



Northside History Project

Oral History Transcript Collection

Prepared for:
TxDOT Corpus Christi District
US 181 Harbor Bridge Project
Nueces County, Texas

Historian: C. Lynn Smith, HNTB Corporation

2017





Oral History Interviewees

The following persons recorded oral history interviews with the project historian and also gave permission to include their oral history transcripts in this report (listed alphabetically by last name):

The Reverend Claude Axel
Mr. Emile Bolden
Ms. Anita F. Bouldin
Mr. Robert Campbell and his daughter Ms. Barbara Campbell
Mr. Herb Canales
Mrs. Irene Canales
Mr. Bobby Galvan (Robert Galvan, Sr.)
Mrs. Marsha Shaw Hardeman
Mr. Willie Hardeman
Ms. Adela Hernandez
Ms. Thurma Hilton
Mr. Sam Johnson
Mr. Doward Kinney
Mrs. Virginia Lerma
Mr. Joel Mumphord
Mr. Herman Polk
Mrs. Phyllis Crecy Ridgels
Mr. Billy Ray Sayles
Mr. James Smith
Mr. Dick Swantner
Mr. Lamont Taylor

Many thanks to these persons who donated their time and shared their memories of Northside. The oral history interviews guided the research for this report and added immeasurable value. Thanks also to Christopher Amy of TxDOT for his vision and support that brought this project to fruition.



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Introduction

The memories of the persons who grew up in Northside and who operated businesses there were considered to be critical to the value to the Northside History Project. Because many of the physical resources (buildings and structures) of Northside have been lost over time, the oral histories of persons with personal knowledge of Northside were a primary focus of the research for the Northside History Project which is composed of the four components listed below:

1. Northside History Project Report (History Report)
2. Northside History Project Oral History Transcript Collection (Oral Histories)
3. Northside History Collection of Photos (Photo Book)
4. Northside History Banners (Banners)

TxDOT gave all four components of the Northside History Project to the Oveal Williams Senior Center at 1414 Martin Luther King Dr. in Corpus Christi. The Oveal Williams Senior Center is operated by the Corpus Christi Parks and Recreation Department who will be responsible for loaning out the Banners to local schools, libraries and to educational groups for periodic display. One copy of each of the first three components (History Report, Oral Histories and Photo Book) was presented to the Corpus Christi La Retama Central Library and the library also received an electronic copy of the Banner files.

From the recommendations of persons who served on the Citizens Advisory Committee for the US 181 Harbor Bridge Project as well as leads from some clergy of churches in the Northside area, the historian identified the initial group of potential oral history interviewees. With TxDOT's permission, the historian also gave an interview to the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* newspaper to publicize the Northside History Project, the planned open houses for the history project, and the need for volunteers to record oral history interviews related to Northside. The newspaper interview resulted in a front-page article dated November 13, 2014, asking the community to participate in the Northside History Project and to attend the planned open houses. A Channel 3 (KIII) reporter also interviewed the historian and the resulting television story was included in three Channel 3 News broadcasts to publicize upcoming open houses. A total of three open houses plus a lunch-time presentation at the Oveal Williams Senior Center was held in an effort to identify additional oral history interview candidates. Information on the Northside History Project was also given at Harbor Bridge workshops held on January 29 and February 21, 2015.

The oral history interview recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriber. Then the historian reviewed each transcript and corrected the names and spellings of places known to the historian through knowledge she gained through Northside research and through being present at the interview. Each interviewee was given the opportunity to edit their transcript until they were satisfied that the transcript accurately reflected what they wanted to convey in the interview and were willing to execute a form giving TxDOT permission to include their edited oral history transcript in the Northside History Project Report.

The edited transcripts of oral history interviews recorded with 21 persons are arranged alphabetically by last name in the *Northside History Project Oral History Transcript Collection*. The contribution of each oral history interviewee made the Northside History Project possible by leading the historian to the stories behind the stories to weave a rich history of a remarkable community.

The Reverend Claude Axel Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 1: January 1990 march to commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday. Leaders (from left to right): Rev. Roy Malreau, Rev. Claude Axel, Rev. Harry Williams, Rev. Gary Roberts



Source: *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*. Photographer: George Tuley

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith and I'm interviewing the Reverend Claude Axel for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation. It's being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. And the interview is taking place on November 17, 2014 in Corpus Christi, Texas. I'm interviewing the Reverend Axel in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. First, please tell me your name and where and when you were born.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: My name is Claude Axel. I was born in Taylor, Texas on November 20, 1943, which means in the next three days I will be celebrating another birthday.

LYNN SMITH: Very good. I believe you grew up in the Northside for some of those growing years. Do you want to tell us about that?

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Yes. In this narrative I will discuss the following topics: my formative years in school, what life was like in the projects, my athletic years (including some of the all-time Northside great athletes), and the numerous changes I observed on the Northside when I returned to Corpus Christi in 1976.

My mother, brother, and I arrived in Corpus Christi sometimes in late 1949 or early 1950. I went to Booker T. Washington in the first through the sixth grade. My first teacher was a lady by the name of Mrs. Porschman. (I do not recall her first name). In grades two and three, I was fortunate to have the same teacher Mrs. Roxie Byrd who was adored by many of her students. My first encounter with a male teacher was in the 6th grade at Booker T when Mr. Raymond Stoney taught our class. In addition to our principal Professor Homer Johnson, we also had another male teacher at Booker T by the name of Mr. Robert Campbell. These three men were not only our teachers but they also served as father-figures for so many students since a lot of us (me included) did not have a father in the home.

Then I went to Solomon Coles for two years. At Coles, I met a teacher by the name of Ethel Greenwood who was my English and Math teacher. She became my favorite teacher who I attempted to emulate when I first became a teacher. And to this very day, I will never forget how much time, devotion, and effort Mrs. Greenwood gave to all of her students. She challenged us to be the best of the best.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And so you were -- you grew up in what they call the projects, is that right?

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: I grew up in the projects. As a matter of fact, they built an additional housing project and -- we distinguished the two by saying that we lived in the old projects. The new people who came in lived in the new projects. And I think it's so ironic right now that the old projects where I once lived are still standing and the new projects are no longer here.

LYNN SMITH: That is ironic, isn't it? Well, what was it like living in the projects? Just -- what were your neighbors like? What was it like to live there?

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Living in the projects was phenomenal. We had neighbors. We had friends. We played ball right in the back area where I lived. I lived at 1927 Xavier Court. Right across from where I lived was a park. And we played baseball and football games practically every day at that park. Some of the guys who participated in our baseball games, which at the time seemed like they were daily occurrences, were: Roosevelt Porter aka "Little Junior", Thomas Roberts aka "Slick", Thurman Roberts, Alvin Thomas aka "Big Alvin", Fred Thomas Martin, and August Brantley. Off course there were many more but these were the main ones along with my brother Clifton. One of the most memorial moments was the day one of my closest friends Joe Pullam, who was not a real good athlete, got a single. He was so thrilled that he had gotten a hit; he tried to stretch his single into a double and was thrown out at second base by my brother Clifton. All I could say was "Joe what were you thinking"? But he was so excited and all of the guys who were playing that day were also happy for him!

We also ran many races in the middle of the street, in the neighborhood parks, and T.C. Ayers Recreational Center. Since I was considered to be one of the fastest runners in the community, I was frequently challenged by an upstart or an old competitor for bragging rights as to the fastest runner.

My grandmother lived at 1936 Xavier. There was a little smaller park right across the sidewalk from where she lived. We also played baseball there. Her name was Pearline Johnson. One of the things that always stood out to me was that no one could go into her yard. She didn't even allow the neighbors to walk in her yard. The only way that we could get a ball from her yard was to send my step-grandfather in to distract her so that one of us could quickly run into her yard and get our ball. That truly was a challenging time for us because we frequently wondered how we would continue playing our baseball game without the ball.

LYNN SMITH: That does sound like a challenge. I think you told me something about what happened when you went to -- if your mother asked you to go borrow some -- a teaspoon of sugar.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Oh that was a good thing. The neighbors were wonderful. Anytime my mother sent me to get a teaspoon of sugar or a little bit of flour from a neighbor, most of the time I returned with a cupful of flour or sugar. In those days, we didn't have much in terms of material things but we never missed a meal. Thank God for the neighbors. Our neighbors included the Pleasant's, Pullam's, Mrs. Mamye Williams, Mrs. Douglas, and the Scotts'. I wish I could remember the names of all of our neighbors from that era because they truly depicted the old African proverb saying, "It takes a village to raise a child". It truly was a community of loving people who gave from their hearts and of course, did all that they could to see that we did not get out of line including, disciplining us, whenever our parents were either working or running errands. That no longer exists today. But back in those days, neighbors did not mind sharing. And the beauty about being in the projects -- in the early '50s was that we were able to leave our front door open during the night, and just latch the screen door. No one ever attempted to rob us or break in our apartment while we were away. We never worried about anything being stolen. Those were some great days. We had our own stores, small business', doctors, dentists, and eating places. What was so good about this was that there were a lot of times when I would go to the Mr. Floyd's grocery store without money, and was able to get our food on credit and pay Mr. Floyd when my mother got paid. By the way, we got our first television when I was 13 years old. We had never had a television in our apartment before so this was "huge" for us. It was a RCA television and it stayed on until midnight daily. The first week we got our TV my brother and I did not even go outside to play baseball with our friends or neighbors.

LYNN SMITH: That sounds like it. All right.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Let me add one other thing. We walked to school every day. Our feet were our transportation. So we walked. I walked for 12 years to school; from Booker T. Washington to Solomon Coles to Northside Junior High School and to Roy Miller High School and I never missed a day of school in those 12 years. And the best thing about walking was that I would frequently go by my friends' houses to pick them up as we journeyed to school. We did the same thing after school.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So you, you were there until about 1964 in the projects, right?

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: We lived there from 1949 until 1961.

LYNN SMITH: And while you were there, you said that sports were a big part of your life, right?

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Yes. I ran track from my seventh-grade year through my freshman year in college. During high school, I was on the varsity track team at Miller for three years. One of the things that is so different now is you had to earn your letterman jacket by accumulating so many points or by placing in the district track meet. During my sophomore year, I had 13-1/2 points for the season but I did not letter because I needed 15. Another thing that was so interesting to me when we travelled to other cities during track season, upon arrival, the head coach would always get off the bus and tell us to stay on the bus until he returned. He did this, approximately three times per trip. We didn't know what was going on back then. However, as I have reflected over my life, I finally realized what the coach was doing back then.

Integration at that time was difficult in a lot of cities. The coach was actually checking to see if they would serve blacks in the restaurants. Whenever he said, all right, boys, you can get off the bus now. Those were sweet words to our ears. All we wanted to do was compete, make our coach proud of us and have fun doing it.

LYNN SMITH: It seems like you told me y'all were having a pretty good time on the bus.

Edited Transcript of the Reverend Claude Axel's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Oh, listen. We'd laugh, we joked, we talked about one another, but it was always in good taste. There was a lot of love and respect for each other. By the way, in 1960, Miller was the first integrated high school in the state of Texas to win the football state championship. We are listed in the state record book as being the first integrated school to win a state football championship. We paved the way for integration for so many schools thereafter.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And then you left Corpus Christi for a time and, and then you came back.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: I came back in the fall of 1976. There were so many changes. I didn't even recognize the front of the school building. When I left Corpus Christi in 1964 there were huge glass windows in every classroom. You could see in and out of the building on all three floors. But when I came back, it was enclosed. The stair steps leading into the building were gone and when I went back for my first visit to Miller, all I did was walk right into the building. No stairs, no windows...it was a weird feeling!

Another change that occurred was at Booker T. Washington Elementary School. Although the building is still there, it is no longer in use and it has been condemned. Another change I observed was when I tried to locate my old junior high school, North Side, I couldn't find the building because it had been demolished and is now the parking lot being used by the Courthouse.

What we called The Cuts, where most of the blacks used to congregate for numerous recreational activities, had been practically demolished. The two major cab companies, owned by Mr. Crecy and Lonnie King, were gone. The Harlem Movie Theater, which was the only theater blacks were allowed to go, it was gone. Another thing that was disturbing to me was the church where I once attended, St. John Baptist Church on Ramirez, was no longer there. It's now a vacant lot. It does something to your heart to find out the places that you once had gone have been demolished or condemned. Many great life changing events all erased either by demolition machines or buildings that are no longer safe to enter and are now just precious memories. Thus, I am left with the bitter sweet feeling on knowing that I will no longer be able to show my kids, grandkids, or friends the schools, stores or church where I once attended as a child. They are all gone. I realize that change and restructuring is good. But by losing some of the most meaningful historical Northside sites for blacks, you also lose some of the validity when you tell your story of Corpus Christi's history.

That's why I am still attached to the old projects. The beauty of the old projects is that I've had friends that come in from California and other places, and I proudly take them by 1927 Xavier Court where I grew up. Although things don't look the same, the neighborhood is no longer segregated, and of course all the people who once lived there are gone, it is still a great feeling to go "home."

LYNN SMITH: And have good memories.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: I have phenomenal memories of my childhood. Even the park is still there. But the irony of that park which has lasted through Hurricanes Celia, Carla, and Allen, is that -- when I was a child, the park and the fence which separated the playground and those old rusty industrial buildings, looked so big and so far when we played ball, whenever I hit a home run over the fence that seemed a long way. But now as a man, looking at the distance from the park to the fence, it's really not very far.

LYNN SMITH: It's not a big league home run, right?

Edited Transcript of the Reverend Claude Axel's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: It's not a big league home run.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Well, when you were away, or at some point, you -- became a minister.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: I accepted the call to the ministry on November 25, 1962 during my senior year in high school and preached my first sermon on December 5, 1962. I have been preaching for over 50 years.

LYNN SMITH: Great. And then at some point you got -- somewhere you got an education and came back and were an administrator at some of the schools.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Yes. I was in education 38 years fulltime and then I spent another two years substituting which gives me a total of 40 years in education. One of the greatest joys that I had as an administrator was to be able to go back to Miller High School in the fall of 1998 and serve there for my last ten years in public education.

LYNN SMITH: At Roy Miller.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Yes, and when I retired in 2008, the school gave me a banquet. I do not know if any other assistant principal has ever received a banquet in honor of them as they retired. But Miller honored me with a retirement banquet held at the Holiday Inn Airport, and there were approximately 175 people in attendance. It has been one of the highlights of my professional career. By the way, it was also on the same night that the CCISD's retirees, which I was one, were having their annual retirement banquet which eliminated some people from attending my banquet.

LYNN SMITH: So it's hard to be in two places at one time.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Very difficult---Matter of fact, impossible!

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And then, currently you're at Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church, and you came here in 1991, right?

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: I came to Mt. Pilgrim in June of 1991.

LYNN SMITH: All right.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: I've been serving as Pastor for 23 years now.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And this building was built the year after you came, right?

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Yes. This building was built one and one-half years after I arrived here. When I first came to Mt. Pilgrim, there were nine adults and four children. We have been really blessed since my arrival. And the Lord is still adding to this flock. I also need to mention that my church members, which I am eternally grateful for, honored with me both a 40-year and 50-year ministry celebration for preaching. The 50-year celebration which was also held at Holiday Inn Airport drew an audience of approximately 300 people from Corpus Christi and surrounding areas.

Edited Transcript of the Reverend Claude Axel's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: All right. Is there anything else that you can think of that we -- we have missed that you want to talk about?

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: No. I think I've talked long enough.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Well, thank you so much.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Oh, you're welcome.

[On the same day, at the same location, the Rev. Axel decided he wanted to add a few additional comments as follows.]

LYNN SMITH: All right. So, there is one more thing you wanted to tell me about, isn't there?

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Yes. I forgot to mention T.C. Ayers Recreational Center. That was the heart of the Northside attraction for blacks. We would go there and have basketball, football, baseball, and softball games or tournaments. That was where the kids bonded as recent as five years ago. As a matter of fact, T.C. Ayers is no longer in use --but at that time it was not only the neighborhood center but it was known as the local attraction for youth -- throughout Corpus Christi.

During the summer, city league basketball games sponsored by Corpus Christi City Parks and Recreation were organized and students from schools representing CCISD [Corpus Christi Independent School District], West Oso, and Incarnate Word would compete.

This type of competition drew people from all over Corpus just to watch those kids play basketball. As to how T.C. Ayers affected me as a youngster was that the director of the recreational center during the time I was a teenager was Mr. Charles Bolden. He met with a group of ten boys in the 11th and 12th grade and organized a club called the Les Circle Monsieurs which meant the "Gentlemen's Club." We became members based on three qualities: citizenship, character, and commitment. Future club membership were based not only on the previous three qualities I mentioned, but also on the approval of every current club member. Roosevelt Porter was our first president and I was the club's first secretary. We had monthly meetings and other activities that were inclusive to club members only. For the dances we sponsored, we invited other teenagers throughout the city.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. There was one other thing that I thought of that you told me about, I thought, the other day, that you may or may not want to talk about today. But it seemed to me that you told me that over in the Northside the athletes were outstanding.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: God. There were so many major great athletes from the Northside. We had one by the name of Roy Hicks. He could jump high -- we used to call him King Fish. He could jump higher than anyone anywhere in the state. As a matter of fact, in my junior year at Miller, they brought a person from Australia here to jump against King Fish. He was like the first seven-foot high jumper here in -- in Corpus Christi, Texas.

There was another individual who has been my best friend since childhood -- Roosevelt Porter, who ran the 9.6 [seconds] in a 100 [meter race]. Charles McAdams, who was a Coles' student, also ran a 9.6. As for me,

Edited Transcript of the Reverend Claude Axel's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

I just ran a 10 flat. There was also a fellow by the name of Robert Skinner, whose nickname was "Good Will." He was just before his time. He was a great pitcher whom everybody respected. I talked about Miller High School earlier. I want to acknowledge two of the greatest black athletes who were not from the Northside. One was Bobby Smith. During a 1960 football playoff game, we played a school from Odessa, Texas. I am not sure if the Odessa players used the "N" word, but some of the fans from the stands continued to use it throughout the game.

