

(Tape 1 of 2)

An Oral History Tape Transcription

Of

Interviewer: Martha Mayo

Interviewee: Charles A. Young

August 31, 1988

MM: Sterling Municipal Library. I'm having an oral history conversation with Mr. Charles Young.

MM: Most of your memory is ...

CY: Yeah, most of my memory of this area, when I was just a, when we first lived here is more geographical than, than historical.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: Because I, we moved away in 1922.

MM: I see. But you came here in '16 or '17.

CY: But came back ... yes, we came here in 1916 or 17.

MM: Ok.

CY: My dad worked in the oilfield. And we lived down in Evergreen.

MM: Oh, ok. Now, what was it like in Evergreen?

CY: Well, uh, Evergreen was a, a recreation area I guess for the, for this area.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And there was a beach, a small beach down there that, and they had a – I'm not sure that it was a dance hall, but there was a big building there, and of course you have pictures of it, but ... Uh, I remember there was a long pier and a diving board out there where people could go swimming. It was a big s- ...

MM: And it was there when you moved here?

CY: It was there when ...

MM: Ok.

CY: Yes, when we moved here. And, uh, we lived just up the hill from the beach. In fact, we lived next door to Mrs. Grant, Mr. and Mrs. Grant. And she was a school teacher here in this district for years and years.

MM: Oh.

CY: And died not too many years ago.

MM: Oh.

CY: In fact, uh, a part of the old Grant House – if it is, if it hasn't all fallen down – a part of the old Grant House that was there when we moved there is still standing.

MM: My goodness.

CY: The last time I drove by it was.

MM: That sounds like that'd be a wonderful place to grow up.

CY: It was. It was. When we moved away, and I was a child of course, to Orange Field away from the water from the bay, I'd go out behind the garage or – not garage, we didn't have a car. But behind the chicken house, I guess.

MM: [Laughs] Yeah.

CY: And I'd cry.

MM: Awww...

CY: I would actually cry because we'd moved away from the bay and then, of course, lived in the oilfield there.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And there was no water, nothing anywhere near.

MM: Nothing. [Laughs]

CY: Except the bayou that ran through there, but ... I know I remember that so well. Because we had a pier out in front of our house, and I'd go out there as a little bitty ol' kid fishing off that pier; the water wasn't deep.

MM: Yeah.

CY: It's a shallow bay, of course.

MM: So it was safe for children.

CY: It was safe, Yeah, because we just ...

MM: Where there a lot of people living out there?

CY: There was quite a number of people who lived out there. In fact, uh, just east of us, from where our house was, the Gulf Oil Company had a row of company houses.

MM: Oh.

CY: Just up on the bluff bank above the Goose Creek – I mean the Evergreen, uh ... recreation area.

MM: Are those there anymore?

CY: No, all of those houses are gone.

MM: Oh, OK.

CY: But there was a row of Gulf houses there. In fact, I think, uh – I can't remember the person's name, now – but I think later on, one of the superintendents was a, worked out at the refinery.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: Uh, years later, you know. And, uh, I think, uh ... well, I, we lived close to a person named Dedman. I don't know, some of the older people might remember...

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: ... a person by the name of Dedman that lived down there. I remember that.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And I was telling you the other day, we – they had to bring water to us in a wagon. We lived on, we moved later on down, farther down the bay.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And back in the woods, and there was no water. No lines or anything. And no way of water, you know, to get water. So there was an old man that had a team of mules and a wagon, and he'd bring water in barrels. And we had a special barrel for our drinking water.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: Of course we caught rain water for washing clothes ...

MM: Yeah. Uh-huh.

CY: ... and dishes and what have you. But we had to buy our ...

MM: How often did you have to get it?

CY: I don't really remember.

MM: Cause, Yeah, as a child ...

CY: But a barrel of water, you know, lasted us – like I say – for drinking. That's mostly what it was for.

MM: Oh.

CY: Drinking and cooking. And probably, my mother probably used rainwater for cooking, because it's being boiled, but ...

MM: Yeah.

CY: Undoubtedly there must have been some contamination in some of it, because I contacted Typhoid Fever.

MM: You did? Oh.

CY: Yes. And, uh ... I can well-remember that ... it ... I almost died because I remember the night that I was so sick that they called my aunt that lived in Houston to come because they didn't think I'd live through the night. And they called Dr. Lilly.

MM: [Inaudible]

CY: And he came out ...

MM: Oh!

CY: ... to our house out there at Evergreen.

MM: Now how old were you?

CY: I must have been four or five years old.

MM: Oh my goodness!

CY: Something like that because, uh, I'll never remember the day that I ... first got out of the house after that seizure. And incidentally, it was in the wintertime.

MM: Oh! That's kind of unusual, isn't it? Uh-huh.

CY: Yeah in late ... Yeah, it was. That's what I, I thought later on, you know.

MM: Yeah.

CY: But it was in the wintertime, or the late winter. Maybe real early spring, but the weather was still cold. But I remember the first day I stepped out of the house.

MM: Oh.

CY: After being in the bed for numbers of days. Could hardly walk, but I'll never forget the trees had just started budding out. You know, in the spring.

MM: It's beautiful.

CY: Oh, I'll never forget that scene, and that's been the most ...

MM: Oh!

CY: That's my favorite time of year. Has been from then.

MM: Anybody else in your family get Typhoid than you?

CY: No. No one else. I don't ...

MM: Just you?

CY: And I don't think they had a vaccine. I don't know whether they had a vaccine or not, but no one else got the Typhoid buy myself. But, uh ...

MM: What, and, the doctor would have to come out – the nearest doctor was in Baytown? Or Pelly, or what, where would be ...

CY: Well, it was uh ... actually in New Town.

MM: New Town. Alright, that's right.

CY: Goose Creek.

MM: Yeah. Ok.

CY: Right. Goose Creek. That's where Dr. Lilly's – I suppose his offices were there then. Whether he had a place here, an office here in Middletown or not, I don't know.

MM: Where – does Cedar Bayou, the doctors in Cedar Bayou wouldn't have served that area?

CY: I-- don't know whether they even had any doctors in Cedar Bayou or not.

MM: Oh, ok.

CY: Cedar Bayou was a community, and there was not really any businesses there to amount to anything.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Uh, you know, there wasn't a school or anything there. Well, I take that back – there was a school because the old building was built in 1845.

MM: Yeah. Yeah, it's quite an old school.

CY: Yes. Because when I came back and graduated from Cedar Bayou High School ...

MM: Oh you did?

CY: I did. And the old, uh, building was used as a cafeteria. The old original building.

MM: Oh.

CY: And, here again I can't understand why they tore the building down.

MM: That's a shame.

CY: Why they didn't preserve it.

MM: Yes.

CY: But that's where we ate, that's where the cafeteria was.

MM: Oh.

CY: Course they built the brick building and that was in 1929 and '30.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: '31, '32 – I graduated in '32.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: So they had the brick building there then. The--

MM: Now, where did you go to elementary school? The lower grades.

CY: Well I, I – we left here. I went to, I started to school here at Middletown. And went one year in the primer.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: I guess that was kindergarten, I don't know.

MM: And now where was that school located?

CY: Uh, right where Lee Drive crosses West Main ...

MM: Oh, ok.

CY: Uh, there's a little subdivision back behind where Hoffpauir used to have a grocery store. I don't know whether you ...

MM: I know, I know where you mean. Uh-huh.

CY: Ok, in those oak trees back there, is where the school building was.

MM: Had it originally been another business like a grocery store or something ...

CY: No.

MM: And then was she being used as a school?

CY: Not that I know of.

MM: Oh, ok.

CY: Now ... there was a school building out in the, in the oilfield at Pelly.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Uh, and I knew that that's where – I thought that that's where I would start to school.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: But that school was shut down when I started to school, so I had to go to Middletown.

