strawberry farms along it.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And you could go out there and buy strawberries. There was two or three fig farms.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And you – there was some canning outfit, uh ... I forget the name of it there at Highlands, now. The only industry up there. You might know of it.

SS: Well, I knew there was one up there.

KG: Well, it was put up in order to can figs that was raised along that interurban line.

SS: Oh. That's the reason it was built?

KG: That was the reason it was built.

SS: um hum.

KG: And when the figs went out, why, people that owned it instead of closing up, why, they just went to canning other stuff, and buying stuff, and shipping stuff in, and canning it. And went to making – this Top Kick dog food is made there.

SS: Oh, is it? From strawberries to dog food.

KG: (Laughs)

SS: Well, you've seen a lot of changes in your years here, haven't you?

KG: Listen it – you know, the trouble of it is you don't realize how many changes you have saw ...

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: ... until you have a conversation with somebody like you and I, and you get to thinking about it.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And think back. Now, when I go home, James will go to ask, James and Rosemarie will go to ask me what we talked about. And that brings up hundreds and hundreds more questions. Just like ... it's not running is it?

SS: Yeah, it is.

KG: Alright, put it ...

(Tape cuts off)

SS: Now, what about the bathing beach?

KG: Well, when I first came down here they had a bathing beach down at the – on the bay.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And you go out there, of an evening, the majority of people would go out there and – at I believe they called it ... out toward Cedar Point, out toward Houston Point out there?

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: And out there was the main thing. At night there would be hundreds and hundreds of people. They had a bathing pier around out in the bay, oh ... I don't know, a good many hundred feet out there. And you'd go down and do all your swimming and bathing there.

SS: And that's now part of the Ship Channel, isn't it? Or close.

KG: Well, it's almost the Ship Channel.

SS: Near the Ship Channel.

KG: You can be in bathing and see ships going up, (laughs) up and down there, and you could also – you'd see porpoises coming in. And when porpoises would come in, they – everybody'd think it was a shark and be trying to get out of the water and so forth. (Laughs)

SS: (Laughs) Were there any sharks around?

KG: Well, of course there were small ones there, but ...

SS: Few. Uh-huh.

KG: Very few that would hurt you.

SS: Uh-huh.

KG: And porpoise come in, they go and they come up out of the water, and then so forth. Well, people then think they're sharks and go to trying to get out and so forth. But it was a wonderful place.

SS: And you have seen those porpoise, porpoises' out there?

KG: Oh, yes. Yeah. Uh, when I first came down here at Lynchburg Crossing, they fish for Tarpon and catch Tarpon along there.

SS: Oh, really?

KG: And I never did fish for 'em, never did catch 'em, but I have saw people hang 'em, and stop my car and watch people play Tarpon on a line there.

SS: Um-hmm.

KG: But ...

SS: Well, uh ... I think that's about the end of the tape.

KG: Kill it on that thing.

SS: Uh, we appreciate you taking the time...

KG: Well...

SS: ... to come and talk with us, Mr. Grimes.

KG: It's alright. And ...

SS: When you think of some more ideas we'll make another tape, ok?

KG: (Laughs) Ok.

SS: Mr. Grimes, you mentioned that there was a spring located in Baytown. Could you tell me a little bit about that?

KG: Well, on Spur 201 overpass where it crosses Main Street and going to Pelly past the sewer disposal plant on the right-hand side in the ditch there is a concrete culvert that looks like it just goes into the ground. But it goes under the road at an angle, crosses the road over on the left hand side to a little ditch about three or four-feet wide, about waist deep. And up, I would say a block maybe a block-and-a-half from the highway, there is a spring that feeds into that ditch and comes down. And if you'll go across when the tide is out the water is all out of that ditch on the right-hand side of the road of that concrete block there'll be a little stream. Perhaps six inches wide and a couple inches deep that is fresh water that comes out of that spring, and comes under that culvert.

SS: So it's still feeding a little water out of the ground today?

KG: Still feeding a little water out of the ground.

SS: Well, that's interesting to know. Thank you.

KG: And cut your thing off, and I'll ...

(End of tape)

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