Odessa won the game 14 to 12. Bobby ran over 200 yards that particular night. And after the game the Odessa players, one by one, came to Bobby and congratulated him and the Miller Bucs on a great game. They talked about how they hit him and even tried to injure him in order to get him out of the game. But they respected him. Of course, Bobby made First Team All-State in football that year. He went on to play professional football for the Buffalo Bills.

There was another athlete by the name of Johnny Roland, a 1961 graduate from Miller. He made First Team All American at Missouri University in his junior year as a running back. And in his senior year, he made All American first team as a defensive back. Johnny went on to play professional football for the Chicago Bears and served as a football coach for several pro-football teams after he retired.

There were no competitive girls' sports during the time I was in high school.

LYNN SMITH: Right. And then another thing I think we failed we mention is that you were the UIL [University Scholastic League] Principal at -- at Roy Miller, right?

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Yes. At Miller I served as the UIL Principal and my major responsibility was to determine UIL eligibility for all students who participated in extracurricular activities. I monitored the student grades every six weeks. If a student failed (scored below 70%) which was the cutoff, they were ineligible for three weeks. At the end of the third six weeks, would be another grade check. If they were passing at the end of that third week of the six-week grading period, they would then become eligible to participate in UIL activities right 4:00 P.M. I always used 4:01 P.M. as the eligibility time. Note, the irony about that is that if there was a UIL activity or event prior to 4:00 P.M., a student was not eligible until after 4:00 p.m.

LYNN SMITH: After 4 o'clock. Wow. Okay. Well, thank you again.

REV. CLAUDE AXEL: Okay.

[End of Edited Transcript of Recording of the Rev. Claude Axel's Oral History Interview.]

Note: Rev. Axel is married to Belinda Axel. They have five children, Tammy Gonzalez (Axel), Paul Axel, Charles and Shandra Bryant--all residing in Houston, Texas, and the late Regina Axel. They also have five grandchildren and two more on the way.

Mr. Emile Bolden Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 2: Emile Bolden in 2015



Photographer: Anna Christy, HNTB

Edited Transcript of Emile Bolden's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I am interviewing Mr. Emile Bolden for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on January 28, 2015, in Corpus Christi, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Bolden in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences relating to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, and the history of that neighborhood. So, thank you so much for meeting with me today.

EMILE BOLDEN: Thank you.

LYNN SMITH: And the first question is just to state your full name, please.

EMILE BOLDEN: I am Emile Steve Bolden, the first.

LYNN SMITH: Thank you. And where and when were you born?

EMILE BOLDEN: I was born in the Valley. I was born in Harlingen, Texas, Valley Baptist Hospital.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And when is your birthday?

EMILE BOLDEN: May 12, 1945.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Now your family is from Corpus Christi, even though you weren't born here, right.

EMILE BOLDEN: That's correct.

LYNN SMITH: So, tell me a little bit about your extended family that are from here.

EMILE BOLDEN: Well the person that stayed here was my grandmother Ruth Bolden, and I also had several aunties that stayed here, with their husband's, Tansy Mae Bailey. Tansy Mae Bolden Bailey. She was married to Nolan P. Bailey, and I had Anne Claudette Steward, an auntie. She taught school, and she was bedridden with rheumatoid arthritis, and I had Eddie Mae Bolden. She was married to my uncle, Charles Bolden, who was the youngest of seven children. He was the first black to manage the T.C. Ayers Recreation Center. He was also the founder of the Black Chamber of Commerce. My Uncle Otho Bolden was a principal of Booker T. Washington Elementary.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, what- - what did they do within the community? What were-what type of businesses were they in, or events or community activities?

EMILE BOLDEN: My Aunt Eddie Bolden started the Robert L. Moore Community Center in the New Addition. Nolan was the first person to start a garbage route in Corpus Christi. He was also a mortician, and owned Baileys Funeral Home, which was on the Old Line. My Auntie Tamsy Mae helped him in the business and opened a washateria next to the funeral home. Ann Claudette Stewart was a teacher. She taught second grade at Booker T. Washington School. As a matter of fact, when I went to Booker T. Washington, she was the teacher at the school, and my Aunt Eddie, married to Charles Bolden was the founder of the debutante ball, and that's a bi-annual ball where they bring out, or present young ladies, usually the second year in college, and it's- - it's a big deal. I mean, you know, the Ladies of the Camellia put it on, and this was the year that they did it, and we went to the ball, and it was a beautiful affair, with the escorts, and the fathers

Edited Transcript of Emile Bolden's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

as escorts, and the girls all had gowns, similar to bridal gowns, and it was a beautiful affair, and it has been going on for fifty years, and my aunt was the one that founded it.

LYNN SMITH: Wow, so, you just went to one recently?

EMILE BOLDEN: I went to one recently. Our daughter was a debutante some ten years ago. No, it has been longer than that. Maybe fifteen years ago.

LYNN SMITH: Time flies.

EMILE BOLDEN: Yes, well, she's 46, so, it might have been longer than that, probably 20. Yeah, 20 years ago.

LYNN SMITH: That's okay. She probably won't mind, if you think of her as much younger.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: At this point.

EMILE BOLDEN: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and what- - what are some other things that you remember? Let me see, you were here from 1954 to 1956, right?

EMILE BOLDEN: Yes, I was here.

LYNN SMITH: As a child.

EMILE BOLDEN: As a child.

LYNN SMITH: And, tell us why you were here.

EMILE BOLDEN: I was here, because my father was a career airman, and he spent 33 years in the United States Air Force, and I was here during the Korean War, and I had no place-I don't want to say no place to stay, but they decided that I would stay with my grandmother, while my mother attended college. My mother was in college in 1954, and from '54 to '56 at Huston-Tillotson.

LYNN SMITH: Huston-Tillotson University in Austin.

EMILE BOLDEN: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. What did she study?

EMILE BOLDEN: Nursing.

LYNN SMITH: Very good. Did she come back, well I guess, she...

EMILE BOLDEN: No, she travelled with my father.

LYNN SMITH: She travelled.

EMILE BOLDEN: My father- - my father was everywhere. The only place where we stayed for any length of time, eight years was at Lockbourne Air Force Base, which is in Columbus, Ohio, or outside Columbus, Ohio.

Edited Transcript of Emile Bolden's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: Alright. But you obviously had some, not only a-I guess, a family connection to Corpus Christi, but you must have remembered it, because you came back here.

EMILE BOLDEN: Oh, yes. After my wife June graduated in '68 [1968], we came back, and we have been in Corpus Christi since 1968.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, when you were a boy in the Northside neighborhood. Do you remember where your mom lived; I mean your grandmother lived?

EMILE BOLDEN: Yes, she lived at 1414 Chipito Street. She lived at 1708 Stillman, which is in Hillcrest. The Chipito Street address is located behind our church, St. Paul [United Methodist Church] on the Northside, and Stillman Street is in Hillcrest.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, that's great. So, you lived in-near Washington Coles, and also over at Hillcrest.

EMILE BOLDEN: That's correct.

LYNN SMITH: Alright, and when you were here, what do you remember about the neighborhood at that time?

EMILE BOLDEN: Well, I remember that it was several businesses that was located on Sam Rankin Street, and on what we called the Cuts. That was Juardine's Food and Diner, which was on Alameda Street, North Alameda, and the Cotton Club. Dr. H. J. Williams's office, which was on Sam Rankin Street, and next door to H J's office was a store, and it was like the community store, bank and it served well. As a matter of fact, it was the last business to leave the Northside, and there's a sad story that goes along with it, because the fellow that ran the store, Ben moved to another store headquarters, and he was killed in a robbery, and that - - that was- - that happened just this year.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, how sad.

EMILE BOLDEN: And, I mean, he was a great guy. I mean, he was, I mean, he would keep a lot of cash, because he would pay cash with welfare checks, and social security checks for the residents of the projects. I was a kid, and the projects were there, but now they have now been razed, and also there are plans to take down the Northside Manor, which is a housing project and the people living there have already been relocated and there's a new rebuild, not on that site, but they are going to rebuild other apartments. I think it's a 20-year plan. See I was in the Leadership Corpus Christi II, and at that time, it was a 20-year plan, to restructure the Northside, by building high rise and town and country, I mean, town houses. And that hasn't happened yet. The only think that has happened is that they have taken down the houses, and the projects, and moved them to Leopard Street and other locations. And I have been quoted as saying, that they are squeezing us out from one side from downtown to the Hillcrest area, it's been squeezed out, and there has been a lot of tearing down of the houses. And there has been a lot of movement of people, so, there is no actual place where you could say that's a black neighborhood, and as I understand it, that same thing has been done, or being done. And the majority of Texas major cities, Houston, Austin, the same thing is going on. And I feel proud to be a part of what's happening, but I don't expect to be alive when it's finished, because if it has taken 20 years to get to this stage, and it will take another 20 years for them to build it up, as- - as part of the plan, just like the Harbor Bridge. They have been talking about the Harbor Bridge for ten years, and now they're moving on, buying the land and plans for the Harbor Bridge, and what section they are going to move over. Because our church was involved in that, we were-we had several meetings, and they came. The Highway Department, and then the other people that are involved in it, and they were talking about

three different ways, that they were going to take the Harbor Bridge, and I think they settled on a way that it will not affect our church.

LYNN SMITH: I think that's correct. Yes. As far as I know, the current plan, which is always subject to change.

EMILE BOLDEN: Absolutely.

LYNN SMITH: But I think the current plan would not affect St Paul's United Methodist Church. Okay. You're - you're familiar with the Northside, and have been familiar with the Northside, since 1954, so, you have you seen it change over the years. Do you want to tell us a little bit about the changes that you have seen over time?

EMILE BOLDEN: Well, all the businesses that I mentioned before are gone. There's no more Juardine's, there's no more Cotton Club, there's no more theater, Harlem Theater, and the majority of the buildings. The only building that-well, the only two buildings that actually stand is the Longshoreman Building, of which an individual purchased and bought for himself to live in and also, the Crecy's complex.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, so, the Longshoreman Building.

EMILE BOLDEN: The Longshoreman Building, and also what was Crecy's Barber Shop, and Crecy's Liquor Store and nightclub is the only other building that still stands. And I am proud to say that those buildings are there, because they visually represent what was, and what was the type of businesses that was on the Northside, but now the rest of them, like I said, about Ben - Ben was the last business that stood. The rest of the businesses are gone.

LYNN SMITH: Ben. What's Ben's last name?

EMILE BOLDEN: What is the, he had a - a Middle East,-the last name.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

EMILE BOLDEN: And we called him Ben.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

EMILE BOLDEN: But his name was Mohammed.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

EMILE BOLDEN: And, don't ask me where Ben came from?

LYNN SMITH: Just somebody decided to call him Ben, and it caught on

EMILE BOLDEN: It caught on.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, what do you think the changes were caused by, that you've seen?

EMILE BOLDEN: I think that it was a part of the 20-year plan out of the original 20-year plan. It was to tear down the Northside, and revamp and rebuild it into high rises, as is done and being done in cities all over Texas. Our close proximity to downtown, makes us highly valuable property, and again, I mentioned the church. It increases the values of the church, and we have some vacant land that I think in my lifetime, I will see us sell it. We have redone what was to be a parking lot. It was a parking lot idea, and we've done that into a park for the kids that live in the neighborhood, that still live in the neighborhood. The park is going to be

named after Dr. William Carline, who was a dentist on Sam Rankin Street in Leathers Drug Store, and his wife Helen Carline who was a teacher at Solomon Coles School. And we still have children that come to the park, and I have seen a turnover of children coming to our church, because they come from the park to the church to see. One little boy, said he come to see what church was about, and I think that was a good idea. Park's been a good idea. The other changes that I have seen are with integration. Solomon Coles High School has become, and it is still stands, as a middle school, and the special emphasis school. Booker T. Washington, where I went to school still stands, but it is an empty building, and nothing has been done. The bus transit system headquarters was on that side of town, as a matter of fact, it was next door to Booker T. Washington, and what's happened, is it's become the RTA [Regional Transit Authority], and that moved far west, like everything that was on the Northside, has either gone away or moved. And when I say gone away, I mean disappeared from existence. And we - - we have still one restaurant that is run by a black person. And that's Maurice Porter's, Dr. Maurice Porter's, he taught school here for 35 years at West Oso [High School]. He was the band director, and his wife, also taught school, and they have used their retirement to open a restaurant, which is downtown in the Frost's bank building. And I think that those are the only businesses that are left that we can point to with pride, and then say, that they were in the Northside and moved. Because before Dr. Porters had the restaurant, he also had a nightclub, and I always thought, that was kind of hard. I mean, he taught school three blocks from where he had a nightclub. I mean, you know. I don't know how he did that. He explained to me one time, that the Trustee owned the building that he was in, so, one of the Trustees owned it, so, probably that's how that worked out.

LYNN SMITH: I see. Okay. Well I think you've given us a really good idea of how you have seen - - have seen it changed. And can you think of anything else you want to add?

EMILE BOLDEN: Well no, not really, other than the founding of two organizations. We founded the Huston-Tillotson Alumni and Friend's Association, and it is still in existence. And the Everyday People Organization, which had functions in the park named after Dr. H. J. Williams. The doctor that I alluded to, because he was my personal physician, until he died. And the park was named Dr. H. J. Williams Park that used to be Hillcrest Park, and it was named after him, and I think that, that's a good accomplishment.

LYNN SMITH: Sounds like it. Alright, well appreciate I your time and - - and your insight.

EMILE BOLDEN: Thank you.

LYNN SMITH: Alright, we're doing a little Part Two, because we're just adding on to Emile Bolden's oral history interview on January 28. Go ahead.

EMILE BOLDEN: Yes, he [Gervase Leathers] had two tenants; one was located in the drugstore, which was ran by Leathers. The drugstore still stands but, of course, he's gone on, he's died. He and his wife, and his brother-in-law, Dr. Carline ran the dentist part. Also we had H Boyd Hall. The N.A.A.C.P, the local chapter of N.A.A.C.P is named for him. And that was named after H. Boyd Hall Chapter [of the N.A.A.C.P.], and it was named after him, for the notorious - - notorious work that he did, and the heroic work that he did, as the founder and civic leader. And I think that, that should be added in also, the fact he was the first black person to live on Ocean Drive, and that was an historic event.

LYNN SMITH: That sounds like it's a worthy to be added, so, thank you so much.

EMILE BOLDEN: Okay. Thank you.

End of Recording for Emile Bolden_01.28.2015

Ms. Anita Bouldin Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 3: Anita (Douglas) Bouldin in December 2014 with the pews and a stained glass window donated by her family to St. Paul UMC



Photographer: Anna Christy, HNTB

Edited Transcript of Ms. Anita Bouldin's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I am interviewing Mrs. Anita Bouldin for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on February 17, 2015 in Corpus Christi, Texas. And I am interviewing Mrs. Bouldin in order to learn more about her knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. First of all, thank you for being here, and allowing me to be with you, and I just wanted to see if you would just tell us first of all, your full name.

ANITA BOULDIN: My name is Anita F. Bouldin.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and when and where were you born?

ANITA BOULDIN: I was born here in Corpus Christi, Texas in D.N. Leathers Center apartments.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and what's your birthday?

ANITA BOULDIN: My birthday is September 30, 1941.

LYNN SMITH: Alright, thank you. Okay, you said you were born in the D.N. Leathers Center Housing Project.

ANITA BOULDIN: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And tell me a little bit about your family, your parents, and your siblings, and your parents.

ANITA BOULDIN: I have one sister, Jacquelyn Turner, and a brother William Alfred Douglas, and my parents are Frederick James Douglas Sr. and Mildred Viser Douglas.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and didn't you have a close relationship with your grandparents, as well?

ANITA BOULDIN: Yes, we did, we had a close relationship with both sets of grandparents, and the ones that lived here in Corpus were Myrtle Carroll and G. A. Carroll who were mother's parents. My grandmother owned her own beauty shop, and my mother became a beautician, and worked in the beauty shop with her. When my grandmother moved from Corpus, mother became the owner of the shop, as well. Our paternal grandparents were Alfred and Ethel Douglas. We always spent the entire summer with them in Yoakum, Texas. They were the best.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, tell me a little bit about growing up at D.N. Leathers housing project.

ANITA BOULDIN: Well growing up at D.N. Leathers was fun. You know, the saying that it takes a village to raise a child, and that's what the way it was. All the parents were concerned about the children, and they kept an eye on everybody's kids to make sure that we were all safe. We had a lot of fun, because there was always something to do. We would ride bikes, skate, play tennis, and attend ball games. Things like that kept us busy. And if you got out of hand, some of the parents would correct you, they would tell you right from wrong. I remember spending a lot of time at the park. The park had swings, monkey bars, slides, and see-saws. We spent quite a bit of time there. When we came home, there was always something to do and we had all kinds of music at our house. My dad played the ukulele and we would sing. We took piano lessons, and I remember the piano that daddy bought us. It was a big upright piano, but it was ours, and it was fun to play. I had piano lessons from Mrs. Reed, and I remember going to her house to my piano lessons. The person that played ahead of me was fantastic. His name was Junior Mosley. He later became a professional musician. However, when I got to my lesson, I would just kind of plink plunk plink plunk, but that was okay too. That's the way you learned. Yes, and I grew to dislike the red and blue pencil used by the teacher to hit us on the fingers when we made mistakes.

LYNN SMITH: Uh oh.

ANITA BOULDIN: Yeah, along with music; we took tap dance lessons, ballet lessons, and tennis lessons. There were always sports around us. We played tennis when a lot of the young girls we knew didn't play. If there weren't enough girls to play with, we would play with the boys. My dad was an athlete, and he loved sports, so, he encouraged us to do the same. He played semi pro baseball, and so, he passed on the love of baseball to the neighborhood kids. He had a ladies' softball team, and also a little league that was really, really good. He was in competition with Mr. Roland, Johnny Roland's dad, who coached the New Addition team. Daddy coached the teams on the Northside.

When we were growing up, we always managed to have brownie cameras, and we always took a lot of pictures. I remember one of the times that we were taking pictures, and all of the little girls got together. We would sit our dolls on the back porch, lined them up just like in a department store, and took pictures. Then we would sit and pose for pictures with our dolls.

LYNN SMITH: And what about the schools you went to?