MM: Oh.

CY: And, uh, from where we lived at Evergreen to Middletown, to us at that time was quite a long distance to walk.

MM: Oh!

CY: And the thing that made it so bad, we had to go through the Tiger's Trail. Now there's not too many people know anything about the Tiger's Trail, but ...

MM: [Laughs] No, I haven't heard that. Yeah.

CY: All the old-timers – if there is any around this area, probably is – will remember the Tiger's Trail. And the reason it was called the Tiger's Trail is because it went through that section of woods that was so thick with the yaupon trees ...

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: ... that it was almost dark in there in the daytime, and the trail was just wide enough almost to, just to walk through.

MM: Oh. Uh-huh.

CY: And when you came out on the other side, there was a boardwalk that went across an old saltwater flat that's still there – right exactly where it was; the old salt water flat is still there.

MM: Oh my goodness.

CY: And there was a two-by-twelve boardwalk that went across that that we had to walk across till we got across that flat. And then we walked on into town into the, where the school was. And I'll never

remember the, I'll never forget the first day I went to school and had to go through the Tiger's Trail.
[Laughs]

MM: I bet! That must have been a pretty scary thing.

CY: Well, in fact it was so scary that I went with some of my older, my aunt's sisters and brothers and sisters that were older than I. So they didn't get out of school until 3:30, I guess, and I got out at 2:30. And I wasn't about to go back to the Tiger's Trail by myself.

MM: By yourself. [Laughs]

CY: So, I was playing around on the school ground waiting for them, and the teacher came out and said, "You'll have to go home." Said, "Your mother will be worried about you," said, "you can't stay here."

CY: So I walked across the road, the street, and sat down and waited there until they got out.

MM: Oh.

CY: To go back to the Tiger's Trail with 'em.

MM: I don't blame you!

CY: [Laughs] I tell you, that was a scary ... And the name, I guess, is what made it so scary.

MM: Yeah. [Inaudible] eh, kids. How long did it take you to walk it, do you suppose?

CY: Oh, about ... I'd be ...

MM: It's hard to know from this ...

CY: It would be hard – you know back in those days when you, when you were younger, a distance seemed so far.

MM: That's right.

CY: So far. If you go back now to some of those places, it's shrunk up so much that you can't believe that that was it.

MM: I know what you mean. Yeah, that's [indecipherable].

CY: And I, and I also, the teacher that taught me that year in, was Mrs. Mulligan. And that's her picture on that, on that picture that you have.

MM: Oh! Yes. Ok.

CY: That's Mrs. Mulligan.

MM: And it was a one-room school?

CY: Undoubtedly it was ...

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: Because, uh, that picture and my picture are exactly the same except for different classes.

MM: Well that's what I thought. Well, I noticed that ...

CY: See it wasn't the same class.

MM: After I got that picture out, I couldn't find you in it. Now I realize it was a different ...

CY: No, I'm not in it, see. But the same date, the same everything. Same photographer and all. And the same building, and the same windows.

MM: Yeah.

CY: With the same person, look like, sitting in the window.

[Laughter]

CY: So, but her name with Miz Mulligan.

MM: Well how did, was that ... quite an affair to conduct that class for that many children?

CY: I'm satisfied it was.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Uh, but, you know – kids that young, I guess you would have a time corralling a bunch of, a bunch of six year-olds I ...

MM: Was it fun?

CY: Well ...

MM: Do you remember it as being lots of fun?

CY: Yeah. Seemed like I kind of enjoyed being there with all the kids, you know. And, and, uh, I – but after, we moved away that following year.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: So therefore, I lost all contact with all of those. I never ...

MM: Oh.

CY: I never grew up with 'em in school.

MM: I see.

CY: So I have no idea who any of 'em are. And ...

MM: Oh. When you came back you were in school?

CY: When I came back I was in the tenth grade.

MM: Oh! And you went to Cedar Bayou then.

CY: Went to Cedar Bayou.

MM: Oh, ok.

CY: So none of those, as far as I know, were in that picture. So, all these years I've wondered if there was somebody around Baytown that was in that picture.

MM: I bet the Baytown Sun could tell you.

CY: And, uh, I never have – I inquired out on the job.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: In fact I had a, that picture blown up from my original – I have the original – I had it blown up from the original, and nobody in that area ...

MM: Nobody recognizes – or claims. [Laughs]

CY: No. Nobody. Right. [Laughs]

MM: Well back to living at Evergreen, what about hurricanes? Were they ...

CY: Well, I remember the hurricanes slightly. The one thing that I remember about hurricanes, uh, as I mentioned, back in those days, all the derricks were wooden.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: They catch a whole lot more wind than a steel derrick does.

MM: Oh.

CY: Because of all the material that's in a wooden derrick.

MM: I see.

CY: And I remember my dad telling me that, at one time a hurricane came through, and there was approximately 412 derricks. And when the hurricane was over, there was probably 12 derricks left standing.

MM: Oh my goodness!

CY: Practically blew them all down. Because like I say, they caught so much wind and ...

MM: Must have been lumber everywhere.

CY: Oh, scattered all over the place, I'm sure. And it was a, it was a rig builder's paradise no doubt.

MM: [Laughs] I guess.

CY: Rebuilding. Because they all had to be rebuilt.

MM: Did the men try to stay out there in the field during the hurricane to try to ...

CY: I – no I don't, I'm sure ...

MM: ... save stuff?

CY: I don't know; I'm sure they didn't. There wasn't anything they could have done, you know. I don't remember you know, I ...

MM: What about the safety of your home?

CY: Well, we had an old oilfield shack, and it was still standing after all the hurricanes. And, uh, in fact the old shack was still standing when we moved back here.

MM: Oh.

CY: So I guess they – for some reason or other – it was built back in the woods, you know, it had a little protection, so I suppose that kept it from ...

MM: Well where did, now your dad came here from where? Did you say?

CY: Well, you mean originally?

MM: Yes, uh-huh.

CY: Well, he came from Holland originally.

MM: Oh, he did? Well he came to work in the oilfields, or what?

CY: No, he came over here and worked – I was born in Houston.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And he worked in the steel mill. There was a steel mill in Houston at that time.

MM: Oh. Uh-huh.

CY: He worked in the steel mill. And, uh, later on, he went to Port Arthur. Well, we moved to Galveston and lived for a short time. And, uh, I think he worked in the – I'm not sure what he worked, did there. Whether there was a steel mill there or not.

MM: Yeah.

CY: But he was a steel worker. And then we moved to Port Arthur. And we were there in Port Arthur in the 1915 hurricane.

MM: Oh.

CY: I remember that; my sister was just a small baby. I remember that, because they carried her – they brought us out of our house in a boat. Cause the water had risen, you know, the rain and what have you.

MM: Yes.

CY: And, uh, then we moved from Port Arthur to Orange Field when, uh – I mean to, uh, Goose Creek when the Goose Creek field...

MM: But that was a real boom.

CY: Oh, Yeah – Goose Creek was a boom.

MM: What was it like?

CY: Well, uh ... like I say, being a, that young, you know. I called my sister this morning to see if she remembered any of this.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And she said, “No, I’m a year younger than you.” And she remembers ...

MM: So you don’t remember people sleeping on the sidewalks, or ...

CY: Oh, no.

MM: Just sleeping.

CY: Uh, I remember one particular person – and whether that was after we came back, or whether this fellow was here at that time or not – but he walked up and down the streets of Pelly. They called him, “Crazy Jeff.” And I know when I came back he was still here.

MM: [Laughs]

CY: And, uh, any time you walked up to him and said something to him, he’d say, “Kill a bear.”

MM: [Laughs]

CY: They called him, “Kill-a-bear Jeff.” That was, that was his name.

MM: For goodness sakes.

CY: And he wore overalls, and that’s all he did. He walked up and down the streets there in Pelly for years and years. He lived there.

MM: [Laughs]

CY: Died not too awful many years ago.

MM: Is that right?

CY: I don’t know exactly when, but he was still there when we, when we moved back from ...

MM: Well I remem-, I was reading about, some things about Pelly. About, you know, the people just pouring in here to work in the oilfields, and sleeping just wherever they could – you know, sleep under a tree, sleep on the sidewalk.

CY: Yeah. I’m satisfied that was true.

MM: You don’t, but you don’t recall any of that?

CY: I don’t recall any of that because ...

MM: Well you were little. I guess you wouldn’t ...

CY: Well, and like I say, uh, we didn’t have any way of going anywhere but except by foot.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And, uh, we didn’t – you know as kids, why, naturally we didn’t go anywhere.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And, uh, I’ll always remember that Mrs. Grant took me and my sister to Sunday school every Sunday.

MM: Oh.

CY: Because she had a car.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And we lived down that-- And every Sunday she took us to Sunday school.

MM: And now where did she take you? Into ...

CY: I don't even remem-, no into, probably into Middletown.

MM: Ok.

CY: I'm sure it must have been into Middletown. And I don't know what church we went to, but I remember, I'll always remember, and my sister remembered this: that every Sunday we got a little card.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: A little, uh, with a Bible verse on it, and a picture of the baby Moses, or some Biblical picture on it.

MM: Yeah. Uh-huh.

CY: And when we left here, well we had just stacks of those.

MM: Oh.

CY: But they, they've got lost.

MM: Oh. Uh-huh.

CY: I'd give anything if I had 'em now.

MM: That's right.

CY: But I don't.

MM: That's right. Well where did your, where did your family get the ... the ... uh, did they raise their food? Or, I mean where did they get their food, and, I mean, where – did they have to go somewhere or ...

CY: No. Uh, they had, uh, they delivered groceries to Yeah. There was a person came around and took an order.

MM: Oh.

CY: For your groceries. And, uh, he'd go back to the store there in town, in some of the old stores in Middletown.

MM: In Middletown?

CY: In Middletown. And, uh, he'd fill those orders. And he'd bring our groceries to us.

MM: Oh.

CY: And, uh, that's where we got our groceries. And, now my dad always had a big garden.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: So we did have vegetables, fresh vegetables.

MM: Yeah.

CY: But, uh, staple goods, you know like lard and sugar ...

MM: Sure.

CY: ... and flour and what, things like that, well we did. And bread, I guess.

MM: Large amounts?

CY: Not real large amounts. I think he came probably every week.

MM: Oh, ok.

CY: They probably delivered every week.

MM: Well what, what about shoes and things when you got ready to ...

CY: Well ...

MM: ... go to school?

CY: Probably went barefoot. [Laughs]

MM: Yeah. Right. [Laughs] Well, until the weather got cold.

CY: The wintertime, I guess we had a pair of tennis shoes, or ...

MM: Yeah.

CY: If there was any tennis shoes then.

MM: You don't remember? Uh-huh.

CY: No, it's ...

MM: You don't have any memory of getting shoes. Or clothes.

CY: No, those things. No, I don't have any memory of that I just, uh ...

MM: Do you remember it as being a happy, good ...

CY: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, uh ...

MM: ... way to live?

CY: I really remember, like I say, I'd always, I wanted to come back to Baytown.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And always, I mean to Goose Creek. It wasn't Baytown, Goose Creek.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And I, I knew I, I enjoyed it – it was a big part of my life. And, uh, course we moved to Orange Field when I was only seven years old.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: And I grew up there till I was 17.

MM: What were the living facilities like there?

CY: Just about like Goose Creek. My dad built an old oilfield shack. And when we got to Orange Field, I remember, you know, we ... went to the old house. It was an old, uh ... the old houses were built with one-by-twelves standing up and down, and the cracks were filled with battens on the outside.

MM: Oh.

CY: And there was no, uh, no inside – it was sealed at, not sealed at all.

MM: Yeah. Uh-huh.

CY: In fact, you could look up to the roof and see the rafters all the way to the roof; the top wasn't sealed, the walls weren't sealed.

MM: Well, there were a lot of houses built like that.

CY: Oh, most all oilfields ...

MM: I mean, were built quickly and ...

CY: Oh Yeah, all the oil – in fact, a lot of the people that lived there not far from us lived in the old army tents that had a wall up about three or four feet, and then it was screened on up and had a canvas top.

MM: Oh.

CY: It was an old army surplus ...

MM: And a wooden floor?

CY: And a wooden floor. Old surplus army tents.

MM: Like they had at the refinery when they were building it.

CY: Yes. They actually lived in those.

MM: Ok.

CY: And ... big, one big room. And that's ...

MM: But you, your family never did.

CY: But we didn't – my dad had built this house that had a kitchen and two bedrooms. I believe it was two bedrooms. And had a big screened-in front porch that we could sleep on in the summertime.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And, uh ...

MM: Did he build it himself? I mean literally hammered it together?

CY: He built it hims- ... he built it himself. He did, he built the one at Evergreen himself.

MM: My goodness.

CY: Yeah, he built that himself. And, uh, course when we moved away from there and back to here, we, we rented a house here.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: And lived in a ... rather fancy house. No inside plumbing.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: But we did have a sealed house. In fact it was a row of houses built out on Cedar Bayou on Kilgore Road.

MM: I bet I've been ... I've been told about ...

CY: Old Bayless houses.

MM: Ok. I've been told about those before.

CY: Yeah, we lived ...

MM: Some of those still ...

CY: Some of 'em are still ...

MM: ... are still there.

CY: A lot of 'em are still there. Right. Some of 'em been remodeled or changed, but ...

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: They were all alike.

MM: Yeah.

CY: All except the first one – the first one was a big, real fancy, compared to the others, you know. And I think Mr. Bayless lived in it for a while. And later on, he moved out and built a home behind there, and a Mr. Schumacher and his family lived there. We went to school with their children. And, uh, the uh ... though the rest of the houses I remember a lot of the people that lived there, you know. In fact I worked with some of 'em later on in the, in the refinery that lived there when ... Angie, uh ... Wilson was her name.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: But ... I'm trying to remember who she married now. But anyway, he worked at the refinery. Then J.B. Schumacher was one of the boys that I've grow, raised up with. He was, worked out there. And Lester Kelly, uh, the brother to Milton Kelly that worked at the bank.

MM: Oh, ok.

CY: Was ... And I went to school with him at Cedar Bayou, and then worked with him in the refinery. So, these people I, I kind of grew up with and, you know, I knew them later, but ...

MM: Now, when you went to Cedar Bayou School, it – had it already become its own school district, or was it still part of the Harris County School District?

CY: Seemed like it was a Cedar Bayou School District. I'm not sure.

MM: Ok.

CY: I'm not sure.

MM: I know at some point in there it became its own ...

CY: I believe that it was.

MM: ... school district.

CY: I believe that it was.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Uh ... Like I say, I – most of my memory is of ... geographical, because I, I loved to fish and hunt and after we moved back ...

MM: Yeah, you owned the lot in this area, I guess, huh?

CY: Yeah, we moved back and moved in the Bayless house. There was a, a dirt road that went down through where Roseland Park is, and went through the woods there, and went all the way to the bay. And we'd walk down ...

[Background noise]

MM: Excuse me.

CY: Sure.

MM: Um, you went through Roseland Park to the bay?

CY: Um-hmm.

MM: Oh.

CY: The old road went through there, and uh, we'd walk through there and go to the bay to go fishing, you know. And, uh, they had – before that, years before that, there was a brickyard there. Right there where Roseland Park is.

MM: Yeah.

CY: They talk about the old brickyard.

MM: I – yes, I've heard about those.

CY: And then on down close to the mouth of Cedar Bayou there, there was some brickyards I think, and ...