ANITA BOULDIN: Well my first school was Kinder, and we called it Mrs. Fucuals' School. Because Mrs. Fucuals was a teacher that would pick up the kids in the neighborhood. She would have us all lined up behind her, in pairs, like little ducks. I remember going to Saint Matthew Baptist Church where her kindergarten classes were held. I enjoyed listening to some of the kids that didn't know their alphabets.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, because, I think you said something about the blackboard in your house.

ANITA BOULDIN: Yeah, because at our house, on a blackboard, my dad would teach us numbers and alphabets, and my mother was very strict about our grammar. She was forever correcting us.

LYNN SMITH: I bet that was tough.

ANITA BOULDIN: It was tough.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, what about junior high?

ANITA BOULDIN: I attended Solomon M. Coles Junior and Senior High School. It was fun because I joined the band and played the clarinet. There was band practice, band concerts, orchestra, and parades. I acted in my first play and attended my first prom. I also enjoyed changing classes and having different teachers and learned the importance of making good grades. Although I attended Coles, Jackie, my sister attended Cunningham Junior High.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, your sister is a couple of years younger, is that right?

ANITA BOULDIN: Yes, 22 months.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and then-- and then integration came about, and then there was a change right?

ANITA BOULDIN: With integration, we transferred to Roy Miller High School and became "Buccaneers." We had to meet and make new friends. We had to get used to the new teachers and larger classes. When I get there, the band class was full so I opted to take choir. As long as I was in a music class, I was happy.

LYNN SMITH: So, you indicated that your dad was a little strict, is that right?

Edited Transcript of Ms. Anita Bouldin's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

ANITA BOULDIN: Yes [Laughter] I think everybody knew about our dad. When integration came about – he decided that we were going to change schools, and that's exactly what we did. We both graduated from Miller High School. However, when there was something going on socially like a sock hop, we would go to Coles. We would also go to Coles for the basketball games and talent shows.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

ANITA BOULDIN: And that was really something for us.

LYNN SMITH: So, you said you were in the band at Coles. Tell me about that reputation of that band.

ANITA BOULDIN: We had a good band, however, one of the things that – happened a lot is that our band director loved marches, so we played more marches than anything else. We always wanted to play some of the latest songs like the other schools, but he always managed to have us playing some type of march, even in the Buccaneer Parade. We had a very good band and I enjoyed playing the clarinet. John Philip Sousa was his favorite.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, after high school, you went to college?

ANITA BOULDIN: Yes, I went to Prairie View A&M College (now Prairie View A&M University), and then I came back to Corpus, and I became employed at Memorial Medical Center which later became Christus Spohn Hospital Memorial.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and what did you do there?

ANITA BOULDIN: I worked in the operating room, and I became a certified operating room technician where I worked for over forty years. I enjoyed it and it was very interesting. I enjoyed doing the cases and the fast pace of the department. As a trauma center, Memorial cared for critically injured patients at all hours of the day and night. The hours were long and the results most rewarding. I also met a lot of students that would tell me that, "Well, if I had been doing that as long as you have, I would be able to do it better." So, I had to realize, you know, age makes a difference. If I had it to do over again, I would not change my profession because I enjoyed it.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. When did you meet your husband?

ANITA BOULDIN: We knew each other from high school, but then we started dating after we returned from college. We married, and then I had Regynald McKnight, my older son, and then later on I married again, and then had Christopher Bouldin. And my oldest son was just like me, he liked music. So, he played the saxophone, and he got a chance to participate in a really big talent event sponsored by one of the fraternities, and he came in second place.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

ANITA BOULDIN: Oh, yes, he graduated from Mary Carroll High School, and that particular year they got a chance to be in the Orange Bowl Parade. That was quite an experience for us. We had never been to Florida, and of course, we enjoyed the entire trip. It was long but it was enjoyable.

LYNN SMITH: That's great, so, although after college, you didn't live in – in the Washington-Coles or Hillcrest neighborhoods, but you still had ties there. Right?

ANITA BOULDIN: Yes, my ties there for the Washington area were at my church, which is Saint Paul United Methodist Church, 130 years old. When my kids were growing up, I worked with the United Methodist

Youth Fellowship. They were kids usually from twelve through nineteen years old. Sometimes it was a challenge, but I enjoyed it, because the kids learned fast and were good students and as members they worked, studied, and participated in all aspects of the church. Growing up in the church, we sang in the choir and we have been ushers since pre-teen and still today. I have held different offices and chaired several committees. We love our church and give the best of our service in many ways. Our family donated a stained glass window and two pews to the current church building constructed in the 1950s.

LYNN SMITH: I believe you were invited to become a member of the Ladies of the Camellia Social Club, right?

ANITA BOULDIN: I was honored and felt quite privileged to have been invited into the Ladies of the Camellia Social Club. I was really surprised when I got my letter of invitation, because my mother was already a Lady of Camellia and she never said a word to me. She didn't give me any hints that I had been invited, and I didn't realize it until I had received my letter.

The Ladies of the Camellia Social Club is an organization whose purpose is to select and meet girls who meet the specified qualifications of debutants and to present them to society. Being a post debutant, I am grateful for this recognition as member of this organization. My mother and sister are also members of this organization having served in several capacities, it is humbling.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and – are there things that the debutants learn, before they are presented?

ANITA BOULDIN: They used to have an organization for the young teenagers, but now it's strictly the college students. Now that they are being presented after their first year of college, we want to make sure that the young ladies are knowledgeable, realize the importance of an education, are taught etiquette, and have good moral standards. They must attend workshops and perform community service such as reading to children, visiting the senior citizen centers, and working at the food bank. They participate in the Feast of Sharing.

LYNN SMITH: And who started the organization?

ANITA BOULDIN: The club was the dream of Mrs. Eddie Bolden to see young African American women of good moral and ethical standards be presented as debutants to society. She was the director of the Robert L. Moore Community Center and worked diligently with all students in the community. In preparation for her dream of presenting young ladies as debutants, teen clubs were formed to prepare them with etiquette, ethics, and morals. However, it is now college students having completed their first year in college. Because there was no organization to present young girls of color to society, with the support of her mother and a gentleman's club, her big dream became a reality. And the first group of debutants (12 girls) were presented at the Debutante Ball in 1957.

LYNN SMITH: And it's still going, right?

ANITA BOULDIN: Yes, the Debutante Ball is a biennial affair which occurs in December. The last one was December 2014 with fifteen debs. The young ladies are invited to become debutants, then they are introduced at a punch in August, and then presented at the Debutant Ball in December.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, great. Now another thing that you talked to me a little bit about was just some of the places that you went when you were kids.

ANITA BOULDIN: When we were kids, we went to the Regale Confectionary and get sodas and you could also get your malts, and your cherry colas, that was one of our favorites. [Laughter] We also went to the T.C. Ayers Center on Tuesday nights to the teenage dances. We went to the movies at the Harlem Theater,

and we went every Saturday, after we finished our chores. Chores first, then movies, and stayed as long as we could.

LYNN SMITH: Alright, and – didn't you go to Leathers Drug Store for some ice cream?

ANITA BOULDIN: That was one of our favorite trips, because Leathers Drug was right down the street from my grandmother's beauty shop, and we were there most of the time while my mother was working. So, we would all go to the Leathers Drug Store and get ice cream cones, and my grandfather always made sure that we had enough money to get an ice cream cone for the dog. He enjoyed them as much as we did and his name was Butch.

LYNN SMITH: That's great, and then when you got older where did you go in the neighborhood?

ANITA BOULDIN: As young adults we went to football games and basketball games. When we were old enough, we went to a club called the Down Beat Club, and that was about the only place we could go, because everything else was off limits.

LYNN SMITH: Even once you got out of college your dad had a few restrictions?

ANITA BOULDIN: Yeah, my father had a few restrictions on what we did, and how we did it, and where we went, and we didn't forget it.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And – you always went to church, at Saint Paul United Methodist Church, I guess. Well, wait a minute, let's – let's back up a minute. Let's talk a little bit about transportation. When you went to school, how did you get to school?

ANITA BOULDIN: We walked or either we rode the city bus.

LYNN SMITH: OK, you rode the city bus, and then when you went to church. How did you get there?

ANITA BOULDIN: Well for church, my dad would call a taxi for us and we always had a specific cab driver. We would get a cab to church, or if we were going to some type of program. Different organizations would sponsor quartets, and religious programs, and singing in the city, and then we would get a cab.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And one other thing you told me about was just how active that your mother and your father were in the community. What kind of organizations were they a part of?

ANITA BOULDIN: Our dad, affectionately known as "Mr. Freddie", was an avid sportsman. He loved them all. He played on a semi-pro baseball team, the Corpus Christi Sluggers. He also coached a ladies' softball team, the Corpus Christi Bluejays. He played tennis with us. He coached the Cub Scouts baseball team. And as he became older and decided on an "indoor" sport, he became quite a bowler. He had trophies for all sports. Dad was active in church as an usher and member of the United Methodist Men.

Mother was active in the church and several organizations. Some of them were the PTA, Cub Scouts, and Girl Scouts. She was Captain of the March of Dimes for the neighborhood. She was a member of the Senior Usher Board and United Methodist Women. Mother was a beautician for over 60 years and very active in their league holding many offices. She was also a Lady of the Camellia who served in many capacities. As business manager of the Beauticians League, she helped plan and prepare for conventions.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, - -

Edited Transcript of Ms. Anita Bouldin's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

ANITA BOULDIN: In the hotel, she would make sure the hotels were ready for the beauticians' conventions. At home she would cook for us, and when we were young she used to make us sample cakes. Every time she would bake a cake, she would not make the real cake until she had baked a sample to insure that the cake was A-Okay. We would look forward to getting the mixing bowl and the spoon.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, to lick the bowl and the spoon?

ANITA BOULDIN: Lick the bowl and the spoon.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, I loved that part when I was young.

ANITA BOULDIN: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Okay we have covered a lot of ground here, and is there anything else you can think of that you would like to tell me?

ANITA BOULDIN: Yes, our parents belonged to a club called the Grandparents Club, and for short they were called, The Grands. And the Grandparent Club was very active. They made plans for the grandchildren. They would always plan trips for the grandkids. One of the things that was most memorable is the Christmas parties they had and of course we would go to the Christmas party. My dad was the bartender, and everybody that belonged to the club had a favorite dish that they would specialize in, and they would get together and have this big party, and it would be so much fun. And my older son used to help daddy set up the bar, such as put ice in the cokes and stuff, and he said he couldn't wait until he was old enough to be a part of that. Well by the time he was old enough everybody was older.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

ANITA BOULDIN: Parents were older, so, he didn't get to make it. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Oh, dear. Alright, well this has been good, and I really appreciate it, and I just want to give you one more opportunity. Anything else you want to add?

ANITA BOULDIN: No.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Well then thank you so much.

ANITA BOULDIN: I will probably think of something but ...

LYNN SMITH: Alright, if you think of something later, you let me know.

ANITA BOULDIN: Please.

LYNN SMITH: Alright, thanks again.

ANITA BOULDIN: [Agreeing]

[End of Edited Transcript of Recording of Anita Bouldin's Oral History Interview.]

Mr. Robert Campbell and his daughter Barbara Campbell's Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 4: Robert Campbell and his daughter Barbara Campbell in 2015



Photographer: Sean Wray, HNTB

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I'm interviewing Robert Campbell and his daughter, Barbara Campbell, for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on January 19, 2015 in Corpus Christi, Texas. I'm interviewing Robert and Barbara Campbell, in order to learn more about their knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. First, if I can ask each of you to state your name for the recording?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Robert Campbell.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Barbara Campbell.

LYNN SMITH: Thank you. And, Mr. Robert Campbell, would you tell me where you were born and what your birthday is?

**Edited Transcript of Mr. Robert Campbell and his daughter Ms. Barbara Campbell's Oral History Interview conducted
by C. Lynn Smith**

ROBERT CAMPBELL: I was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And what is your birthday?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: March 5, 1923

LYNN SMITH: Okay, 1923. That sounds good. Alright.
Barbara, how about you? You going to tell us --?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: I was born in -- here in Corpus Christi.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: On November 11, 1953.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Thank you.
Okay. Well, when you were in Fayetteville, North Carolina, Mr. Campbell, what -- what were you doing there?
What -- what were your -- your -- you were with your parents; right?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: And where -- where did y'all live? Was it on a farm or --?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: No. In -- in the city.

LYNN SMITH: You lived in the city?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Now your -- your Dad passed away?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: And how old were you then?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: -- he was three.

LYNN SMITH: So that was really, really early?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And, so, then who raised you?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: My mother.

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by C. Lynn Smith**

LYNN SMITH: Your mother raised you?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And how – how was she? Was she a strict mom?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: She was?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: So, what was her – kind of her rules? What were her priorities?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Obey, to listen, and work.

LYNN SMITH: Obey, listen, and work?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Keep the house clean.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: And obey her.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Okay. So, – so, were – did you have brothers and sisters?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Many.

LYNN SMITH: Many brothers and sisters?

[Laughter]

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And you all had to obey and work I bet?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

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LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Now, it seems like last time you and I talked, you told me something about -- that your mom didn't have, like, certain things that the boys did, and certain things that the girls did. That you had to learn to cook, and --?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: So, you had to learn to take care of the house just like your sisters?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: That's true.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. She was a progressive mom, I think.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Very.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And then you went to school -- you went to -- to college -- was it in North Carolina?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes. Fayetteville State.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And then what about New York? Didn't you go to New York?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes, I went to New York.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And, do you remember why you went to New York?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: I just wanted to learn more.

LYNN SMITH: Did you go to college there?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: So, you got another degree?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Was that degree in Education?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

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LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, you were preparing to be an educator, as your –profession; is that right?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: His master's degree was in – from N.Y.U. And World War II sort of interrupted his college career. So, when he came back he finished his bachelor's degree, and then, he and my Mother, they were married, and they moved to New York City to go to N.Y.U., so, he could go to N.Y.U. And then he did about half of the work for a P.H.D., before he moved to Texas.

LYNN SMITH: Before he moved to Texas? Wow. That's a lot of education.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: So, at some point you – you moved to Texas. Did you come to Corpus Christi first, or did you go somewhere else in – in Texas first?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: No, I came here.

LYNN SMITH: Came right to –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Corpus?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Do you remember what – what drew you to Corpus Christi? Why you decided to come here? That was a long time ago.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Barbara, do you remember when you were a kid? Maybe he told you about that?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: He grew tired of urban life, and did something rather spontaneous, and was in the N.Y.U., one of their offices, and saw some brochures with palm trees, and water, and decided that maybe that's where they ought to move to.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: It was really very spontaneous.

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by C. Lynn Smith**

LYNN SMITH: That's incredible.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: They had never been to Texas. And they didn't know anybody in Texas. It was in the placement office, that's where he saw the brochure.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, whoever was doing the publicity for Corpus Christi, it had reached New York?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Yes.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: So, they must have been doing a pretty powerful job there?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: They must have done a good job.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, that's terrific. So, when you came here, you came here with your wife?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And – but Barbara was born here? Were all of your children born in Corpus Christi?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Yes, both of us.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: So, then it's you, Barbara and what is your brother's name?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Lawton.

LYNN SMITH: Lawton?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And then – and your mother's name, Barbara?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Elizabeth.

LYNN SMITH: Now, I think we are clear on the family names. When I was here last, you told me that you taught in one school, and your wife, Elizabeth, taught in a different school?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

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LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, – so, you were at Booker T. Washington? Is that right?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Booker T. Washington School, yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And what grade did you teach?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Fifth grade.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And you were – you were a fifth grade teacher for quite a number of years?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: And then you became the principal –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- over at Solomon Coles; right?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, which did you like better; teaching or being a principal?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: I don't know.

[Laughter]

ROBERT CAMPBELL: I enjoyed both of them.

LYNN SMITH: Well, good. That's good.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: And, because – actually, the children that I received, later, were the children that I taught in the beginning.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, so, --- they knew you both places?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes. Yes. I knew them, and they knew me.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: So, that makes it really good?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: They knew what to expect?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

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LYNN SMITH: They knew that you already cared about them? And that's great.
And, I think when I was here last time, you told me a little bit about if – if one of the children had a problem in school that day –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- I think you were telling me something about you didn't necessarily punish 'em at school, because –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And why – why didn't you punish them at school?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: I just didn't believe in it.

LYNN SMITH: Didn't believe in it? Okay

ROBERT CAMPBELL: I was there to teach. I wasn't there to be spanking, and whipping, and all of that stuff.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Although that did happen sometimes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: But, what happened when they got home, if they had misbehaved?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Well, that's up to the parents.

LYNN SMITH: Up to the parents? There ya go. Alright.
So, when you were teaching, I know that many people have very fond memories of you.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And what did you – what did you teach 'em every day? I mean, in terms of your philosophy. What – what was important? Why should they be in school?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Well, they're there to change some of the things that they did, which was – I – I can't think into words right now, but they were here [one hand low]; they have to go up here [other hand higher], you know. And they had to learn how to be more than what they are.

LYNN SMITH: So, they needed to be – learned how to be, maybe, more worldly, how to get – get along outside of just their neighborhood maybe?

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ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Learn how to deal with the world?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: How to talk to people.

LYNN SMITH: There you go.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Don't use profanity and things of that of that nature. That – that's bad, you know.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

ROBERT CAMPBELL: You don't get anywhere – you don't get far away when you are using that -- language.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: I think that – I think that both of my parents were interested, not only in teaching, because teaching was their actual job –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: -- but they were interested in each student individually.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: And they were also interested in teaching them social skills, as well as academic skills. And just how to manage the world – inside of their neighborhood, and outside of their neighborhood. And so, I think in that line, they did the kinds of things that teachers do with textbooks, as well as discussing how you handle Thanksgiving dinner, for instance. I know that there was one year where my mom cooked a turkey, and then all of the kids in his fifth grade, one of his fifth grade classes brought something, and contributed to the Thanksgiving dinner. And they all had dinner. For some that was a – a new and different occasion, and for others it was learning how to share, how to contribute, and how to enjoy a meal together.

LYNN SMITH: Well, I bet that is very important, especially –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- you know, if your parents are working a lot, and –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Right.