MM: [indecipherable]

CY: We'd, we'd walk down to the bay to go fishing, and that was because that was, I guess, the biggest part of my life was fishing.

MM: [Laughs] You lived to do that, huh?

CY: I loved it. I ...

MM: When did you work in the oilfields yourself? On the prairie?

CY: Uh, I went to a ... after I graduated from high school in 19 and 32 in May. My father died in January of '33, and I went to work in August of '33 in the oilfield at Esperson Dome. I was 19 years old.

MM: Oh.

CY: And I worked from that time until I retired. Only ...

MM: At Esperson Dome?

CY: Esperson Dome is ...

MM: Where is that?

CY: Just this side of Dayton, right off of Highway 90.

MM: Oh.

CY: Off in the prairie out there.

MM: Oh.

CY: Uh, there was a, an old oilfield there that, uh ... that actually when I went to work it was for Cranfill Reynolds: a small, independent company. And that was during the depression, and they were about to go under, and they borrowed some money from the Sun Oil Company to keep operating. And the Sun Oil would only loan it to them if they would let them put their management out there.

MM: Oh.

CY: So they brought their management out to the oilfield. And so, there – that was the reason I was able to find a job during the Depression, because the man that was my daddy's superintendent at Orange Field was put over this field.

MM: Oh.

CY: And he hired me because I knew I needed a job because my brother and sister were still going to school.

MM: Oh.

CY: And so, that was our only means of support at that time, so ... I went to work in, at Esperson Dome in the oilfield. In 1933.

MM: So you never worked in the Goose Creek field?

CY: Not in the Goose Creek field. I spent a lot of time in the Goose Creek field following my daddy around.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: So I ...

MM: Cause the children – that’s right – children kind of could wander on in there, couldn’t they?

CY: Oh, there was nothing to keep you from going with your ...

MM: Because there was no ...

CY: You know my daddy was a pumper and he just took care of the pumping units like this one out here.

MM: And you went with him?

CY: And I went with him. And, uh, that’s the reason I – back in the back of my mind, I knew what all this looked like, an old wooden derrick. Because when I went to the oilfield, the derricks were steel at that time.

MM: Um-hmm. Um-hmm.

CY: The rest of it was just like that one that I built. That model there I built.

MM: And that was the same time when you saw the oxen. When they were using oxen for...

CY: That was back in the, in the early days of...

MM: Early, when you were a child.

CY: ... Pelly when I was just a real small child.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: That was when I, we first moved here, they were still using yoke of oxen to move the drilling equipment.

MM: Oh.

CY: The boilers and things like that.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Lot of rain, lot of mud, and ...

MM: I was just gonna ask that. Some of the pictures I’ve seen ...

CY: ... just, just nothing but mire, and you know, it ...

MM: Just deep.

CY: And ... yes, right. And they had yoke of oxen, uh ...

MM: How many, how, I mean, there’d be a – the whole team?

CY: Seemed like there must have been 10 or 12, maybe hooked up side-by-side, you know ...

MM: My goodness. Yeah.

CY: ... with those old, big wooden yokes over their ...

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: ... necks, you know.

MM: Pulling this heavy stuff.

CY: And pulling that heavy stuff.

MM: My goodness.

CY: And, uh ... uh, that's – I don't remember a whole lot about it because I don't suppose it last-- ; you know, they lasted too long. I suppose they had finally went to mules, and horses before too long.

MM: Why?

CY: Because I don't remember a whole lot.

MM: I mean, ox, well, are – were oxen, uh ...

CY: I guess they were more plentiful maybe by that time. Maybe it was ... maybe they, I don't know whether they ... I don't know whether they could do any better job.

MM: I wouldn't think a mule would be any stronger than an ox.

CY: No, I would think those oxen looked like they were pretty ... pretty stout, you know.

MM: Yeah. Yeah.

CY: But, uh ...

MM: And they had, you said, just big pens of 'em? Where they changed out the team?

CY: Uh, I don't remember where the oxen were.

MM: Oh.

CY: I remember in Orange Field, uh, that there was a contractor there, a teaming contractor that had big ... a big, uh, barns or yards of, uh, mules.

MM: Oh.

CY: He was, he didn't have any oxen. All his were mules.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And he had a whole lot of mules, you know. And a big barn full of hay. And had a blacksmith shop in the barn, you know where they, they repaired the horse's shoes.

MM: Yeah.

CY: The mule's shoes, boy they ...

MM: Just had a whole ... set up.

CY: Yeah he had the whole business and ...

MM: Well, I've heard people talk about how they, in building the Exxon refinery or the Humble refinery, how they used mules.

CY: Oh, Yeah. Yeah.

MM: To do so much of the, um, construction there.

CY: Yeah, that was ...

MM: Now when did you go to work for Exxon? In the Humble Refinery?

CY: I went there in 19 and 42 in September.

MM: Oh, ok.

CY: In 19 and 42. That was during the World War II.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And, uh ...

MM: Were you there when they had the ... soldiers?

CY: Oh yes, uh, yes I, uh, very well remember them when they had the, uh, machine gun and the anti-aircraft gun set up on top of the roofs of the labs and around the perimeter of the refinery.

MM: I hadn't heard that.

CY: Oh, yes.

MM: They were right on the roofs?

CY: On the roofs. See there were some low, flattop buildings out there at the research center.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And they had these guns set up on top of there. And then all around the perimeter of the refinery there was, uh, lookout towers.

MM: My goodness.

CY: Where the soldiers sat. Because uh, I had a job of maintaining the water wells.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: And I had to go to the water wells. Each night we had to take, make two trips to the water wells, and uh ... the rubber plant had been started at that time.

MM: Yeah, that was a government contract, wasn't it? Yeah.

CY: That was a government project, so there was a fence between us and them.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And, uh, but we had a key to the gate. But right at the gate there was a ... a lookout tower.

MM: Oh.

CY: And when I'd go there at night to unlock that gate and go in, why that guard would always shine his light in my face, you know, and want to know who I was. What I was doing there.

MM: Checking your ID, I guess.

CY: Right.

MM: And, well the one water supply all through the ... I mean, did you have to get water somewhere to take ...

CY: No, no.

MM: To some other ...

CY: No, these wells – see they dug wells, several wells all over the refinery. And they pumped into a big reservoir there in the refinery.

MM: Ya?

CY: That, uh, that's where they got their water for cooling purposes.

MM: Oh.

CY: Because they didn't have this other water supply. They didn't have the San Jacinto water supply.

MM: Oh.

CY: They only had their own private supply. So they had a number of wells. I don't know just how many.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: Deep wells. And they pumped, they had lots of water.

MM: And you were just servicing them now? Uh-huh.

CY: We just had to be sure that they had oil in the bearings and that they were running right, you know, and everything. In fact, one of the wells, uh, was right where the, uh, MBA building is now.

MM: Yeah. I know where you mean. Uh-huh.

CY: Right in that vicinity. And, uh, the old water tower that was the Baytown water tower? We had to fill that water tower. That was my job to be sure, to ...

MM: Make sure that had ...

CY: ... to fill that tower up. I'd have to go by there at a certain time in the morning, and open the valve to fill that water tower.

MM: That would take a while, I guess.

CY: Well, I just went on about my other work.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And when I came back by, if the water was, if the tower was running over through an overflow pipe, well I knew it was full.

MM: You knew it was full. [Laughs]

CY: I'd turn the valve off.

MM: Oh.

CY: But we kept that full.

MM: I guess those wells are still there, huh?

CY: Yes, but they're not using 'em.

MM: They dissolved?

CY: They had to, see they had to go to surface water.

MM: Yeah. Yeah.

CY: So ... they shut 'em all down.

MM: Is that one of the reasons they chose that location for the refinery? Because of having ... the [indecipherable]

CY: Well, I think the main reason was because of the access to the ship channel.

MM: Oh, transportation.

CY: Houston Ship Channel.

MM: I see.

CY: That was one of the main things.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And then of course the, I guess the, uh, amount of land there was there, you know, to be had, and ... I'm sure that they, you know the water was much more plentiful then than it is now.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: Because, uh ...

MM: Well, Yeah, there weren't so many ...

CY: I can remember when, uh, Goose Creek stream there at the Lee High School was just a little, narrow ditch almost.

MM: Oh, really?

CY: Yeah.

MM: You mean where you go over it on Market Street?

CY: Oh, Yeah. Just a little, narrow ditch. It wound down through the – there. But the subsidence has let it go down so far that that's a big marsh.

MM: Yeah.

CY: A big flat now. And that was, there was no water there. Behind, uh, behind the San Jacinto Hospital?

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: All that area where ...

MM: Yeah, where it's ...

CY: Well there was no water there. It was just a little old narrow ditch. Like I say, Goose Creek stream wound up through there, went up through and into the woods, you know.

MM: My goodness.

CY: Just a little ol' narrow stream.

MM: I had no idea.

CY: But, uh ... I can remem-, very well remember when out at, uh, Brownwood where – my, that was high and dry land.

MM: Yes. Yes.

CY: Oh, it was ...

MM: And now it's ...

CY: In fact I always wanted to, and I always wished that I had owned some property out there where I could build a home out there.

MM: Yeah. And now you're glad. [Laughs]

CY: But now ... I have pictures some of the houses now that, in normal tide, the water's up to the windows.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Normal tides. That's how much subsidence we've had here.

MM: Yeah. I, I'm just – I've lived here 23 years, and I've been aware ...

CY: Yeah.

MM: ... you know, of things that have changed.

CY: Yep. Quite a change.

MM: Over time. Yeah. When you went to work at the refinery, was there a fence around the refinery, or was it, or did that fence come when they put the soldiers in? Is that right? For the ... safety during the war?

CY: Well, see when I went to work in '42, the fence was there.

MM: Oh, ok.

CY: And the soldiers were there.

MM: Oh.

CY: Because the war was on.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Now I don't remember exact-, I think the, I think the fence was built at one time when there was a threatened strike.

MM: I think that I've heard that. Yes. Uh-huh.

CY: In the refinery. So they built a fence around it.

MM: Yeah.

CY: I believe that I'm right there.

MM: Ok.

CY: So like I say, when I went to work the fence was there. And, uh, we went in, always punched in at the clock house at the old Corral Gate; that's where we entered.

[End of tape]

Transcribed by: AS 2/20/18

[Tape 2 of 2]

MM: What about mosquitoes? Things like that. Sounds like living at Evergreen, you'd be plagued with mosquitoes.

CY: You were. You were. Right there off the bay there was a lot of mosquitoes. I remember we slept under mosquito bars.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: The big ol' mosquito nets over our beds, you know.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And, uh, seemed like almost every night we'd build a smoke.

MM: Oh.

CY: Old rags or something that would smoke and not burn.

MM: Oh.

CY: And we'd put them in the house, carry 'em all through the house, to smoke the mosquitoes out.

MM: And then they wouldn't come back in? Or if they did come in, you'd be protected with your ...

CY: Well, you ... Yeah, then we had the mosquito nets though, but ...uh, I don't remember whether we had any screens back in those days or not. I doubt it seriously.

MM: Well, children don't notice things like that.

CY: No, and I ... mosquitoes didn't bother us kids too much.

MM: Yeah.

[Laughter]

MM: That's right.

CY: We thought that was part of life, and it was.

MM: Yeah. You just accepted it, Yeah.

CY: Yes.

MM: But, was there malaria? Did people – or, they weren't that kind of mosquitoes?

CY: I don't know. I just don't know.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: Like I say, the Typhoid Fever's the only sickness that I remember any of us having while we lived there. Course we didn't live there a great number of years, you know, until we moved away.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: Uh, from 1916 or 17, until 1922 is when we moved to Orange Field. So we weren't there too long.

MM: What was the schooling like in Orange? Very much ...

CY: Uh, a great deal the same as the Middletown School. When we moved there, we went to a two-room school, started a two-room school, Winfree School. And, uh, incidentally, one of the teachers there was a sister to Mrs. Mulligan.

MM: [Laughs]

CY: She was a Mrs. Mulligan, and she was a teacher.

MM: Isn't that funny?

CY: Right. When I first got there ...

MM: [Laughs] You could get away – you thought all teachers were named Mulligan probably.

CY: Yeah. I couldn't believe that when – of course I was a kid, but I asked her, I said, "Do you know a Mrs. Mulligan in Goose Creek?"

She said, "Oh, yes. That's my sister."

MM: Oh!

CY: And her sister also was one of the teachers.

MM: For goodness sake.

CY: She was the superintendent; her sister was the teacher. They, those two sisters ran the school, or taught the school.

MM: Oh!

CY: All the grades.

MM: Yeah.

CY: In two rooms. Cause ...

MM: On up even through high school? Or ...

CY: No, no.

MM: Just up ... oh.

CY: Just through, just through the, uh, seventh grade.

MM: Ok.

CY: When we graduated, when I finished the seventh grade, then we went to Orange Field High.

MM: Ok.

CY: Uh ...

MM: Where is Orange Field, now? That's not in Orange, is it?

CY: No, it's seven miles out of Orange. West of Orange.

MM: Oh. That's almost in Louisiana.

CY: Back toward ... toward ...

MM: No, west would be this way, wouldn't it?

CY: No. Toward Bridge City. I don't ...

MM: Oh, ok. Now I know where.

CY: Ok. Now ...

MM: I've been to Bridge City to ...

CY: Ok, Bridge City is ...

MM: ... play baseball, so.

CY: Oh. Bridge City is actually replaced Orange Field. As far as the town is concerned.

MM: Oh. And that bayou that runs through there ...

CY: Cow Bayou.

MM: Cow Bayou? Ok, alright. I've been on that, Yeah.

CY: Ok. That, that road winds down around there close to those [indecipherable].

MM: That's pretty low.

CY: It is, Yeah.

MM: That country is real low.

CY: It is low. That's right on the, you know, right on the beach there ...

MM: Yeah.

CY: I mean right on the bay, and lake, Lake Sabine.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And it's low, but, uh ... We went to school there in high school. I started in high school in the eighth grade. We had to start in a church building, though, because the school, the original school had burned down.

MM: Oh.

CY: So we started school in a church building because they were building the, uh ...

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: Orange Field High. The old brick building, it's standing there now.

MM: Yeah.

CY: It's been added to, of course.

MM: I believe that's right there where the ball field is. Where we played.

CY: Right where the ball field, right. It's, uh, right on highway – I didn't know that, but, not highway, but farm to market road, or Texas Highway 105.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Goes right in front of the old Orange Field High School.

MM: Oh, ok.

CY: Yeah, that's – and I went two years there through the, through the ninth grade.

MM: Wonder why they changed it to Bridge City?

CY: I don't know. I guess ...

MM: Orange Field sounds good.

CY: Yeah. When we moved there, it was during a rainy season, I'll never forget. And, uh, they had built, they had to build a board road from Orange to Orange Field. Seven miles of board road. And that's the way you got back and forth to Orange. And it was a toll road. Uh, right where our school was, there was a toll booth there that you had to stop and pay 50 cents to go on into Orange.

MM: Even if you were just walking?

CY: No, I suppose if you walked, you could, uh ...

MM: Oh.

CY: ... go on. But drive, to drive a car, you had to.

MM: Oh.

CY: And many times, that board road would be floating almost from one end to the other – from the rain because there was no drainage.

MM: Oh.

CY: And when it would rain a lot, course that being lumber, it would float.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And [Laughs] it just, of course we had a ti-, we walked from Winfree School to our house. It was that one mile on that board road. And it was a lot of fun when that board road was floating.