LYNN SMITH: -- you don't get the opportunity to have meals –

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Right.

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LYNN SMITH: -- together all of the time.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Right.

LYNN SMITH: So, that – that probably was a very important experience. Okay. Let's see. I think – the other thing I wanted to ask you about was a little bit more about your experience with Solomon Coles. Because you taught at – at Booker T. Washington, at – the fifth grade, and then you went over to Solomon Coles.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Taught the same children.

LYNN SMITH: And taught the same children. And what – subjects did you teach them? Cause you taught subjects over at the high school; right?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Do you remember what subjects you taught? Was it – was it History and English?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: And then you – you had –by that time, you had your doctorate; right? ¹ You were – no – not yet? So, you had a master's at that time?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Alright. But– a master's degree qualifies you to be in the [school] administration –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Oh, yes.

LYNN SMITH: -- of the high school?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: But you weren't there – you weren't the administrator in the beginning?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, then did somebody retire? Is that what happened?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And then you became a principal?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

¹ Mr. Campbell completed his doctoral classes, but did not write his dissertation.

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LYNN SMITH: So, when you were a principal, teaching – teaching, and – and guiding, I guess, as principal –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- the – the same students? About how long did you do that; do you remember? Was it five years, ten years --?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: No, it wasn't that long.

LYNN SMITH: Wasn't that long?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: In all, it was probably two or three years.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: At – at Coles.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes, at Coles.

LYNN SMITH: And then what happened? What – why did you stop being principal at Coles?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: The school closed.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: That's right.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: The school closed as a junior and senior high school.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: So, at – so, at the time you were principal, it was both a junior and a senior high school –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- and then it – it just closed?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: In 1967.

LYNN SMITH: In 1967? Okay.
Alrighty. Barbara was in school by that time, and –

[Laughter]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Well, before – sort of before that, yeah.

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LYNN SMITH: Sort of before that?
[Laughter]

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Yeah. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: And – and – let me see, you went to Booker T. Washington while your Dad taught there, right?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: He was across the hall when I was in the fourth grade.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And – and you changed schools after that year. Do you want to tell us why?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Because it's not a good idea to go to school where your Dad works.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yeah. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Nobody likes you. Nobody wants to talk to you, or play with you on the playground –
[Laughter]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: When your Dad is right across the hall.

LYNN SMITH: They're afraid they're going to get in trouble?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]
[Laughter]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Probably.

LYNN SMITH: Probably?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, – so, when you left Booker T. Washington, where did you go to school?

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BARBARA CAMPBELL: I went to Crossley Elementary.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: For the fifth and sixth grade.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Alrighty. And then after that where did you go?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: After that I went to Driscoll Junior High School.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: And I went to Roy Miller High School.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. I think Mr. Lamont Taylor told me that you did very well at Roy Miller High School.

[Laughter]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: I did.
[Laughter]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: I – I did. I did.

LYNN SMITH: So, a little influence from your Dad there maybe?

[Laughter]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: From both of my parents.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, – you were – you were – what was it, sixth in your class? I believe that's what Mr. Lamont Taylor thought.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Actually it was probably like 18 out of –

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: -- 600, and – oh, maybe like 620, or 650. I was number 18.

LYNN SMITH: Very good. Alright. So, would you tell us a little bit about your experiences there at – at Miller? Miller, at – at some point integrated, because it – at one point wasn't it – it only a white school, or white and Hispanic?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: I don't –.

LYNN SMITH: That was before your time?

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BARBARA CAMPBELL: That would be way before my time.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: I went to Miller in 1969, and I graduated in 1971. I thought we had a very well mixed group of students at Miller.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: I thought everybody got along well. And, in my experience – my high school experiences were fantastic. They were the way you would like to remember high school. I just happened to like to study.

[Laughter]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: And, so --.

LYNN SMITH: Fortunate for you with your parents?

[Laughter]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Fortunate for me. But they never really had to do – they never had to encourage me much. I just kind of did stuff on my own at school. But I – I enjoyed going to Miller High School. I loved it in fact.

LYNN SMITH: That's great. So, when you were, you know, your Dad was over at Solomon Coles, and – you were in that neighborhood during the day, even though you didn't live in that neighborhood [Coles Neighborhood]–

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Right.

LYNN SMITH: Did y'all live in the Hillcrest for a while?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: We lived – in Hillcrest for all of my life.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Until we moved here [Saxet Heights] in 1971, right before I went to college.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, was it Palm Drive that y'all lived on--?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Is that home still there, or --?

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BARBARA CAMPBELL: The house is still there, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yeah.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: We just saw it yesterday, as a matter of fact.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Wow. So, –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Not the same as it was when we were there, but.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Is that right?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yeah.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Well, I – I've heard that when y'all were there, during that period of time, the homes in Hillcrest were just really beautifully kept, and –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: They were.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: They were. Everybody took a lot of – quite a lot of pride in their house –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: -- and keeping up their house, and --.

LYNN SMITH: So, would you – kind of describe the neighborhood, how you remember it?
Either one of you?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: I remember it being a really family oriented neighborhood, and –

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: -- with family businesses -- that everybody supported. We had – this might sound like a really trivial thing, but I enjoyed the ice cream man coming down the street, where we could have – where we could chase him down, and get – get ice cream. And we had great neighbors.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Everybody kind of knew each other. I think, because we live in a coastal area when things – when the weather got pretty dim, or whenever we had hurricanes, and I think, not unlike

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other coastal cities, everybody supported each other more. When you're about to lose some of what you have, or maybe all of what you have, people tend to kind of come together in a way that I think they should. But, on any given day, I think everything else was quite normal, and – and probably provided a lot of – of good structure for everybody who grew up over there.

LYNN SMITH: That sounds great.
So, Barbara, what was it like to grow up in Hillcrest?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: I think it was a mighty fine place to grow up. It gave me a sense of – of pride. I enjoyed being around people that I was very familiar with. We supported each other. On any given day I know that – I knew I could go down the street, or several blocks down the street, if I needed something. My best friends lived four blocks away. It was a – a great and safe place to be. I felt very safe there. And when I was eleven I was given a – a key to the front door, and I would walk home from Crossley Elementary, and open the door, and stay in, and watch a little TV, and do my homework. But, had I needed someone, I – I know that I would have been able to find them quickly, and that sort of thing. I know that I have many memories of being in that neighborhood when we had hurricanes here in Corpus Christi, and I think that a – a good neighborhood probably became a better neighborhood – because that's when you really need your – your neighbors to help support you when you're losing your house or losing the, you know, things that you cherish, because of a natural disaster.

LYNN SMITH: So, I'm trying to remember the exact date you told me you moved out of Hillcrest. What – were you there during Hurricane Celia?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Yes.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: We were – we were there during Hurricane Celia, and all of the -- and some prior to that.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, you –

BARBARA CAMPBELL: But we moved –

LYNN SMITH: -- weathered it there?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: -- we moved here in 1971 right before I went to college.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. And was your home damaged during Celia?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Not a lot. Not – not –

LYNN SMITH: So, you were fortunate?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: -- very much.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yeah, not much damage.

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BARBARA CAMPBELL: Yeah, not very much.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Was the neighborhood – was there a lot of damage in the neighborhood?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: So, y'all were just fortunate?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Just lucky.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright.

Well, I guess my – my last question is just; if there's anything else you want to tell me? But – well, actually I have one more question, before we get to that question. And that is that you graduated from –

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Miller.

LYNN SMITH: And then where did you go to college, and – and what do you – I know you've – you've continued your education, as your Dad continued his – his education. So, if you'll tell me a little bit just about what your pursuits are?

BARBARA CAMPBELL: I went to – to New York City, and I – I graduated from Barnard College of Columbia University. And – I have a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology. And when I graduated from there, I came back to Corpus Christi, and I graduated from Columbia in 1975. In 1978, I had a master's degree from the university here in Corpus Christi in counseling, and I am a professional – I'm a licensed professional counselor. And in 2009, after I retired from the state, I went back to get a PhD.

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: So, in counselor education and supervision. So, I have finished all of the course work just like my Daddy.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: [Agreeing]

BARBARA CAMPBELL: And I am writing my dissertation on those days that I'm able to do that.

LYNN SMITH: I understand. Are there any other things that you want to tell me about your life in Northside, – or around Northside, or Corpus Christi, in general? Just things you think that we need to know?

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BARBARA CAMPBELL: I'd like to say one thing.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: And that is that my Dad is the 11th of 12 children. He's the youngest boy. And because his father died when he was three, I think, and – and because my grandmother raised a lot of children by herself, I think my father was really able to understand a lot of the Northside kids because grew up in a family that struggled. He grew up in a family where you had to get a job when you were old enough to work. Sometimes when you weren't exactly legally old enough to work, but you needed to do that. Certainly the, you know, the – the age difference between my Dad and his oldest sibling was almost 20 years, so, there was an older Campbell – Campbell kid group that went off to work, and they helped support the younger kids.

LYNN SMITH: That – that, I'm sure, helped you.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Look up- - up there.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And that is – and that is your family?

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. A picture of your family in the dining room.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Sisters and brothers.

LYNN SMITH: That's a lot of sisters and brothers.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yes. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Wow. Okay. Well, I have very much enjoyed just being with you all today, and thank you.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: I look forward to seeing you.

LYNN SMITH: Well, I will do my best to stop by.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Cause I enjoy seeing you.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Thank you again. Y'all take care.

BARBARA CAMPBELL: Thanks.

[End of Audio Recording for Lynn Smith – Campbell – 01.19.2015]

Mr. Herb Canales' Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 5: Mr. Herb Canales at La Retama Central Library in Corpus Christi in 2014



Photographer: Anna Christy, HNTB

Edited Transcript of Mr. Herb Canales' Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: Okay. This is Lynn Smith, and I am interviewing Mr. Herb Canales for the Northside History Project. A component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on December 18th 2014, in Corpus Christi, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. Canales, in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi. First, please tell me your name and when and where you were born?

HERB CANALES: My full name is Herbert Glenn Canales. I was born on June 19, 1954, here in Corpus Christi, Texas.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And would you just give us like a brief- - a brief biographical sketch of kind of what your life has been like and?

HERB CANALES: Right, you know, I grew up here in Corpus Christi, went to parochial school, starting at the Corpus Christi cathedral, all the way through high school, at Catholic schools, and then to Delmar College, and the University of Texas, and then Columbia University in New York for graduate school. And I worked at The Public Library for 33 years from 1980] to 2013, basically 33 years at the public library, with 27 or 28 of those as a director.

LYNN SMITH: Great. Okay. And now you are a columnist?

HERB CANALES: I'm a, right, every once in a while columnist for the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. Now, I know that your- - your family dates way back. Do you want to start us the beginning?

HERB CANALES: My great-great-grandparents, my great-great-grandfather was Juan Gonzales. He came from the north coast of Spain to Texas. I found his naturalization records through New Orleans in 1859, married a woman in Brownsville. Her name was Rosario De Alcala. They married in 1870, and soon thereafter moved to Corpus Christi, Texas.

LYNN SMITH: Great, and what did he do there?

HERB CANALES: He was a merchant. He had, like a dry goods store, and then the family got into the real estate, after that-back in the late 1870s when they started purchasing properties.

LYNN SMITH: Okay and where- - where was his business and the house?

HERB CANALES: Oh, yes, the house was on Antelope Street, which is just south of 37 [Interstate Highway 37 (I-37)].

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Considered all part of the same neighborhood.

HERB CANALES: Considered part of the same neighborhood. You know, 37, the interstate off of the Harbor Bridge is what sort of created the division, but it was really considered part of the Northside area then, which was the center of town back then.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And then your great-grandparents were also here.

HERB CANALES: Right, their daughter, Josephina Gonzalez, married a Francisco Reyna, and they had their house right there on Waco and Buffalo [streets], which is where the moving and storage company is today.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERB CANALES: Back, I want to say it started in 1899, and I think it- - I think it was my great-grandfather, who either built that home, or definitely expanded it to a two-story home.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And then your - - your family continued to stay here?

HERB CANALES: Right. I grew up- - I grew up on Antelope Street. But actually the house that I lived in was the house of my great-great-grandmother. I don't know if my great-great-grandfather lived there, because he died in 1885, and she died in 1918, so, she lived a number of years, after he died. And so, I don't know the exact house where he lived, but I cannot find a city directory from that era, but she lived there, and so, we lived there. That's where I grew up.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And your grandparents, what were their names?

HERB CANALES: My grandfather was Frank Reyna, like Francisco, like his father, and he married Irene Molina. She was from Victoria, Texas, and my mother's name, of course, is Irene.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and so, your mother, Irene Reyna Canales.

HERB CANALES: Canales. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: She married your dad.

HERB CANALES: Yes. Humberto Canales, he was from Brownsville, Texas. He was in the Navy in World War II, and got stationed here at the Naval Air Station right after World War II, and through his friend, my uncle, that is how he met my mother, and they got married.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, what are your early memories of the Northside neighborhood?

HERB CANALES: Well, it was- - it was an active area. I remember the house that belonged to my great-grandparents, because my great-aunt, their daughter Olivia, Alvarez was her name. Her married name. Olivia Reyna Alvarez, she stayed in the house after her parents, my great-grandparents had died, and so, we used to spend a lot of time there. It was just basically a couple of blocks from where we lived. Three blocks, more or less from where we lived, and they used to babysit us a lot, me and my older sisters. And we went to Corpus Christi Cathedral, which is just a few blocks from the house. From kindergarten all the way through eighth grade, and that was a center of really of our life, because everything was there. All the activities, after school activities, of course, church, all took place then, and so.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and when you were in high school, I think you-you, your interest in Old Bayview Cemetery began. Is that correct?

HERB CANALES: Right, I think it was something that a teacher had told us in some class that there was a historic cemetery. The Old Bayview Cemetery, and a friend of mine and I were just curious about- - about that, and so, we went there. We must have been 15 or 16, at the time, to explore the cemetery. Look at the history, -because you see the old tombstones where they talk about, you know, victims of the yellow fever epidemic, you know, in the 19th century, and those that died during the Civil War. And, as I was saying earlier, what was written on one tombstone, I mean, it gave us the creeps. Basically it said, and I do not know why I remember this, but it says 'as you are now' and it is still there, 'As you are now, so, once was I. As I am now, so, you must be, prepare therefore to follow me' - - that is some poem, I do not know what it is, but I just remember that in the end, just getting chills.

LYNN SMITH: I bet so.

HERB CANALES: But it was interesting, because it was part of Corpus Christi's history, and we started to learn a lot about the city, by going there.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. But I almost forgot to ask you about an experience that you had when you were younger, when the Harbor Bridge went in.

HERB CANALES: That is right. I do recall the old bascule bridge vaguely, because the Harbor Bridge opened in 1959. I would have been five years old at the time, but I do remember the lift. I do remember seeing that image once, and I do remember the Harbor Bridge being constructed again vaguely. And I remember when we first went across the bridge in my father's 1957 Ford Station Wagon, black, when they used to make the hoods, them good. All the kids could stand on top, and you did not dent it, because it was thick metal.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

HERB CANALES: And, we went across, we went across with my grandmother, my mother's mother. But it was so high that she was scared, and so she pulled out a rosary, and started praying, because she was sure that the bridge was going to collapse on us. Okay.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERB CANALES: So, I just remember it as being exciting, because I had never seen anything like that.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And because of your- - your interest in history, and your knowledge of the city, could you kind of give us an overview of how the Northside has changed over time?

HERB CANALES: Well, I do remember, you know, growing up on Antelope Street. I remember when they started to build 37 [I-37]. Okay. And I remember the earth movers, and it was fun to go watch them move, and see the big ditch that they were building to create the freeway. Uh, my parents when they first married, my mother, of course, grew up in the house that my great-grandparents, her parents were right next door, but uh, when they first married they lived on

Lexington Street, which is in Hillcrest. Okay, so, then they married there, and they lived there for a while, and then they moved over to Antelope Street. Right after the war is when the neighborhoods started to change.

LYNN SMITH: And that would be World War II?

HERB CANALES: Yes, World War II. That was the- - that was the center of the city when it first started, the area that I am talking about. The Washington-Coles, and then further, what, west of there would have been Hillcrest. Okay. That is where a lot of nice homes were located, and the HEB family, they lived. I was looking at an old City Directory, a number of years ago, and found their names, when they first came and opened up their stores, and really were based in Corpus Christi in the early 1930's. They lived on Palm Street. It is in the city directory. So, a lot of people lived there. It was- - it was the premier, sort of residential area city, at the time. But that started to change after World War II. When the GI's came back, and, I mean, when they got the GI bill, so, the city started growing, at that point, and became more industrial. Okay, so, the city started growing south and continued to do so. So, a lot of people moved out of that area. And then the freeway came in. But by the time the freeway came in, in the early 1960s, that area had already started to change. People had already moved out. And that trend has continued, and it has converted. It has become more industrialized. So, you had those two factors. The city grew after World War II. There was an economic boom. A lot to do with the oil industry, and people just moved out.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Is there anything else you can think of, that you would like to share with us today?

HERB CANALES: Uh, just that the area was known for having jazz clubs. That article that I [mentioned] was [about Florence] "Bu" Pleasant - I do not remember. That would have been before my time, but I just remembering hearing that Duke Ellington once came down here, and played in one of those jazz clubs. None of that exists anymore, but that would have been back in the '30s and the '40s, in particular, maybe part of the 50's.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERB CANALES: But, you know, I remember all of that, so, and I remember going to a grocery store there on Staples Street near Holy Cross. We did not go to Holy Cross. We went to Corpus Christi Cathedral, as I said earlier.

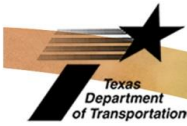
LYNN SMITH: Right. Okay.

HERB CANALES: Okay.

LYNN SMITH: I thank you so much.

HERB CANALES: You're welcome.

[End of Audio Recording for Herb Canales – 01.06.2014]



Mrs. Irene Reyna Canales' Edited Oral History Transcript

NOTE: Herb Canales conducted this interview of his mother, Irene Reyna Canales, on November 16, 2014 on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation. The interview was conducted at Mrs. Canales home in Corpus Christi, Texas.