[Laughter]

MM: Well ...

CY: A lot of fun.

MM: I'll bet.

CY: We enjoyed it. [Laughs]

MM: Throw people in and do things like that.

CY: Oh Yeah. But we walked back and forth to school there for a number of years – well, all the years I went to school there.

MM: Yeah.

CY: It was a mile each way.

MM: [Inaudible]

CY: And thought nothing of it.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And, of course, there was always a bunch of us, you know, together.

MM: When did you retire from the refinery?

CY: I retired officially in 1977.

MM: I see.

CY: But I went back to the work for the company ...

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: ... in, uh, when they were building the olefins plant.

MM: I see.

CY: And, uh, I went back to work and signed a contract for nine months, and stayed three-and-a-half years.

MM: Oh! [Laughs]

CY: More.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And then quit again.

MM: Oh, and what did you do?

CY: I was in electrical training.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: I had finally wound up in the electric department after ...

MM: Oh.

CY: ... first starting out in the boiler house. And I went to the electric department and I became an electrician, and after, later on I became a electrical trainer.

MM: Oh.

CY: And, uh, they were training all the people that they hired for the olefins plant, in all the different crafts. Because it's a multi-craft plant.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: And so they wanted everybody to have some training as electrician, an instrument man, a machinist, a ...

MM: Oh. Look, uh-huh.

CY: ... boilermaker, a pipefitter, carpenter, whatever, just ...

MM: Is it called a refinery mechanic?

CY: Refinery mechanic, so ...

MM: Ok. I remember Baton Rouge had that, Yeah.

CY: Right. So they hired quite a number of annuitants in diff-, from different crafts.

MM: Yeah.

CY: To do the training.

MM: The training. Oh.

CY: So we trained everybody that was hired in at, originally, you know.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And, uh, so that's the reason I stayed as long as I did.

MM: Well you saw a lot of expansion and change, then?

CY: Oh, yes, uh ...

MM: In the refinery.

CY: Very much so.

MM: Does anything stick out in your mind as a ...

CY: Well, I guess, uh ... the change that's taken place in the refinery from the time I went to work when they had the old cracking coils, uh, that are completely gone now, you know and ...

MM: Oh.

CY: So much of the work then was done by hand.

MM: Yeah.

CY: You didn't have the mechanical equipment to do the work with then. Uh, I worked in the rigging department for some time, and we always had to set up a gin pole, and ...

MM: Now what is that?

CY: That was a pole that stuck up so far in the air where you could put a tack a block and fall.

MM: Oh.

CY: To where you could lift material, you know, and raise material and lower material, and things like that. That all had to be done by hand, you know.

MM: Yes.

CY: And we had air motors that we strung up, you know, the blocks with, and you'd run 'em, operate 'em by air.

MM: Oh.

CY: And you had to string out a whole bunch of air hose, you know, rubber hose to operate your air motor.

MM: You mean a blast of air?

CY: No. The air drove the motor.

MM: That's what I mean.

CY: It was an air motor. Yeah, it was an air motor.

MM: Hmm.

CY: That was driven with the air pressure.

MM: Oh.

CY: And, uh ...

MM: My goodness.

CY: That's what operated the – now you could lift some real heavy loads because of the number of lines you had strung up: every time you put an extra line, why you'd give it more power.

MM: That's incredible.

CY: And it takes less power to operate it, you know.

MM: Oh.

CY: So you don't have near as much pull on that single line, just like this little derrick out here.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: I've got five lines strung up there. To where that actually, you'd be surprised how much weight that that little bitty string would pick up, because there's five lines strung up there.

MM: Oh. My goodness.

CY: So that's, that's what we had. But all that was done by hand.

MM: Well, how about safety? I guess, was there [inaudible].

CY: Well, they always had a safety department, and always stressed safety, but ...

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: ... not quite as much. It wasn't as ... as, uh, didn't seem like it was as, uh, important at that time. I guess because of the fact of the war effort.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: Maybe. And they didn't have the safety equipment even that they have now.

MM: Well, was there –

CY: But ...

MM: Were there any big accidents, or?

CY: No, uh, it's amazing that there was never any real big accidents, you know. There was some fires, and there was some fatalities, and some explosions, and ...

MM: Oh.

CY: But not, you know, nothing – to me, it's amazing that a plant that large could operate with that many people and that much power and pressure and all of that all around you, and not have any more.

MM: That really is, that really is pretty amazing when you think about it.

CY: It's so, it's just, yeah. Because when you think about what's out there, you, you'd almost be afraid to walk through the place.

MM: That's right. That's right.

CY: But when you work there, you was right ... right next to it.

MM: Right in the middle of it, Yeah.

CY: On top of it.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And, whatever. And it, you know, it never bothered you a whole lot, uh...

MM: You ever feel like you really knew, knew the refinery, all the different places you know you were familiar with at the plant?

CY: Oh, Yeah. Then, then in the mechanical ...

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: In the mechanical, you worked all over the whole refinery. It wasn't like being in process where you worked on one unit.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: You worked over the whole refinery, and you were free to ... come and go wherever your job ...

MM: Yeah.

CY: ... dictated, you know. It didn't make any difference, uh ... the docks, on up, or wherever, you know. I'd say you could, you had access to the refinery, and that's one of the things I miss.

MM: Yes!

CY: The fact that I can't go out there now and walk through the refinery.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Back years ago, when a man retired, they gave him a pass and he could come to the refinery and go through the refinery, and go out there and talk to his friends and so forth.

MM: But now ...

CY: But they finally stopped that.

MM: Is that part of the safety program, too?

CY: I'm satisfied it was.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And you have to know somebody, and you have to call somebody. They'll still let you go if you have somebody ...

MM: Yeah, but it's a big ...

CY: If you know somebody ...

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And you want to go to a certain unit, or a certain area in the refinery and you call and, them and they call and ...

MM: Yeah.

CY: You know, clear you to come in. But it's not like ...

MM: But anything you, well you'd ...

CY: Yeah.

MM: ...like to get out there see the changes.

CY: Right, right. Right.

MM: Oh.

CY: Because we built the, uh, polyolefins plant from scratch with company labor.

MM: Oh.

CY: Wasn't a contract job.

MM: Oh!

CY: They sent us out there in 1959 with nothing but a prairie out there.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And, uh, we started from that prairie. Uh, me and, uh, a number of electricians,

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: put all the underground conduit in and pulled all the wire. For the whole plant, you know. And we were there from that, from the time it was a prairie, until the unit went online.

MM: Is that right?

CY: And I stayed there in maintenance to maintain the unit after the unit was completed.

MM: Yeah.

CY: So, you know, I was very familiar with the polypropylene plant; POU, they called it.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: Cause I worked there almost 20 years. And, uh, I knew just about where all the wires were.

MM: Yes.

CY: How the unit operated, and – electrically.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And ...

MM: Start over. You said all, the holes were originally s, s, crooked?

CY: Well a lot of the, a lot of the orig-, the holes were originally crooked because they didn't have any weight indicators to let 'em know exactly how much weight they were putting on the drill stem.

MM: Oh.

CY: And so, as they drilled, if it happened to hit a rock or a hard place ...

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: Or they put too much pressure, the, the drill, the bit may start off to the side, you know.

MM: Oh.

CY: Just, and it might go off to the side. And it'd make a crooked hole.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And that was not intentional.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: Uh ... a lot of times we pulled tubing on wells that were so crooked that the rods would rub against the side of the tubing because the hole was crooked, and it'll finally wear a hole in the tubing.

MM: Oh.

CY: And, all the oil would leak through the holes, so we'd have to pull the tubing out and replace the tubing because of the crooked holes.

MM: What was the tubing made of?

CY: Steel.

MM: Oh, ok.

CY: Steel pipe. And the rods were steel, only they were small. They were called sucker rods that ...

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: Did the pumping. But the hole was crooked, you know, and it would be, wear holes in the pipe.

MM: Oh.

CY: Now, like I say, that was not intentional, those slant holes.

MM: Yeah.

CY: But later on, they found out that they could drill a slant hole. In other words, they set, and they go down so deep and they decide they want to go another direction, so they set what they call a whip

stock. And a whip stock was a deal that had a slope in it, that when the bit got to it, it had to go off to the side because that was a steel deal. It was steel.

MM: Oh.

CY: So the push the bit off to the side.

MM: Oh.

CY: So then your bit would go in that direction.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And, uh, they could drill a slant hole. They can drill – depending on the depth of course – they can go a long way from, from where the well is sitting on top because ...

MM: How could you tell if somebody was tapping into your, your well?

CY: Well, really I guess back in the early days, they couldn't probably. You know, but in fact I think that probably happened. You know, when leases were close together.

MM: Yeah. Yeah.

CY: But back in the early days, the derricks, the wells could be just as close as you could get 'em together. Didn't make any difference. And then later on, they put a spacing rule on – where you could only drill one well on 20 acres. When I worked in the oilfield, you could only drill one well on 20 acres, or per 20 acres. That was all you were allowed.

MM: Oh I've heard ... them talk about the Goose Creek oilfields, that you could just walk, walk through it.

CY: Oh, yes.

MM: I mean, they were so close together, it was just a solid platform.

CY: Yes. I have a picture of the Texas Illustrated – do you get that in here?

MM: No – yes, we do here at the library. We did.

CY: Ok. Of the old, of the old Sour Lake oil boom days.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: Where the derricks are just jammed together almost.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Just rows of 'em. It was, uh ... different people owned the land, and these little companies would come in and lease a piece of land and drill a well, and next, just over next to them might be somebody else's property, so they'd lease it to someone and they'd drill a well and they were just cram, jammed together.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And, uh, and just as close as they could get 'em. And, but uh, they stopped that, of course. But that was back in the days when the derricks were wooden.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And when they had a fire, they all went.

[Laughter]

MM: Yeah, I guess ... Yeah, it wasn't just a few – it was all your neighbors, too, I guess.

CY: That's right. They're like ... Yeah.

MM: Gosh. Did you see one, one of the wells blow-out?

CY: Oh, I have. Yes, I have.

MM: What's that like?

CY: Well, uh, course my first recollection of that, I guess probably was in Orange Field.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: And we lived, like I say, in the oilfield; we had wells right within two blocks of us. And I can remember when they used to drill those wells and they didn't have the, uh, the heavy muds like they have now. And the blow-out preventers.

MM: Oh.

CY: So when they hit a real, uh ... high pressure po-, gas pocket, the wells would get away from 'em. Cause that mud wouldn't hold pressure, and it would blow-out. And then the well would get away and start blowing the gas, of course, and rocks, and sand, and mud, and all other, and what have you. There was a steady roar. You can just – you'd lay in your bed at night, and it's nothing but a, just a roar. Just ...

MM: You couldn't stop it once it started?

CY: No. Once it started, that was, that's –

MM: Ohhh.

CY: It blew until it capped itself off, or bridged over, or ...

MM: Oh.

CY: ... all the pressure was released. And it would blow for, sometimes for days.

MM: Oh!

CY: And you'd lay there at night trying to sleep. And I can remember hearing that ...

MM: And rocks were falling, and ...

CY: Roared, just ... you know, well sand, that was, that was one of the things.

MM: Yeah.

CY: The sand would blow for, for miles almost around that location, you know, from, from the well.

MM: It's dangerous with blowing gas like that, wasn't it?

CY: Well, it was, yes. Uh, course a lot of 'em would catch fire, you know.

MM: Oh.

CY: But, uh, there was, it was a terrible sound to hear that ...

MM: Gosh.

CY: ... roar.

MM: Did you hear it coming?

CY: No.

MM: Or was it a surprise when it did its ...

CY: No, you couldn't hear it coming. Of course the, the people on the derrick floor, the workers you know, could tell it was coming because they couldn't – the way the mud would start coming back, you know, and ...

MM: Oh. [Inaudible]

CY: They realized that they'd hit a vent, they couldn't, uh ... In fact, we had one in Esperson Dome when I was working in there in the oilfield, and they had blow-out preventers and big pumps then, and heavier mud.

MM: Um-hmm.

CY: And I remember one in particular that began to blow-out, and they, the pump wasn't powerful enough to overcome the pressure. So they compounded the two big pumps, and which made the pressure that much more.

MM: Yeah.

CY: To pump against that gas.

MM: Oh.

CY: But what it did, it blew the surface pipe in two, down in the ground. And let all that gas pressure out down there. And what it did, that gas went out into the ground just from, for – oh, for ... no telling how far out into the area there. And it went out under the boilers, and the boilers were firing, because there was a steam rig, and the gas came up under the boilers, into the boilers and caught fire and followed that back to the rig, and set it on fire. And of course, it soon melted the derrick down, and, and ...

MM: Well, now how long would that go on? How long would it burn?

CY: Oh, that went on – that burned, that particular well, was hap-, that particular blow-out happened in one of the worst snow storms we've ever had in this area. And, uh, we had to fight that thing for days. I don't remember how many days, but ...

MM: How, what – what did you do to fight it?

CY: Well, we were laying, I was working in a gang.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And we were laying steam lines to operate pumps and water lines and things like that to where they could try to...

MM: Just trying to keep the pumps going, huh?

CY: Yeah, to ... and, uh, there wasn't much they could do about, about the blow-out, as far as the blow-out was concerned.

MM: Yeah. Was that the end of a well when it blow, had a blow-out?

CY: No. Uh, well I ... I, if they did I, no they went back in, I think they went back – they went back into that same hole later on after it bridged over. And after it died down.

MM: Course that place wasn't a problem anymore, I guess.

CY: No. No.

MM: Yeah. [Laughs]

CY: But, uh ... that was one that I had some particular, uh ...

MM: Golly.

CY: And then one of the others while I worked out there that blew-out was an old work over well that they were working over with a small steam rig. And, uh, it began to blow and they'd just, they didn't have any heavy mud, and – cause they weren't expecting to hit that kind of a gas pressure.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And when it started coming out, why, I remember, uh, everybody got off the derrick floor because it got away from 'em.

MM: I guess.

CY: And, but we moved off just a short distance from the derrick, was watching it, you know. And it, it was blowing up through the derrick, you know: rocks and sand and mud and ... Uh, all of a sudden, why, it just, it went off like an explosion. A rock, I guess, hit a ...

MM: Oh.

CY: Cause a arc, a spark.

MM: A s-, Yeah.

CY: And it just went off like an explosion might. It shook the ground where we were. So we turned and ran then.

MM: Oh.

CY: And got far enough away, you know, to watch it.

MM: Oh.

CY: We stood there watching that well blow, and uh, I remember they still had 13, I mean 19 thribbles. That's – thribble is three joints of pipe.

MM: Oh.

CY: Thirty-foot long.

MM: Oh.

CY: They had 19 thribbles of pipe still in the hole. Had melted all the derrick off and everything, and the hole was open at the top, and we were standing there watching it, and after a while that pipe started coming out of the ground.

MM: Just, it was just raising it up.

CY: The pressure was so great, they had a set of reamers on the bottom, which is a big steel pipe that fills a hole completely to ream the hole the size that they could set casing in.

MM: Oh. Uh-huh.

CY: So they had a set of reamers, which blocked – held all the pressure down below it.

MM: Oh.

CY: So that caused it to push the drill stem out of the hole.

MM: And here it came.

CY: And it actually ... it was ...

MM: A 19, 30-foot piece, you say?