HERB CANALES: Okay, state your name and date of birth.

IRENE REYNA CANALES: My name is Irene Reyna Canales. I was born September 18, 1926.

HERB CANALES: What was your address on the Northside?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: 911 Waco Street.

HERB CANALES: Who were some of the neighbors? The names of some of the neighbors?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Some of the neighbors were-- were Judge Hopkins, the McGloynes, Mr. Carl Jones and a family by the name of Grossman.

HERB CANALES: When you went shopping, where did you go?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Mainly in the downtown area on Chaparral Street, but there was also some shops on Leopard Street.

HERB CANALES: Okay, were there? Do you remember any shopping in the Northside area at all?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Some shopping on- - on Leopard Street, but mainly downtown.

HERB CANALES: But nothing in the Northside area? No stores in that area?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: No. No.

HERB CANALES: None. Okay, where did you go to church?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: I went to Holy Cross Catholic Church.

HERB CANALES: Okay. What was the- - what was the neighborhood like there in terms of the- - the population, and also the church congregation?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: It was Hispanic, Anglos and some blacks.

HERB CANALES: Okay. Do you remember any kind of parades, or any kind of events in the north side area?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Not at that time, I do not remember. No.

Edited Transcript of Mrs. Irene Reyna Canales' Oral History Interview conducted by Herb Canales

HERB CANALES: Do you remember any of there- - there were nightclubs in the area, jazz clubs? Do you remember that at all?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: I do not remember. I am sure there were, but not close to us, and I do not remember any.

HERB CANALES: Okay. Do you - - did you all, did you remember any parks in that area? Did you ever go to any parks?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: No. I do not remember any parks.

HERB CANALES: Okay. So, when you went for entertainment, like, movies and things like that. Where did you go?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Well, there was two theaters on Leopard Street, close to our house. The Grande Theatre and the Melba Theatre.

HERB CANALES: Okay.

IRENE REYNA CANALES: And then there was downtown, the Ritz Theater.

HERB CANALES: Now where did you go to school?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: I attended a George Evans Elementary School, and Incarnate Word Academy.

HERB CANALES: And after that?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: And North Side Junior High School and Corpus Christi High School.

HERB CANALES: Corpus Christi High School is now known as Roy Miller High School.

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Yes.

HERB CANALES: Okay. Later, you moved when you got married. Tell me about that.

IRENE REYNA CANALES: In 1947 I married and moved to an apartment at 924 Lexington Avenue.

HERB CANALES: And how long were you all there?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Until about 1953.

HERB CANALES: Okay. What was the population like there?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Mostly Anglos.

HERB CANALES: What else?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Hispanics.

HERB CANALES: Okay. And any- - any blacks?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: No.

HERB CANALES: What was it? I mean, was it middle class? What was the neighborhood like?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: I would say middle class. It was - it was middle class.

HERB CANALES: Okay. Is there- - is there anything you remember that's- - that is special to the Northside, because you lived there in the 1930s, and the '40s and part of the '50s, correct?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Yes.

HERB CANALES: From about 1926 when you were an infant to 1953, correct?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Right. Yes.

HERB CANALES: Okay. Anything else that you remember about that? About the Northside?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: No. I cannot remember anything like that.

HERB CANALES: Were you [Inaudible]? It was a- - it was a - - Did you live in your grandparents' home?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Yes.

HERB CANALES: And your parents lived where?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: 911 Waco Street.

HERB CANALES: But your parents lived where?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: 1104 Buffalo,-just around the corner from...

HERB CANALES: And there were other family members living on that big property?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Yes.

HERB CANALES: And so mainly you was amongst yourselves?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Yes.

HERB CANALES: But there were- - were there other family members, you know, like cousins, and so forth in the neighborhood?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Yes, there was.

HERB CANALES: Where?

Edited Transcript of Mrs. Irene Reyna Canales' Oral History Interview conducted by Herb Canales

IRENE REYNA CANALES: In the area of 1104 Buffalo.

HERB CANALES: Okay.

IRENE REYNA CANALES: That block.

HERB CANALES: You had other family members. You had cousins, though, didn't you?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Yes, I had cousins that lived there too.

HERB CANALES: Okay, like the Gonzales. They lived close by?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: The Gonzales lived close by. Yes.

HERB CANALES: Okay. Anything else you want to add? That you can remember?

IRENE REYNA CANALES: Cannot remember anything else about that area?

HERB CANALES: Okay. All right. Thank you.

[End of Recording for Irena Reyna Canales Interview]

Mr. Bobby Galvan's Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 6: Mr. Bobby Galvan in the Galvan Music Store standing beside the bass instrument once owned by Mr. Galvan's first music teacher, Bernave Alvarado.



Photographer: C. Lynn Smith, HNTB, 2016

Figure 7: Bobby Galvan on the cover of "You . . . in Corpus Christi, June 1967"



Source: Personal Collection of Bobby Galvan

Figure 8: Virginia Galvan and her husband Rafael Galvan, Sr., parents of Bobby Galvan, in their home at 403 Waco St. This home was moved and is currently located in Heritage Park in Corpus Christi.



Source: Personal Collection of Bobby Galvan

Figure 9: Galvan children (left to right) Patty with her violin, Mamie with her banjo, and Ralph (Jr.) with his violin when they lived in Northside.



Source: Personal Collection of Bobby Galvan

Edited Transcript of Mr. Bobby Galvan's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith and I'm interviewing Mr. Bobby Galvan for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on April 6, 2016, in Corpus Christi, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Galvan, in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. Thank you for being here.

BOBBY GALVAN: Thank you.

LYNN SMITH: First, please just state your full name.

BOBBY GALVAN: My full name is Robert M. but everybody calls me Bobby, so I go by Bobby Galvan.

LYNN SMITH: When were you born?

BOBBY GALVAN: I was born July 10, 1929.

LYNN SMITH: Very good, and where were you born?

BOBBY GALVAN: Here in Corpus Christi at 1001 N. Staples which was the corner of Winnebago Street and N. Staples Street.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And what were the names of your parents?

BOBBY GALVAN: My parent's names, his name was Rafael Galvan, Sr. and my mother was Virginia Galvan.

LYNN SMITH: Very good. And what were the names of your brothers and sisters?

BOBBY GALVAN: There were nine children, the oldest one was Beatrice (Galvan) De La Vina and her husband's name was Jose De La Vina in Edinburg. Next my sister is Rosa (Galvan) Martinez and her husband's name was Lisandro Martinez and they had three children. Then my sister Patty (Galvan) Prezas and her husband's name was Johnny Prezas and they had two boys. Next was my sister Mamie (Galvan) Oliveria and her husband's name was Luis Oliveria, they had three children, one boy and two girls. Then my oldest brother Ralph Galvan and his wife's name was Jean and they had two children, a girl and a boy. Next was my brother Sam (Sammie) Galvan and he married Terry and they had three children. Then my sister Virginia (Galvan) and her husband's name was Arnold. Next my brother Eddie Galvan and his wife's name was Cathy and they had two children. We have already lost Sammie and Eddie. All the nieces and nephews, most were thoroughly, very educated of course. I was born last and my wife's name is Alicia. We have a son, Robert M. Galvan Jr., but he goes by Bobby Galvan. He is a District Judge [94th District Court] and he is married to Deeanne Galvan who is a County Judge [County Court-at-Law 3].

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and what about the lovely lady, Virginia Lopez that introduced me to you?

BOBBY GALVAN: Virginia Lopez is our first cousin. Her parents were George and Delores Neeley, but her mother died giving birth to Virginia. So my uncle, Justo Contreras and his wife adopted her at birth.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and so where did you go to elementary school?

Edited Transcript of Mr. Bobby Galvan's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

BOBBY GALVAN: I started at George Evans on Comanche Street, but they changed the boundary so they transferred me to Cheston Heath Elementary.

LYNN SMITH: And at that point you were still living on Staples Street?

BOBBY GALVAN: Yes, at 1001 N. Staples Street.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and then where did you go to junior high?

BOBBY GALVAN: North Side Junior High.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and then high school?

BOBBY GALVAN: There was only one high school at that time, Corpus Christi High School which is now Roy Miller High School.

LYNN SMITH: Very good, and then you also went to Del Mar College, didn't you?

BOBBY GALVAN: I went to Del Mar for one year and after that I went into the Air Force and they stationed me in San Antonio, with the Air Force Band of the West. And right before that when I was in high school, I was a member of the all-state band.

LYNN SMITH: Very good.

BOBBY GALVAN: There were three members: Jack Felts and Clinton Gamble and myself. I was on the clarinet. Jack played bass and Clinton Gamble played French horn. That was in 1947.

LYNN SMITH: That was your graduation year 1947, right?

BOBBY GALVAN: Yes. 1947.

LYNN SMITH: You started with your music very early, Can you tell me about that?

BOBBY GALVAN: Yes, my father heard this gentleman [Bernave Alvarado] playing before I was born, and he got enthused and he asked him if he would teach all of his children. So my Dad built one of the rooms on the house at N. Staples and made it into a little studio, and all of us would study there at 1001 N. Staples.

LYNN SMITH: So you learned clarinet. Did you learn clarinet first?

BOBBY GALVAN: No first we learned solfeggio and then we learned the strings, violin, and then I started playing clarinet when I got to junior high school, at Northside High.

LYNN SMITH: When you were pretty young, in high school, your Dad built the Galvan Ballroom, right?

BOBBY GALVAN: Right, I had just graduated from high school when they started talking about it in 1947 and 1948 and then they finished it in 1949. And of course he built the Galvan Building and the ballroom was the second floor of the building.

LYNN SMITH: When he started the ballroom, what do you think inspired him to do that?

BOBBY GALVAN: Well I don't remember what inspired him, but I think he realized there was a necessity for a big ballroom so he had it built. I guess he was pretty sure it would be a success which it was. At one point, he had it rented on Saturday nights and he would have paid dances on Sunday and he made a lot of money, you know. Even today, we still rent it a few of times a month.

LYNN SMITH: So what types of names of musicians were coming in after he opened the ballroom in 1949?

BOBBY GALVAN: Well at 1949, the big band was still going strong. My brother Ralph, Eddie and Sam were all super musicians. My brother Ralph organized a big band right after the war.

LYNN SMITH: Right after World War II.

BOBBY GALVAN: Right after World War II, so we already had the band going, it was just a success right away and we still rent it.

LYNN SMITH: So your family's band played here a lot and who else played here?

BOBBY GALVAN: We had local bands and name bands like Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, and Gene Krupa. Los Tres Panchos who was a big trio; Perez Prado was also a big name band, Luis Alcaraz was an orchestra director and composer. My brother Eddie (Galvan) also organized his band. Eddie really was a super band director. They named the music hall at Miller High School after my brother because he was there for over 20 years and his band won the sweepstakes just about every year.

LYNN SMITH: Wow, so he really inspired his students then.

BOBBY GALVAN: Yes, he did. Did I show you a picture of his band?

LYNN SMITH: We will look at that in a minute.

BOBBY GALVAN: I will show it to you.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, that would be great.

LYNN SMITH: One of the things I wanted to ask you is how the Galvan family and the music here [in the Galvan Ballroom] interacted with the music scene in Northside, because there were jazz clubs in Northside were there not?

BOBBY GALVAN: Yes, but at that time, the town has really grown a lot, but was not that big then. Everybody had the chance to play all over. What was really popular at the time was the big band sound, it was really big then. My brothers and I, especially my brothers were such super musicians, they played outstanding, any style of music. Not only the boys, but the girls also, except because of tradition, my Dad would not let my sisters perform once they got married.

LYNN SMITH: I see, a very traditional family.

BOBBY GALVAN: Old traditions, but they were all very talented, just like my brothers.

LYNN SMITH: That's great. When you were little, living on N. Staples, can you tell me a little bit about what you remember about living in the Northside neighborhood?

BOBBY GALVAN: One thing I remember when I was little, every Juneteenth, June 19th, the date when they [African American slaves] received word that the slaves were free, the band would march from Solomon Coles School on Winnebago, west and then at N. Staples they would make a right turn and go to The Cut. We lived right there and we would see the band once a year until we finally moved.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

BOBBY GALVAN: I remember that very, very well.

LYNN SMITH: Did you like the music they played?

BOBBY GALVAN: At the time, they played a lot of marches, just a marching band. They were also super talented people.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. It is interesting because other people have told me that the band director was very fond of marches.

[Laughter]

BOBBY GALVAN: Yes, a wonderful band director.

LYNN SMITH: Are there any other things you remember about living in that neighborhood?

BOBBY GALVAN: Well, we were always practicing music and our Dad made us prepare for college.

LYNN SMITH: How was the neighborhood, who lived in the neighborhood, who were your friends? Who did you play with? I know it was a long time ago.

[Laughter]

BOBBY GALVAN: It was a long time ago, but to the best of my recollection, we were always busy with our own family. We had a few friends, but the majority of the time we spent with each other, practicing and studying.

BOBBY GALVAN: When we were in high school or right afterwards, my father-in-law, had the San Antonio Dry Goods Store on Leopard Street. My Dad, when he built the Galvan Building, he knew he wanted a dance hall upstairs, and that really helped fantastically, even today. But he also was concerned about leasing the building.

LYNN SMITH: The downstairs, the retail part?

BOBBY GALVAN: Yes, the downstairs retail part. So he had divided this into different compartments and he approached my father-in-law which is this gentleman right here [pointing to a photo].

LYNN SMITH: And this was before he was your father-in-law, right?

BOBBY GALVAN: Oh, yes, way before.

LYNN SMITH: And what was his name?

BOBBY GALVAN: Salvador Varela.

LYNN SMITH: Very Good, and what was his wife's name?

BOBBY GALVAN: Angela.

LYNN SMITH: And what was their daughter's name that you married?

BOBBY GALVAN: Alicia, and she was super smart. She went to school in Terre Haute, Indiana and she got her degree there. And then she taught school here for a while and then she left with a friend of hers to go to Florida and she became a buyer there for Jordan Marsh [Department Store]. Then finally my family and her family got together and their business was in the building for 51 years.

LYNN SMITH: And her family had King Furniture on the first floor of the Galvan Building?

BOBBY GALVAN: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: One of the things we talked about a little bit yesterday in our pre-interview was the philosophy of the Galvan Ballroom in terms of working with musicians and the community and different ethnicities.

BOBBY GALVAN: Right. One of the things that my Dad made clear, he was really thinking way ahead of his time. Anybody that wanted to could rent the ballroom. There was no discrimination of any kind. It was open to the public. Which was very, very smart because it really helped establish the place.

LYNN SMITH: He knew and your family knew people from Northside involved in music, right?

BOBBY GALVAN: Very well because he had a lot of rental properties all over. He invested a lot in real estate. He had a lot of properties in the black sections. And of course rented, but there is always a lot of problems, even today.

LYNN SMITH: So Elmo Crecy was one of the ones that your family knew?

BOBBY GALVAN: Yes, everyone knew Elmo, especially my brothers and my Dad. Elmo had the Down Beat Club which was very, very popular.

LYNN SMITH: So one of the things we have not really talked about is that although you were born at 1001 N. Staples, your family moved to another house.

BOBBY GALVAN: They moved to 403 Waco Street, it was around 1942.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BOBBY GALVAN: Around 1942.

LYNN SMITH: Who all lived in that home?

BOBBY GALVAN: My two older sisters were already married. So it was just seven children that lived in that house.

LYNN SMITH: And then that house is now located in Heritage Park, right?

BOBBY GALVAN: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: One thing that we have not talked about, but that I want to document is that we are sitting in the Galvan Music Store, and you are very, very active.

BOBBY GALVAN: Very active, yes.

LYNN SMITH: And you run it, and you are how old now?

BOBBY GALVAN: Eighty-six. I want to say that my father-in-law and mother-in-law, they started King Furniture down here [first floor of Galvan Building]. And we finally had a sale [going out of business sale], because my wife decided that was enough, but it lasted for years. We still have some signage that we kept, I will show it to you. My father was looking for a tenant. He asked my father-in-law [Salvador Varela] if he wanted to lease it and he agreed, so he became a tenant.

LYNN SMITH: You can't beat a long term tenant, and that was a long term, right?

BOBBY GALVAN: A long term.

LYNN SMITH: That's fabulous.

BOBBY GALVAN: He had this part and he did not have much of an education, but the irony is that when I was at Cheston Heath Elementary, the principal was Rose Shaw. My Dad told me that when he was at Cheston Heath, Rose Shaw was a brand new teacher at that time, and they named a school after her.

Edited Transcript of Mr. Bobby Galvan's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: Is there anything else you want to share with me this morning?

BOBBY GALVAN: Well, about the only thing is that my in-laws played a very important role because that really helped my father to have a tenant last so long.

LYNN SMITH: And a very successful tenant.

BOBBY GALVAN: Yes, a very successful, yes a super successful tenant. Before my Dad came over here, he used to have mines in Mexico, but you can't really do business with people in Mexico unfortunately. My Dad, before he started the ballroom, he had a fishing business here and in Matamoros, but it didn't work unfortunately, it didn't work out.

LYNN SMITH: But he kept at it.

BOBBY GALVAN: Oh yes, he was a doer.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BOBBY GALVAN: Oh yes, he was a doer.

LYNN SMITH: I really appreciate your time today.

BOBBY GALVAN: Listen, the lovely Lynn Smith, she has really been wonderful. I am sorry you didn't get a chance to meet my wife. She recently, about a month ago, broke her hip.

LYNN SMITH: I am so sorry.

BOBBY GALVAN: But she is walking and she is doing very, very well. It has been our pleasure to have you here.

LYNN SMITH: Thank you very much.

[End of Audio Recording for BOBBY GALVAN 04-24-2016]



Mrs. Marsha Shaw Hardeman's Edited Oral History Transcript

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I'm interviewing Marsha Shaw Hardeman for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on November 17, 2014 in Corpus Christi, Texas, and I'm interviewing Ms. Hardeman in order to learn more about her knowledge, and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. Would you, please, first just tell me your name, and when and where you were born?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: My name is Marsha Shaw Hardeman. I was born in Corpus, Christi, Texas on October 21st, 1948.

LYNN SMITH: Great. And you, in the pre-interview, you told me a little bit about how your grandmother got here. So, you want to start with that?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Right. Well, we always told stories, and we would always ask questions, but back then you -- you had to be very careful about 'cause you didn't interfere with grown people's talk is what they always said. So, one time -- but my grandmother -- we used to take naps in the afternoon, and she would always talk then. And so I would ask her everything, and I didn't realize the importance it would be later on. But I asked her about how she came to Corpus -- how did you all get here? She said that we came here on a train. The train came from one of the Carolina's. I can't remember which, North or South. And she said, and this is where it stopped. The train -- on the train with her was her mother and her grandmother. And, great-great-grandmother Mimms, and her mother was named Eula Booker. And we called her Nana. But I never met her, but in all the stories they called her Nana.

And Nana said, and Nana pretty much ran the household, and so she said -- they said the train, this is where the train is stopping. Everybody get off, and -- because we're not going any further. And so that's how my grandmother got to Corpus Christi. And so, -- and they built a life here. They built a house here, over the years. It didn't happen overnight.

And she met my -- my step-grandfather, her second husband, she met him here. And -- and she was -- she was married before, and her name was Green. Her husband was Gabriel Green, and he -- he was in a band, the Pickwick Band that was -- played around in different places, and he was from Louisiana, and so he didn't have a lot of stability as musicians go. And so -- they ended up getting a divorce, and that's how she met my step-grandfather, which he was the only grandfather I knew, which is Bill Williams. And so that's how her name is Susie Williams. And he -- he built the house. He was a great carpenter, fix-it guy, and he built their new -- their house, and -- that's where they lived, and that's where we would always go, and stay and hang out, and --

LYNN SMITH: And that was here in Washington-Coles neighborhood, right?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Right. It was at 1306 North Staples, and it's right down the street from Holy Cross Church. And that's how we got to become Catholic, because my grandparents were not Catholic. But Holy Cross was the closest school, and she knew that we would get a good education, because those nuns would make sure that y'all followed the rules. And so that's how my -- my mom and her brothers and sisters

came to Holy Cross, and that's how they became Catholic, and that's how we became Catholics, as their children. And so I'm glad we did, glad we did.

LYNN SMITH: Yeah. Alright so, then you were born here in Corpus Christi?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes. At Dr. White's Maternity Hospital, because, remember, we weren't allowed to go to the -- to the bigger hospitals, Spohn and Memorial, and I don't know that Spohn was there then, but, I know Memorial Hospital was, which was a county hospital. And so it was this white [Caucasian] doctor named Dr. White [laughter], and he -- and he serviced a lot of black people, and that's where my mom had me, and my two sisters, and I'm the middle, so that's why I am the way I am. But, anyway, And -- and that was in 1948, and that was 66 years ago.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And --

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And so, at that time y'all lived here in -- well, you moved when you were a young child, right? Didn't you live --

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Right.

LYNN SMITH: -- over on Sam Rankin at one time?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: We lived on Sam Rankin which was right -- some little apartments right behind the rental homes, right behind the funeral home. And we moved from there to -- I think that was probably when the public housing opened up, because -- from my recollection or just in talking with people on the Housing Authority Board that know the history, they -- it used to be military quarters. And so, they, -- and so they opened it up to families after the war. And -- and a lot of people moved there. A lot of -- a lot of black people moved there. And really they moved in different areas 'cause the black people moved here on the Northside. Hispanics moved over there closer to 19th [Street], and that corridor, west side corridor is what they call it now. And -- of course, most of the white people had homes, and so, -- and they moved further south as they are still doing. And so, it was just kind of the ebb and flow of the city. And, segregation was still enforced, and so -- that's just the way it was.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, okay. And you said -- didn't you go -- you were telling me something about Bethune Nursery School.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Oh, yes. I went there -- it was a nursery, because after the war -- young couples -- the women went out to work, and so if you weren't a domestic, you needed daycare for your children.

And so Bernice Leonard was one of the stalwarts here in the city and was very active in the community. She worked a lot with the YWCA, and the YWCA and they -- and the churches -- were pretty much responsible for getting daycare for black kids. And so, she was the driving force in opening Bethune Day Nursery. It started on Howard Street, which is not too far from here. And I can remember going there. And -- and I was probably between two and four, I think.

But you do have memories, because, from zero to three, you can remember. That's where the memory starts. And so, I can remember going there. I can remember it was very -- I can remember the smells in there. And sometimes I'll go in places nowadays, and that smell will hit me.

Now I don't know what they were cooking, vegetables or whatever. But, Miss Harris was the cook. Why I can remember that, I don't know. But she was real nice to me. And -- it was a fun place. And -- and so, you remember fun places.

And so once I finished there I came to Holy Cross [Catholic School], because they had -- back in the day what they called in pre-primer. But now they call it Pre-K. But I remember, since my birthday was in October, I couldn't start school -- you had to be five. And so I had to go to pre-primer. And I had the best teacher, Sister Victory. I'll never forget her. And she -- because I was like her pet. It was probably, because I was so young, younger than the others. And I remember her taking me into the convent. And nobody was ever allowed to go in the convent. And she took me into the convent, and I went inside the place where nobody else could go. And I still remember that. It was -- it was such a good, such a good memory. And she was like -- I held onto her all the time, and I was always, she was just my favorite. She was my favorite. And I remember all of my teachers. And I was telling my sisters that the other day. And they said, you remember that? And I said, yeah. Don't you remember your teachers? And they said -- "No." But I did remember them because it was good. It was so good -- I had really good times here at Holy Cross.

All of our teachers were very good. And one teacher, when I was in eighth grade, because that was our last year. I had Sister Cabrini. And she came back to do CCD [Confraternity of Christian Doctrine] here. And -- as an adult, I was talking to her, and I said, "Oh, sister, I am sorry for all the mean things I did to you in class" -- because I was a brat at that age. I mean, middle school, ugh. She said, Marsha, I don't remember a thing.

[Laughter]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And I said -- Thank you Sister.

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: -- yes. And so, it was wonderful

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: That was wonderful.

LYNN SMITH: All right. And then you went to Holy Cross through eighth grade. But before that, your music, your connection to music started. Tell me about that.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yeah. Well, in the school itself, the nuns taught us how to sing. Sister Georgina was our music teacher, and so -- but aside from that Mary Bell Martin taught music to a lot of the kids in the community. There were two music teachers. There was Mrs. Martin, and there was Miss Reed. And so, they kinda had, not a rivalry, but -- either you were Ms. Martin's student or Miss Reed's student. Well, we went to Ms. Martin, because she was a member of the church. She was my godmother. And she -- and she lived right across the street from the school. So it wasn't a problem for us to just go over there for music.

And her -- her mother was there, lived with her. And her mother's name was Hattie Little, and she -- she would always -- we would have to wait in line in order to get our lesson. So my sisters would go ahead, and I was always the last one. But I stayed in there, and we'd -- we talked in the kind of living room area. And would talk to her -- her mother wanted to talk, and I would listen, because she would tell these stories, and I'd love it, and she said that she had never lived anyplace else but Corpus Christi. She had always lived in Corpus Christi, and she would always talk about the things around here, because I think her husband was the coach driver for Dr. Spohn who founded Spohn Hospital.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And, and so, she would always just tell these stories that, I just sucked it up, because, I'm a history person. And so, I just loved knowing about what happened then, back then, and what led to this, and what led to that. History was my minor in college.

And so she was a real good influence on the history of Corpus Christi, and she said she'd never lived -- she doesn't remember ever living anyplace else, but Corpus Christi. And so I would think, how could you just live in one place all your life? And now, here I am. I've been here all my life, too. So it's easy to do.

[Laughter].

LYNN SMITH: Evidently.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So you were taking lessons at Mrs. Martin's, but you also were learning through the nuns. And the nuns taught you in a particular way, didn't you -- didn't they.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes, they did. The nuns were from Ireland, and we would always kinda laugh about the way they spoke 'cause it was different from Texas. And so, and so they would -- the nun, Sister Georgina, she had a pitch pipe. There was no piano or anything. We got a piano later on, but at the very beginning -- she had a pitch pipe. She'd say this is the song. She would sing it. Now this is your note. She would blow the note. And we better get it or else.

[Laughter]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And so -- we did. We made sure that we got the note. And people would always say, well, so you mean to tell me -- in later years they would ask, So you mean the Irish nuns taught you black students how to sing gospel. And it was kinda funny. I said, well, not really, because remember, gospel wasn't allowed in -- in the Catholic Church back then. But what she taught us was discipline, and she taught us how to harmonize. And that's how we learned gospel music, by harmonizing with the note that she told us to be on at that time. And when we would sing in different voices, the altos, the seconds [second sopranos] -- she would never let us close our ears. She said you always need to listen to what the other people are singing so you will know how your part blends with theirs.

And that's really how -- it comes back to you, as an adult, because that's how we harmonized. And my sisters and cousin are here in the choir with us, and we sing together now. And, everybody will say, well, how do y'all know what to do, and how to sing gospel -- we've been singing together since we were in first grade, so

we know what somebody's gonna sing, and where to be, and what to do -- and so, it -- it just sort of fell on me to -- to be the director. I mean, because nobody else would do it, and so --

LYNN SMITH: Well, you told me --

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: -- and I'm so glad they didn't.

LYNN SMITH: You told me a while ago that -- how your mother encouraged you.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes, my mother encouraged me. My mother encouraged me 'cause I was complaining about how (after Vatican II) we were all awry, because we didn't know what to do. And so we didn't know what to sing.

And we didn't know what was acceptable, and -- and so, I was always complaining about how nobody would sing, and -- and I said, somebody oughta get up there, and tell 'em what the page numbers are, or somebody, and somebody, and somebody. And my mother -- my mother said, well, you oughta. Why can't you do it? And, you're here complaining. Do something about it.

And so, -- and that was kinda my mother's thing. She didn't like complaining. She said, don't complain if you're not able to solve the problem. And so that's how I just kinda fell into it, and -- and the rest is history. And I've been doing it for over 30 years, and longer than that probably 'cause I was still kind of in college, so - or at the beginning of my teaching career. So that was in '71, 1971, so it's been a long time.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And -- and I really didn't really take it over until maybe 30 years ago, so --

LYNN SMITH: A mere 30 years ago.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: A mere 30 years, yeah. It's been -- it's been a little short time, but it's -- it's been a fun -- it's been a wild ride. We've gone through several musicians, because I had to go to other churches to find musicians. And finally we -- the last musician that we had -- she -- I stole her from the Methodist church. And she was a substitute teacher. And she subbed in my classroom one time.

And so, we got to talking. Well, where do you go to church and what? And so she -- she said she played for St. Paul Methodist Church. And I said, oh, you play? Oh, well, we need to talk. And then I got her, and we had her for 15 years.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: She passed away a few years ago. But she was so good, and she taught me so much, and -- and because I didn't know how to play. I knew Chopsticks and Happy Birthday to You, and the first six bars of Moonlight Sonata, and that's all I remember doing. I stopped at Moonlight Sonata, because Ms. Martin died. And so I -- I couldn't -- I didn't do it.

LYNN SMITH: So I -- I'm -- I'm curious. I'm a little bit off script here, but at this point, are you all acapella, or do you -- or do you play organ, or do you have a musician, or, you're all acapella?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: We don't have a musician. We don't do acapella. What we do is technology.

LYNN SMITH: Uh-huh.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: We -- and people still laugh at us. We use a floppy disk, and -- and we got -- Monsignor Higgins, when he was here he purchased this [an electronic piano] for us. We got a donation from this man in Refugio that was a protégé of Monsignor Higgins. And he bought this for us. It was \$4,000. That was always so much money.

LYNN SMITH: And let me just kind of clarify for anybody listening, since they're not here. We're -- we're actually sitting in Holy Cross Catholic Church --

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And Marsha's at the keyboard.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes. And we --

LYNN SMITH: So --

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: -- we have these old floppy disks which you can record on - - on the piano, and that's how we -- that's how we play.

LYNN SMITH: You accompany yourself.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: We accompany ourselves. And -- and a lot of these recordings are from our -- Gloria Sneed, who was our last musician. And then -- and then, now, we just -- I just kinda go around, and beg people to play something for us, and we still have 'em. And so, every time somebody else comes, and they say; you're still using those floppy disks? And -- but that's what the piano calls for.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing] Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Now it has -- it has something else now that is more computerized, and more digital, but it's over my head 'cause I'm [laughter] --not technical

LYNN SMITH: But the floppy disks are still working.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: The floppy disks still work, and I guard 'em with my life. And we have copies of them. And we tried to do it on CD, but it never -- the sound never did sound right to me. And so --

LYNN SMITH: Interesting.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yeah. So we still have these. So I -- I guard it. If anything ever happened to these we would be in dire trouble.

LYNN SMITH: You would be out searching for musicians it sounds like.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes, yes. Local musicians who play gospel music are few and far between and a lot of them play at more than one church.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Well, one other thing that I wanted to kinda ask you about is your -- your perspective of changes in the neighborhood over time. And one of the things you said was Vatican II changed the Church [Catholic Church].

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Right.

LYNN SMITH: And -- I don't know if you want to say anymore about that. And then, and then -- well, you start with that. Do you want to say anymore?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: No. When Vatican II changed the Church [Catholic Church], our church became more multicultural. And so, it kind of changed the dynamics of -- of things, because the dynamics of the neighborhood had changed. But we still had our -- our place. We still had Holy Cross Church which was the diamond in the rough.

There were -- since this was a multiracial church -- the other black churches in this neighborhood, and in the black community were not multiracial. So we were kind of the stepchild, I am guessing, probably because they didn't trust -- (what adults used to say to me and by then I was adult) -- we don't trust y'all, because y'all's hierarchy are not black people, and -- they're not going to have our best interests at heart.

And I say, well, we never had a problem with it. So, we can work together. And so, I've kind of reached out anytime we have an event or do something, over the years. My number one priority was to reach out to the other churches, no matter what color, no matter what -- the other black churches chose to do--

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: So that we can be partners. Over the years we've -- come together in one accord. But back in the day, it seemed that they didn't want to have anything to do with us Catholics. And -- I concluded, in speaking with black non-Catholics and the black clergy, that they didn't trust the white men of the Catholic clergy. And -- I was told that the vestments worn by the Catholic clergy seemed mysterious, and seemed akin to Voo-doo practices, and it was probably not something they were used to. And so -- because we didn't really have any of that in the black protestant churches, it caused many of them to be suspicious of the Catholic Church.

Many of the non-Catholic clergy would not accept invitations to come over -- to visit Holy Cross, because -- there was no black clergy presiding. As Catholics would marry non-Catholics, more non-Catholics would feel more comfortable in participating in Catholic Church functions such as fund raisers, parish dinners, and musical programs.

I remember when I got married I wanted his Baptist pastor to be a part of the ceremony. And he refused to participate in a Catholic Church function.

And so -- but it worked out. God was in charge of it, not us; and so he worked it out, and so, we've been married for over 40 years. So --

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yeah. We just had an anniversary last week, I think, yeah. Went to Pizza Hut. Oops.

LYNN SMITH: [Laughter]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Whoopee. [Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Big spender. But anyway --

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Hey, good pizza's hard to beat.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Laughter] Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: All right. So, and then -- the other thing you were going to talk about a little bit, I think, was just changes in the neighborhood over time, and what you saw happening, because of various factors.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: I can remember growing up and we would walk to my grandmother's house after school, which was right down the street. There were a lot of businesses. There was a barber shop there, Graham's Barber Shop were my daddy worked there as a barber.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And, we'd get to see him-- wave to him as we passed by the open door because there was no air conditioning. We'd have to go in order, and my older sister, and she'd pass by first and say, "Hi, daddy." Then she'd go on. And then I'd go by and say, "Hi, daddy." Then my younger sister would pass by and say, "Hi daddy."

And then the barbers would tease him. They would say, "you got all those girls, and you can't even cut their hair 'cause you don't have any boys."

So another thing that I remember was when the freeway came through, when 37 [Interstate 37] came through, the businesses just left. I mean -- people moved out of the neighborhood because land was purchased for the expressway. I remember my grandmother saying that you had to take what they offered you for your land and they were told it was called urban renewal. Well, my grandmother moved out of the neighborhood and moved to D.N. Leathers as a result of the expressway construction. We had been living in public housing at -- Leathers [D.N. Leathers Housing Project] but we moved from there when I was in third or fourth grade. So that was probably in 1955. And we moved south to -- it was called Greenwood Park.

And there were brand new houses [at Greenwood Park]. And, usually people couldn't get a brand new house that nobody had ever lived in, especially black people. And so, it was -- it was an anomaly for us, because, it was very hard to get a loan. You had to have impeccable credit, and there was no mortgage company in Corpus Christi that would finance the houses. Ultimately, we had to use a mortgage company in the Valley that would give loans to blacks. So -- 'cause I can remember my daddy saying this every time we got the bill. He would say, we have to go to McAllen. It was either McAllen or Harlingen.

And the streets in Greenwood Park were all named after trees. And we lived on Birch Street. The first street was Sycamore, then Birch, then Hemlock, then Hickory. Then the last street was Bois D'Arc, and the side street was called Blackjack. And -- I remember that being a good learning experience for us, because, we

never really talked about trees that did not grow locally. And my mom made it -- one of her things was for us to learn about those trees,

There was no grass in our yard, and we would go out there before we moved in. The builders would put the grass in, the little squares. I can remember.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And we'd have to go every night and -- and water and it was fun to do. It was -- we would always pass by the bread store on the way, and [laughter] the bakery, and we'd buy bread from 'em, because it was real cheap, because he bought it from the bakery rather than the store. And my mother would buy bread, and it would be dinnertime but she had gotten off from work, and so she would -- and my grandmother would be with us, and we'd water the grass, and eat bread, and water.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Oh, dear.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Oh, yeah. And my mom worked at Lichtenstein's Department Store -- one of the few places that hired blacks at that time. It was owned by a prominent Jewish family that was sympathetic to blacks and who treated black customers with the same respect as their other customers.