CY: That, oh that's a, that's a lot of pipe.

MM: That really is!

CY: But it would go up, I don't know how many feet in the air, until it got so heavy that it would just curl over like macaroni. [Laughs] And it'd just curl this way, and curl that a way, and still coming out. And it did that until the reamers came out of the hole. The reamers were about 30 feet long, a big ... and when it came out of the hole, it was like another explosion. It just released all that pressure, and that reamer, set of reamers ...

MM: Yeah.

CY: Came out of the hole and turned end-for-end. They were on the end of the drill stem, but they broke off of the drill stem and went no telling how high in the air. So much higher than the pipe had ever gone.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Because it was loose. And when it started coming down, it looked like it was gonna fall on top of us.

MM: Oh!

CY: We couldn't tell at that distance, that height, where it was gonna hit.

MM: Yeah, Yeah.

CY: And I guess I ran as fast as I've ever run in all of my life.

MM: [Laughs] Golly.

CY: To get away from there. Because I thought it was gonna fall on us.

MM: Sure.

CY: But it fell, actually fell farther from us than some of the pipe had. But it didn't, it didn't look that way when ...

MM: No.

CY: ... it was coming down from hundreds of feet in the air.

MM: Yeah, stand and wait. Golly.

CY: Hundreds of feet in the air. That was one of the wells, the blow-outs that they got, uh, this wild firefighter Red Adair to come out there.

MM: Oh.

CY: So he came out there, started setting up all of his equipment, you know.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: Big blowers and what have you to, to fight the fire.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And it was gonna start the next day to try to get in there to try to do something to it. And during the night, it bridged over and quit.

MM: And that was it.

CY: That was it. That was all of it.

MM: My goodness.

CY: So he didn't have to do anything to that one.

MM: That is fascinating!

CY: But that was ... Yeah, there were some quite, quite interesting things.

MM: I would think it'd keep you really on your toes.

[Laughs]

MM: To be in there.

CY: Yeah, it would, uh ... I remember the, one of the accidents that happened out there on a drilling rig. Uh, course a drilling rig is something like that traveling block, the setup I've got out there, only it's big stuff.

MM: Oh.

CY: You know, the – a big traveling block, and a big hook and swivel and all of this, elevators and what have you. But they were going in the hole with their drill stem. And, uh, whenever you get the pipe down to the bottom, to the top of the rotary table, you have to set slips. So there's two fellows at it – one on each side – that sets the slip in.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: And they were setting these – you set the slip, then you unlatch the elevator and go back up and latch onto another thribble of pipe, screw it on and drop it down. Well they had quite a bit of pipe in the hole and it was getting heavy. And the big ol' break drum was, uh, water-cooled. And all they can figure is that somehow or another, the water shut off ... uh, momentarily for a length of time; they don't know how long. And when he was coming down, you know, putting the break on, well the break drum got hot. Red hot. And then whatever was blocking the water turned loose and put that cold water to that break drum, and when it did it just exploded.

MM: Oh.

CY: That break drum just flew into thousands of pieces, or hundreds of pieces, and went all over the place. Luckily it only hit one man, and it hit him in the side. And knocked him into the pipe that was coming down. The elevators were coming down. It knocked him into that pipe. And his one leg fell into the, where the hole was ...

MM: Yeah.

CY: And the elevator set down on top of his leg, but there was enough room in the rotary table there for it to stop the elevators. The, the rotary table did stop the elevator before it cut his leg off. But it had him pinned in, and then he couldn't get out. Then there was a big hole in one side or the other – wherever your liver is.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Whichever side your liver on. They say you could see his liver. That, uh, where it knocked a hole in his side.

MM: Mmm.

CY: And, uh ... but, uh, we set up a, one of our pulling machines, and got a line over the derrick to where we could get a hold of the elevators and took it up off his leg, and finally got him out of there. And he lived.

MM: He lived?

CY: But he was very crippled from then on – he never, never rough-necked anymore, because ...

MM: Oh.

CY: He was, you know he was – damaged his leg so bad they couldn't ... couldn't really, you know, he walked, but a very bad limp. With a cane, you know.

MM: It's a wonder to me there weren't more of the things like this.

CY: It is. Uh ... Yeah. And there used to be quite a few more than there is, course in all industries there was more accidents before ...

MM: Sure.

CY: ... before safety first and safety equipment.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And one of the things that caused, I guess, as much, as many deaths, or injuries on a drilling rig as anything else, was what they called, "Old Maude." Old Maude was a set of tongs, backup tongs.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: When they were breaking out drill stems, when they set the elevators and they had the drill stem up in the dirt, they had to unscrew it there. So they had a one big set of tongs that hung on a cable – counterbalanced on a cable – and they'd latch it around the bottom. And this cable was tide, one cable was tied to the corner of the derrick to hold that end of the tongs so they couldn't turn.

MM: Oh.

CY: And, uh, then they had to, to put another set on top to break the pipe out. Well every once in a while, that cable would break, and that ol' big ol' tong would swing around and hit a, the guy standing there. And it's killed a many a man.

MM: Oh, killed them?

CY: Oh, it's killed many a man. Numbers of people have been killed with what they called, "Old Maude," you know. They always said, "You got kicked by Old Maude."

CY: It didn't always kill 'em.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Depends on how much strain and how much pressure and ...

MM: Yeah.

CY: You know. But, uh, see it would spin around

MM: Sure

CY: whenever it turned it loose like that with all that pressure on that other – see that other set of tongs, they were pulling on it.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And when it broke, why, it would flip around and it's been a lot of people injured and killed. What they call Old Maude. And then another thing on the rig that did a lot of damage was the cathead. That was a, just a spool, a steel spool.

MM: Uh-huh.

CY: That, uh, they used a rope on that, and they put so many rounds on that cathead, and then you could hold the other end and you could pick up weights

MM: Oh, uh-huh.

CY: And you could do a lot of things with a cathead. And, uh, sometimes there'd be a string or something on that rope that would get hung into the, under the other loops, you know.

MM: Yeah.

CY: It would cause it to hang up. And a lot of times it'd jerk you into the cathead. Jerk your arm into the cathead or something. And that's, lot of, that caused a lot of accidents.

MM: Good grief.

CY: So there was, like I say, there's a lot of injuries, but ...

MM: Yeah.

CY: Uh, it – not as often, you know, now as it was back then. A lot of that stuff is automatic now. Those tongs, and everything.

MM: People aren't even exposed to those. No.

CY: You – no, you don't even have to get ...

MM: Yeah.

CY: It's just not like it used to be.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Works, works different altogether, so. So much improvement, you know, just like, like I was saying about the refinery. There's been so much improvement there that ... so much ...

MM: But they couldn't have gotten to that point if there hadn't been somebody learning about it right in the ...

CY: Somebody had to, yeah.

MM: Standing right there in it.

CY: Right. So much equipment now that does the work, you know, that you had, you had to do back in those days.

MM: Yeah.

CY: Which, so much easier.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And of course, uh, like on the process units, uh – used to every unit had a control house. And that unit was operated out of that one control house. Only that one unit.

MM: Yeah.

CY: And, uh, they had several men that went out and took care of all the opening and closing valves and doing whatever had to be done to do whatever they were doing. All of that on a computer now. And they put a, they've got a one big room, one big control room that operates numbers of units.

MM: That's what I understand, yeah.

CY: And there's computers there, and they punch in what they want to take place on that particular unit.

MM: Hmm.

CY: Nobody has to go out there. Every once in a while a fellow goes out and just looks his equipment over and ... sees how it's working and [Laughs] that's about all there is to it.

MM: Yeah.

CY: The computer takes it over. So you don't, don't have that.

MM: But it's not as interesting.

[Laughter]

MM: To me.

CY: No. No, it's not, not like it used to be.

[End of tape]

Transcribed by: AS 2/22/18