And my mom began as the elevator operator and then from there she went to the Gift Wrap Department. And the word got around that she was a gifted seamstress and so she went to the Alteration Department. And she worked in there, and she was real good at alterations, and she made all of our clothes. And she finally moved up to be the manager of the department.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And, yeah. And she was -- my mom was very quiet and gentle, a very unassuming person. My Mom is 89.

A lot of black females were able to go into Lichtenstein's, who was a good employer of minorities, and -- and that's how they advanced. And that was one way that we got to purchase the house in Greenwood Park, because our family had two incomes. My dad had always worked two jobs. We didn't see much of him because he was always working, except for Sundays when we went to Mass as a family. He wanted us to be better off than his dad did because his dad lived on the family property, so, he didn't have to worry about getting a house, and all that.

But -- after the war and everything, times changed. And so he knew he had to provide for, for his family. And so, -- that's how a lot of the Northside neighborhood changed, because the families were able to move out -- they were teachers and professionals. They moved to Hillcrest or on the other side of town, and the other side of the freeway.

And - and so, a lot of places were left vacant. And a lot of places were closed, because of the building of the freeway, and a lot of the businesses had to close down, because they didn't have a whole lot of clientele anymore. And -- because I remember this store, that used to be Callahan's, it became a Hispanic owned store and the family lived behind the store—

LYNN SMITH: Which, which store is that?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: -- in the 1950s it changed ownership. In the late 1960s, it was called the Blue Front, but back in the day it was Galan's. I think it still has their name on it.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: It was Galan's Grocery. 'Cause we would go in there after school, and buy pickles for a nickel, and things. They would sell those -- they called 'em chicharrones, but we called them cracklings, and they were just fried pig skin.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And -- but they were so good. They hurt so good, but they -- and -- they moved into the neighborhood early on. But that store used to be a black store, and it was called Callahan's. And -- that was part of the -- evolving. They had a hand painted sign there that said -- it seems like the sign said "since 1946." But I don't remember it. I just remember Callahan's store. But my memory is not all that great.

There was a movie theater there, the Harlem Theater. That was where I first saw my first movie, "Lady and the Tramp." And I'll never forget, my aunt took us, and it was just totally -- wonderful, 'cause it was right down the street and was walking distance from my grandmother's house. And there was -- the ILA [International Longshoremen Association] Hall was there. And so --

LYNN SMITH: And that was International Longshoremen, right?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing] And it was always abuzz with people coming in and out, and going places. That's how they got assigned to ships to work to unload and load cargo. We children were not allowed to go on that side of the street because of all the men over there.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And my grandmother had a little store. And -- my grandfather really started it, but, once he died, my grandmother had to -- kind of take over. And it was just a little five and dime. She sold candy, and -- and things like that.

LYNN SMITH: All right. Can you tell me, about where was it located in relation to the house? How did all that work?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: The store was -- there was a covered walkway, kind of like a trellis, for maybe 10 yards from a side door of -- my grandmother's house. And it led to the store. And I don't even think the store had a name. If it did, it was Williams' Store or something 'cause that was my grandfather's last name, my grandmother's last name.

And they just sold candy and cookies, and little -- some canned goods, but not a lot. Just -- just very minimal food, and it was just kind of a little storefront store. And it was right there next to my grandmother's house. And we would always go in there and get free candy.

LYNN SMITH: All right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: We loved that part.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Hard to make a profit when you're giving your grandchildren free candy --

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Right, right.

LYNN SMITH: -- I imagine.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: And, she had a bunch of grandchildren.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, that's great. Okay. Well, let's go back a little bit about Holy Cross, because you told me that you were baptized here [Holy Cross Church], right?

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: I was baptized here.

LYNN SMITH: And then, you had some interesting things to say about when you were confirmed here.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: When I was confirmed, I was confirmed at ten years old. And --at that time my daddy was not Catholic. And it never became a problem, only when he went home to Refugio, because everybody in the family there was Baptist. And so they made jokes about Catholics etc. And we would hear it but, my mother said, just don't listen to it, just ignore it.

One of my Dad's uncles, the patriarch kinda of the family, Uncle Noel Shaw, he worked for the O'Connor's who were big time Catholics in Refugio. And so they kept talking to him about it, and he -- anyway, he ended up converting to Catholicism. We all respected and liked my uncle. And so when he became a Catholic, they accepted it, because he was the patriarch of the family, so there's no talking about it. So, he would always talk to my daddy about being Catholic. And so when my daddy married my mom, who was already Catholic, he started secretly taking instructions from the pastor at Holy Cross. He always wanted to come to Mass with us, but he didn't because it wasn't the same if you don't know what's going on.

And so, he started taking instructions about being a Catholic from our pastor at Holy Cross, but he never told my mom about it. And so, when I was going to be confirmed -- we were all getting ready to go to the confirmation -- he said, well, I'm gonna make my confirmation, too. And she said, Milton, what are you talking about? And he said, well, I'm going to be baptized today, and I'm going to be confirmed today with Marsha, because I've been taking instructions from the priest.

And, oh, it was just such a glorious day. So we started going to Mass together, and my daddy got real active in the church [Catholic Church], and he was president of St. Vincent de Paul Society, which is the Works of Mercy Ministry. And he was just an usher, and very active in the church.

My parents were married here at Holy Cross, and so that made me happy about being married here in this church as well. Of course, my husband's Baptist too, but there wasn't that -- separation, because he accepted Catholicism. He accepted me. He -- wasn't afraid to come to Mass. He wasn't treated differently. And so, it was easier, to do it in the '70s than it was to do it back in the '40s and '50s

So that was a good, good story I like to tell, because along with my mom, my dad became very active in the church. He did pretty much everything, and he got the Men's Club together and he was, always there doing -- working within the church. And so that's probably where I got it from too.

But, no matter what church it was, -- our family was always active because my grandmother was very active in her church in Refugio, Mt. Pilgrim Baptist Church. And so when you see your elders and your parents working in the church, it becomes what you've got to, too. And so, that's how to keep it going.

LYNN SMITH: There you go. Okay.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Well, there was one other thing we talked about in the pre-interview that I don't know if you want to talk about. But you talked about a lake, kind of a lake in -- in Washington-Coles or Northside. Do you want to --

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yeah. There was a lake in the -- in the public housing. It was close to public housing. And it was a lake that ran from T.C. Ayres, from Winnebago Street, really, all the way to the railroad tracks. And it was grown up with bushes, and trees, and things, and -- there was always a flow of water. You could always hear it.

And -- and we were forbidden to go there, as kids, because it was like a swamp, really. You think on it as an adult. It was a swamp, so anything could happen to you. And there was a lot of mold on the rocks. You could cross over -- from one side to the other, but it was always real muddy, and when you did the crossover, the mold was there, and so, it made it real slippery. And so you could fall in at any time. It wasn't very deep, but it was dangerous.

I mean, there could have been snakes there. There probably were snakes there and frogs, and things that -- we were too young to understand the dangers there. But we had a cousin, and he was the only boy of our group. And so he would take us down there to the lake and -- we were "going exploring" doing something that we weren't supposed to be doing. And it was -- very clandestine, and don't tell anybody, and don't tell your mom. And I think back on it now, and it stunk to high heaven, because it was sewage coming down there, too. I mean --

LYNN SMITH: Ewh.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: -- I remember there were possums down there. This possum was there, and the possum had babies but -- the possum had died and the babies were dead also. So my sister Gloria and her cousin, Deborah, got a stick or something, and pulled the babies out of the possum because they felt bad that the babies were dead and they wanted to give them a proper burial. I mean, they could have caught anything. It was -- it was just awful. But they put the babies in a box, buried them, put flowers around the grave and put a cross to mark the grave.

And so, we were never allowed to go there again. We were never supposed to tell that we went. But it was really kind of awful that it was right there in the neighborhood, and so close to where we lived. And, I think about those things now. It never would have, it never would have happened now.

LYNN SMITH: So it's gone now? I mean, it's not swamp now.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Oh, yeah. They cemented it in -- a long, long time ago. And, I think I was still probably in high-school -- so it had to have been the '60s or '70s.

The sewage plant was there, too. And, and we would always go over there, and -- we couldn't get close to it. But we would look at it 'cause we couldn't believe that that's where the -- that's where the waste -- when you flushed the toilet, that's where it went. I think it's still there. But it seems like they did something to it to make it better or something. I don't know.

LYNN SMITH: Not as dangerous, maybe.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Right. And not as smelly -- 'cause it smelled really bad. And -- at certain times of the day it was -- I guess when the wind would change it was worse. But it was an open huge tank -- probably about as big as this church. And it was an open type tank -- I can just remember it had this filter thing in it that was running water to rotate around like that all the time.

[laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Your parents were probably smart to forbid you to go there.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Right. Exactly, exactly. I don't think they knew. To this day they don't know, so they can't read this.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Well, one other thing that I just thought of that I wanted to just touch on, is that we were talking about the '60s.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And Vatican II was in the '60s, but also the Holy Cross School. That was when that closed in the '60s.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Would you tell us kind of what happened there? Why it closed, and -- or your perception of why it closed.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yeah. We weren't told a whole lot I remember. It seems like some official from the Diocese came. And so they came one day. My sister was still attending school at Holy Cross. And my other sister and I were already at Incarnate Word Academy. So the powers that be came one day, and said the school's closing. We're taking the nuns out. Because after Vatican II the nuns were -- could be paid. And we couldn't sustain them as a parish by paying them. So they said the nuns are going back to San Antonio so they can receive a salary. And the school is closing, because the parish can't afford it, and you need to go find somewhere else to put your kids.

A lot of the kids went to public school. My sister and a couple of others that were still here went to Sacred Heart School, and they accepted them, and then -- that was another thing. Are these other schools gonna accept you? I remember one went to Christ the King. And it was a big deal, because Christ the King Elementary was a predominantly white school and neighborhood. We didn't have to worry about integration at Holy Cross Catholic School because pretty much all the students were black. That was about the time when integration was being implemented nationally.

And so, my younger sister went to Sacred Heart Elementary which was multiracial. And my sister and the other Catholic black children -- they blended in and got along. It was okay, because we had the church as our, as our kind of blanket. So, so we were all Catholic, so that was fine. And so, it kind of worked out. I know some people it didn't work out for, but it worked for our family. And my sister ended up going to Incarnate Word Academy, and a lot of those girls went to Incarnate Word, too.

And so, she still had lifelong relationships with a lot of those girls that she met. And that was the thing, too, about going to Incarnate Word. I mean, you could -- it was like any other place. It was better, because we had the blanket of the church around us, so -- so a lot of the nuns -- they didn't stand for discrimination. Some of 'em did, because that's how they were raised. But that's -- life. We adapted. We knew that we were in a safe place.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: I still have four of my teachers that I had in high school that are there. And I always see them, 'cause when I started teaching at Central Catholic in -- at the end of my retirement, I would go to Mass over there. And so I'd see them. It was such -- it was so good to see 'em, and talk to 'em. And they came to Holy Cross when we celebrated our Centennial [Centennial Jubilee September 14, 2014 – Holy

Cross Catholic Church]. So that was good. But I have lifelong friends that I met at Incarnate Word -- in fact, my very best friend, Kathy, we met in seventh grade, and we're still friends. We still see each other. She was in my wedding. I was in her wedding. Our kids grew up together. And I love telling that story about her, because she was such a joy. It was a myth of what you would see on TV about racism and such, and what we were living. It was totally different. God's hand was in it. And it showed me that it depends on the person. It's not the skin color. It's the person. You know, you -- you gotta be the one in the room, you have to be the bigger person, -- and my parents didn't preach that. They, they lived it. And, and, and that's how we've come together, too -- that's what we were taught, and that's what we believe. That's what we come to Mass for, and supposed to get fulfilled every time? So, you just have to pray for them.

And it takes maturity, I mean, because it took me a long time. Because I was ready to fight in a minute. But, you grow in your faith. And, you mature in your faith. And you mature as a parent, as a grandparent, and -- so, anyway.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Well, that sounds like a wonderful note to end on unless there's --

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: -- something else you want to add.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: No.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: But I'll get your address, and I'll probably think of something in the middle --

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: -- of the night, and --

LYNN SMITH: That's all right.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: -- write it; email it to you, or something.

LYNN SMITH: Thank you so much.

MARSHA SHAW HARDEMAN: Thank you.

[End of Audio Recording for Lynn Smith - Marsha Shaw Hardeman]

Mr. Willie Hardeman's Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 10: Willie Hardeman in 2014



Photographer: C. Lynn Smith, HNTB

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith interviewing Mr. Willie Hardeman for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on November 23rd, 2014 in Corpus Christi, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Hardeman in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to

the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. First, please tell me your name and when and where you were born.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: My name is Willie R. Hardeman and I was born here in Corpus Christi, Texas at 904 Parkers Alley in 1941.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And you lived in the neighborhood pretty much your whole life, right?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yes, [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And so, tell me a little bit about when you were a child, and where you lived and what you did.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: What I recall as a child growing up in the neighborhood was that -- we had -- because we had to have our own [African American] businesses at the time own restaurants, the things that would sustain the neighborhood. We had a theater. We had a Regales, was the name -- the name was Regales Confectionary where they sold hamburgers. And we'd get ice cream, different things like that.

Then we had Martin's Photographic Studio that was right next door. Then there was a Callahan's Grocery Store. It was a full-service grocery store. It had meats and all the canned goods, the vegetables, and everything.

And on some weekends I would work for Callahan's delivering sale papers throughout the neighborhood. We would get 50 cents to -- and we would walk for probably half a day through the Northside neighborhood. That would include the Northside area around Washington Elementary School, Solomon Coles High School, and the first two streets in the Hillcrest neighborhood, and throughout the projects, placing sales papers in -- in the mailboxes.

And I had one job working for what was called Baker Boy Donuts. I would go door-to-door selling donuts for 50 cents a dozen every Saturday.

At the time I was growing up in this neighborhood we had no Whataburger or McDonalds, so there was no other place you could work. We had an HEB that was up on the corner of Leopard and Port Avenue where currently the Frost Bank sits. That was HEB. HEB moved about a -- I guess a block or two further down the street to a larger area. So, there were really no areas and no jobs available other than the little jobs working in -- within the community itself, delivering the sales papers.

I remember within that area called The Cut -- identified as The Cut. We had Bob's -- Bob Toot's where he would sell beans and sausage meats. And I think for 15 or 30 cents you could get a plate of beans and sausage and a slice of bread.

We -- in order to have earned money to go to the movies, every Saturday morning I would wake up, get me a shopping bag, and walk all through the neighborhoods, picking up any glass bottles that could be turned in for a nickel apiece. I would pick those up and take them to the grocery store on the corner here of North Staples. Galan's I think they were called at the time.

You could take them there and he would buy them for 50 -- I mean 5 cents apiece. And then I -- I -- at the time the cost of the movies, as I remember, was 15 cents. And I could get a Baby Ruth [candy bar] and a

soda for 10 cents. So I would earn 50 cents maybe recycling the glass bottles and then I could go to the movies.

We -- at the time I was growing up in the neighborhood, we didn't really have a ballpark. But the Booker T. Washington Elementary School had a large field behind it. And that's where we would play baseball or football. Other than that we would play football in the street. And we ended up with a lot of stubbed toes 'cause we would play with no shoes. But we played barefoot on the gravel. And prior to some of the gravel being laid down, we had shale streets. So we'd always stub our toes running barefoot.

Played a lot of cowboy and Indians games running through the neighborhood. So we got to know all of the neighbors. And all of the mothers knew all of the kids. And if anyone was acting up at some other neighbor's house, by the time you got home your mother would know and she'd say, well, Miss Williams or Miss Jones told me that you were throwing rocks.

So we had -- when they talk about it takes a neighborhood to raise a child, we definitely had neighborhoods where the kids -- we knew the parent of every child we played with. And my parents knew the name of every parent of every child that we played with. So it really was a tight community at the time.

I also remember that at the time I was growing up here, we had what we called the Uptown Area. And that was on Leopard Street. And then we had the Downtown Area. And that was down Chaparral, that area down there where they had the Lichtenstein's and the Fedway and the J.C. Penneys stores.

Every Saturday one of the things my mother would have me do is go pay the bills. So I would walk from the Uptown Area to the Downtown Area and pay the bills at J.C. Penney's, and any other bills she would give me to pay.

At the time, Sears was located Leopard Street, so that's where we did a lot of shopping. We could walk to Sears 'cause they were here in the neighborhood.

I recall it being a very tight-knit neighborhood. This is at a time when, if your neighbor needed a cup of sugar to complete a cake or needed an egg, they would come knock on the door and say, can I borrow a cup of sugar or a cup of flour or get an egg or a slice of bread?

In the neighborhood we had two churches. St. Matthew Baptist Church, was on the corner of Chipito and Waco. And right around the corner St. John Baptist Church was located on Ramirez Street.

When I was the third grade, I attended school half days, from 8:00 AM to 12: 00 PM because -- did I say that already? Did I mention that? I just -- that was another conversation.

LYNN SMITH: No.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Okay.

LYNN SMITH: Yeah, go for it.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: And I remember attending school during the third and fourth grade years from 8:00 AM 'til 12:00 PM. At that time there was a shortage of both classrooms and teachers for the black school. And so they only had one elementary school here at that time, and that was Booker T. Washington. Later they built George Washington Carver Elementary out in the New Addition area.

At the time I was growing up here on the Northside there were very limited neighborhoods where blacks could find housing or would be able to move. So, pretty much, black people were limited to this side of town.

The teachers, the professional people [African American professionals] that worked here in Corpus all lived in the neighborhood, so in many instances your teacher lived right down the street from you or right around the corner. And we -- until they built Oakwood, Greenwood Park, Hill -- I mean, Molina, and the New Addition, all of the African American Housing was here on the Northside.

If we had to catch a bus -- I don't remember a bus actually coming through the neighborhood. We would have to walk up Leopard Street to catch the bus. And at the time that I did ride the bus I remember having to walk to the rear of the bus, past the white line by the rear door. It didn't make any difference how many empty seats were up front. If -- if there were no seats available, you would stand up for wherever you were going at that time.

We also had at that time a hotel in the area called the -- Savoy. And it was owned by King, Lonnie King. He had at that time the King Cab stand located in the same area.

And around the corner from him was Crecy with -- next door, rather, was Crecy's club, the Down Beat. And then we had Crecy Cab Company, I believe that was the name of it, right around the corner on North Staples.

We had a couple of small mom and pop grocery stores in the neighborhood. I believe they were owned by Henry Garza. They were not as large as the Callahan store.

And I remember when I lived in the D.N. Leathers project housing unit, there was a store right on the corner of Winnebago and Lake Street. And it was called Ray's. And I remember as a child growing up, my mother would send me over to Ray's to get sugar, or bread, or lunch meat. And then I would sign the slip. And when my father got paid he would go over and pay whatever we owed for the items I had purchased.

LYNN SMITH: So you lived on Parkers Alley in 1941, when you were a baby until you were two years old. And then y'all moved to the D. N. Leathers housing projects, right?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: And then what happened so that you moved from the projects?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: I left the projects or we moved from the projects because my father began working at Reynolds Aluminum Company. And they said at the time that he made too much money to live in the projects. So we moved over on Ramirez Street. And we lived on Ramirez until I was 13. I believe I was probably about 10 years old at the time I moved from the projects.

But -- and then after we left Ramirez they opened up what they called the Greenwood Park Neighborhood. My father bought a home out in Greenwood. And I lived there until I left Corpus in 1978, moving to Northern Virginia. Wonder if I forgot, I entered the military.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Well, tell us a little bit about that.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: What year did you go in the military?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: I entered the -- I was in the Air Force. In 1962 I entered the U.S. Air Force.

LYNN SMITH: During the Vietnam War.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: During the Vietnam War. And I spent four years in the U.S. Air Force. I was stationed first in Washington, D.C. at Andrews Air Force Base. And during that particular experience I had an opportunity to see the then President John F. Kennedy. I was a military policeman, so I was standing guard as Air Force One came into Andrews Air Force Base. So I was standing guard and I saw the President and the First Lady when they exited the airplane and got in the limo to exit the Base. I was -- happened to be standing at the gate. First eye-view of the President at the time. Very exciting.

And then from Andrews -- I spent two years at Andrews and then I was transferred from Andrews to Lackland Air Force Base where I worked for two years as a guard at the military confinement center there in San Antonio.

And after getting out of the Air Force -- I mean leaving the Air Force in 1966, I returned to Corpus and at that time I moved to the Greenwood neighborhood. And I first started working as a waiter at the Corpus Christi Town Club. I left there and began working at the Corpus Christi Army Depot. And in 1978 I was selected for an internship at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

So I left Corpus Christi in 1978 and moved to the Northern Virginia area. And returned to Corpus in 1984. And then left, I returned to Corpus in February of 1984 to work at the Depot in the personnel career field. And then about six months later, after a job that they promised me didn't come through, I went back to the Pentagon. I returned back to the Secretary of the Army Personnel Management Office there in the Pentagon.

And then I remained in the Washington, D.C. area until 1995. And then I was -- the office I was working in -- I worked for the Federal Aviation Administration in Washington, D.C. in the Personnel Office. And then I was transferred from Washington to Atlanta, Georgia, and worked there from '95 to 1997. Retired and returned back to Corpus Christi in '97. And been here since.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: All right. And you have family here, right? Pretty --

WILLIE HARDEMAN: I have -- I have one son here. My youngest son is here. I have five boys from my first marriage, my wife died in 1998 --

LYNN SMITH: I'm sorry.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: -- I remarried 13 years later. And the lady I married had two boys and I had five, so now I've got a blended family of seven boys and 18 grandkids.

LYNN SMITH: That's a lot of grandkids.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: I hope you're saving for Christmas.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Oh, yeah. I got -- they get -- they give -- they start giving me a Christmas list. So I tell 'em it's easier for me to just give 'em the money and let them do their own shopping.

LYNN SMITH: I can understand that.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Mm-hmm.

LYNN SMITH: is there anything else? I think we -- we kinda went from elementary school, but we really didn't talk too much about your junior high and high school time.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Oh, okay.

LYNN SMITH: You wanna -- tell us a little bit about that?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Junior high was at the Solomon Melvin Coles High School. At the time, the high school and junior high were combined at Solomon Coles for blacks in the area. I can recall seeing yellow buses lined up at the school where they kids from Alice, Robstown, Sinton -- I guess within a 50-mile radius of Corpus, all the black kids who lived in those towns would be sent to high school here in Corpus, or junior high here in Corpus. So I could recall seeing all those yellow buses lined up all day for those kids.

And then when schools were integrated in 1954 I remember they called a meeting at Solomon Coles. I was in the tenth grade at the time. And Thurgood Marshall came down, who was the Attorney at the time for the NAACP.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

WILLIE HARDEMAN: He came down and held a meeting with the parents at Solomon Coles. And at the time he said he was here in Corpus to go to the school board and talk to them because they had delayed integrating the schools. At that time, what they were doing in Corpus, the Hispanic community or the Hispanics in the city at that time were being identified as Anglo. And then they would send reports saying, saying that Miller High School, for example, and some of the local elementary schools on the Northside were segregated -- were integrated, rather, because there were blacks and Anglos attending the schools [together].

So when they came down they found that they -- because they were identifying the Hispanics as Anglos, there was -- they were misleading the government. So I think in '74 the steelworkers filed a lawsuit -- no, no. They filed the lawsuit in the '50s -- I believe my dates may be wrong -- against the CCISD, the Corpus Christi Independent School District, which was eventually settled in 1974, some 20 years later, where the schools now are considered to be completely integrated.

And they were trying to stay with the neighborhood school concept. But that was hard to do when the schools were integrated in the '50s, and the neighborhoods were segregated until 1968. And the biggest problem in Corpus that I see is one of economics more so than anything else. If you don't have a decent job that will allow you to move out of certain neighborhoods into better housing, you get caught up in that so you can never have neighborhood schools if you don't have jobs.

And that's probably one of the things in -- let's see. I went from -- well, I didn't finish my story on Thurgood Marshall.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: That's okay. Finish that one.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Okay. Anyway, Thurgood Marshall came and he spoke to the parents and some of the students at Coles, and said he was gonna go to talk to the school board and tell them if they didn't go ahead and integrate their schools that he was gonna file a lawsuit against them, coming from the NAACP.

So then one of the things he said was, now if I get them to say okay, they're gonna integrate, I've got to have kids who are willing to go. So my mother said okay. My son will go. So --

LYNN SMITH: So, she volunteered you.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah, she volunteered. In the middle of the school year, in the middle of my 10th grade year, I transferred from Solomon Coles to W. B. Ray which was a tremendous culture shock for me because here I was. Had been on the Northside all of my life. Suddenly I'm gonna be attending school on the South Side, a school to me that was so big and they had everything. They had things I had never seen before.

And my expectation was that that the difficulty would be with the Anglo students. They would not accept us. And the problem really was with the teachers. The bi-- I didn't expect the teachers to be biased. And then I ran into a lot of that. But, as a child -- at the time I was 13 years old -- 13 -- 14 in the 10th year, going to the 10th grade. So it was kind of hard to, to -- you know, you are -- every class I was assigned to, I was given a seat on the back row. So it was kinda like okay, you sit at the back of the class.

So the expectation was not that great. Then, when they built Mary Carroll High School, I was one of the -- in one of the first classes there as a -- I went to Carroll as a junior, and graduated in the first graduating class in 1959.

My guidance counselor throughout the two years I spent at Carroll never talked to me, asked me anything about college or what my plans were. She called me in and said, okay, you've got enough credits to graduate, and that's it. I never saw her again.

And I played football at Carroll for two years, and I remember the first year the coaches came to all the black players. There were -- seven of us on the varsity. And the coaches called us to a meeting and said, okay, this week we were playing in Houston. Y'all can't go. Y'all are gonna have to stay home because the Houston Independent School District does not allow black and white kids to play on the same football field. So y'all can't go.

And I think they were playing a school name Westchester or Winchester or something. But anyway, when they came back, when they were showing the game film that Sunday, they said, boy, if you guys could have played, we could have won that game. So I -- I kinda got an attitude. I thought, well, the coaches should never schedule with a team where they know we can't play. But the adjustments you make as a child coming from an area where you had to do without -- but none of us felt -- realized we were poor because we're all in the same condition. It didn't make no difference whether it was a school teacher or -- at that time a lot of the blacks who had college degrees were working at the Post Office, or working at Reynolds [Aluminum Company], and as soon as they fully integrated the schools, they left those jobs and went into teaching where they had their degrees.

But at the time when I was growing up, I didn't, I didn't know that there was such a thing as being poor or deprived, because all of us were in the same boat.

Living next door to me in the projects was the pastor of a church, out in the New Addition. Reverend Dilworth used to live right next door to me. So I didn't know -- I didn't know what being poor was. We never thought of ourselves as poor. I couldn't understand why the treatment was so different. As a young child it's always difficult to deal with that. You know, I used to ask, why do people dislike me just because of the color of my skin? You know, that's a tough thing.

And when I entered the military, at the time the military said they were integrated. Well, they were integrated in the sense that everybody lived in the same barracks. But they segregated the rooms. Once you entered the barracks' door, they had all black rooms and all Anglo rooms.

As you grow older, you start wondering what, what -- you know, people make a big fuss out of what? You know, we limit the individual. I mean, we limit what people are able to do. So you have to really develop strong willpower in order to recognize that you are capable of doing things.

LYNN SMITH: Over your lifetime, you've seen some improvements.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: I've seen a lot of improvements, a lot of it. I was an Investigator for EEOC, a Federal Investigator, where I travelled all over the nation investigating. So I -- I've seen those improvements and I have been able to -- and for two years I was the President of the local NAACP. So I was able to work with some people like HEB, Whataburger, and several other organizations who promised -- who set up programs to hire a lot of the young men out of jail, you know, because the -- a lot of the young men who have spent prison time were having difficulties finding jobs.

So I set up -- it's kind of like a training deal. They said, okay, if they are willing to start at the bottom, they can work their way up. So I had those kind of programs set up. So I've, I've seen the improvement. And I've seen -- that's one of the reasons I'm kinda glad that the TxDOT, I guess that they're making improvements in this area because this has been an area that has been truly and totally neglected.

When I was growing up here we had the drawbridge and I -- I actually lived close enough where I could walk to that area and fish. We used to fish under that area, and right there in the Port. So it, it definitely will be a big improvement. This area now has been designated the Entertainment Area of the -- and in, as such, here in the paper, as they are moving people from North Side Manor to the Palms over there on Leopard, one of the ladies commented that it's great to be in an area where you don't have that loud noise, the music coming from the Concrete area. So it's a --

LYNN SMITH: Concrete Theater? Isn't that what they call it?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Yeah, yeah. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

WILLIE HARDEMAN: So that's a big improvement for people in the neighborhood. I remember meeting with the representative of Dusty Durrill, the guy that owns that. Because the decibels of the music was so loud, like at St. Matthew Baptist Church. I was -- like on a Saturday -- a Sunday -- Sunday night one time I was there at the church and B.B. King was performing. So I was teasing people, saying, okay, \$5.00 you can park here and listen to B.B. King.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: So.

LYNN SMITH: 'Cause you could hear it pretty well from the church.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: You, you, you could hear it just as if you were sitting down there. But -- and one of the biggest things. They promised jobs to the people in the neighborhood. Well, the very first thing the police did whenever they'd have a big concert, they'd come up and they'd put wooden barriers at every street along here so that the people leaving wouldn't accidentally turn through the neighborhood.

I don't know what they thought would happen, but -- And when I was a kid, you know, they built the Police Station right in the black community. And it was almost like, okay, we gotcha all in here now.

The thing I could never understand as a kid was that they -- they were never friendly to me, you know. I don't know about the other kids, but -- you have a picture in mind with a policeman who stops and talks to kids. 'Cause I know one of the things I did as a Military Policeman, when I did base patrol, I would stop at the playground where the kids were playing basketball, and I'd get out and play basketball with them.

I knew every child there that lived in the community. And if anything happened, they would tell me. They'd say, Airman Hardeman, they -- they stole some hubcaps over there [laughter]. And they'd tell me who did it. So you're able to, by developing that kind of relationship, the fear of the police go away. And you see them as your friend. And I think that's the kind of policing that they're moved to now. We had, at the time I was growing up; we had three black policemen, who walked through the whole neighborhood. They walked the Cuts. And at the end of the Cut area, they had -- they had what we called the Calaboose. It was a white building that was about the size of an outhouse, and it had wrought iron bars on the windows, and it had a wrought -- you know, a door. And that's where, if they arrested anyone, they'd put 'em in there as a holding cell until the police came and picked 'em up and took 'em to the

[laughter]

WILLIE HARDEMAN: -- yeah. So you could walk by there and see the guy sitting in there because they had gotten drunk that night. It, it was humiliating but funny to see them sitting up in what we called the Calaboose.

LYNN SMITH: Wow. Okay. Is there anything else that you want to tell me today?

WILLIE HARDEMAN: No, I think that -- that probably covers it. That's been -- I've gone from,

[laughter]

WILLIE HARDEMAN: from pillar to post this time.

LYNN SMITH: Well, it's been my pleasure to hear it. And I really appreciate your coming in today. All right.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: All right.

LYNN SMITH: Thanks.

WILLIE HARDEMAN: Okay. Thank you. [Agreeing]

[End of Audio Recording for Lynn Smith - Willie Hardeman - 11.23.2014]

Ms. Adela Hernandez' Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 11: Adela Hernandez with a photo of her parents' wedding held at Old Bayview Cemetery



Photographer: Sean Wray, HNTB

Edited Transcript of Ms. Adela Hernandez' Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I'm interviewing Adela Hernandez for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on November 18th, 2014 in Corpus Christi, Texas. I'm interviewing Ms. Hernandez in order to learn more about her knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. First, please tell me your name, and when and where you were born.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: My name is Adela Hernandez, and what else did you ask me? Where was I born?

LYNN SMITH: When and where?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: When, October 6th, 1945, and I was born at the Carline Clinic in Corpus Christi, which is on Sam Rankin Street.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And you lived – your family lived together with your grandparents, right?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Can you tell me a little bit about your – your grandfather, and what he did, and where you all lived?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: My grandfather, Hinio Clark, was the caretaker of the Old Bayview Cemetery for over thirty-six years, and we grew up there with him, and my grandmother, and I had two aunts, my mom, two cousins, and me and my two brothers that lived in a three-room shotgun house with an outdoor bathroom.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So your mother – I mean your grandmother was part Apache right?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes -- yes, she was part Apache, she said a few words occasionally, and – but never really taught us anything, or ever gave us any background that I can remember. And I don't know where my grandfather came, but he was a Clark–

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- I don't know the history of that.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. You told me he – he had blue eyes, and --?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: He had kind of bluish eyes, and a little white hair, little –

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- little hair.

LYNN SMITH: And he was the caretaker of the cemetery; right?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes, he was a gardener; he took care of the grounds, and had lots of flowers. That cemetery at one time was really a beautiful park. It had lots of flowers, lots of fruit trees, and he kept it immaculate. It was a city paid job, so he – he maintained it for the city.

LYNN SMITH: And that cemetery, the Old Bayview Cemetery, was established as the first – well as a federal military cemetery; right?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: The oldest in Texas.

LYNN SMITH: The oldest in Texas? Okay. And you all lived there until when?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Until I was about ten, I think is when we – we moved. I remember that my grandfather – you know, we were children, and we were not allowed to sit in on adult conversations, but we could tell what was going on, and the next thing we know we're moving to San Pedro Street, which was still in the Northside area. And we moved there because the city asked my grandfather to move, and they were removing the house, and my grandfather got to keep the house, and moved it to the Oak Park area, so I was about ten, I think.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And when – when the house was there it was on the corner of, we think, Waco and Ramirez, kind of right – right in that part of the cemetery?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes, I think so.

LYNN SMITH: And – and when you were children, what did you do in the cemetery?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Well we had a beautiful playground, and we climbed the trees. One time my brothers and I killed a bird, so we made arrows, and we killed birds, and we went down, way down to the bottom, because this was a big – it is a big property, way at the bottom where our grandfather couldn't see us, and we roasted those birds, and my grandfather caught us, and he threatened to make us eat them, but they still had the feathers on, so we – you know, we cried, and asked, he – we got away with it, but he told us never to do that again. And there were two tomb stones, there's still two – I keep saying were, but they're still there. Two round tomb stones, which we claimed as our horses, and we played on those things, my brothers and I, there was three of us, so one of us was always the odd man out. They had little areas – they have little area where there's wrought iron fences that – that were built for that particular site, and we used those as our homes. And the best thing about those tomb stones was that you could play jacks on them, and the ball bounced – the golf ball, because we used golf balls, bounced off of that – that concrete just superb.

[Laughter]

ADELA HERNANDEZ: And so we, we played a lot of jacks on those tomb stones, the square ones that were on the ground, and– it was a great playground. I have a cousin who's – he's still alive, and his hand is twisted, and because they were trying to get away from my grandfather – my grandfather was very strict, and very stern, old gentleman like most of them were back then, and they did something, he and my cousin did something, and he climbed up the tree to get away from my grandfather, and he fell and broke his hand, and to this day it's still in that condition. I don't know why they never fixed it, but he still has that crooked hand. And every time we see him we – we all talk about that story, how we were – they were trying to get away from my grandfather. My other cousin did manage to climb the tree, and – and get away from him, but not the one that fell.

Edited Transcript of Ms. Adela Hernandez' Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: Oh dear. Okay. And when you were there you started elementary school while you were still living in that shotgun –

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: -- house; right? And that – tell us about that.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: I went to Cheston Heath Elementary from first to fifth grade. And then in the sixth grade I – we moved to Oak Park, after my grandparents died. But – that school, it was mostly Hispanics. We did have a – two Anglo students, or – that were a part of the – the school, but most of us were Hispanics. They were the only two. There were no blacks. The blacks went to Booker T. Washington, and Solomon Coles.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And you – I think you told me you were born in the Carline Clinic.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Tell us a little bit about the neighborhood around there.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Okay. The Carline Clinic was next to the – the pharmacy. Was it Leathers Pharmacy?

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing].

ADELA HERNANDEZ: And that was a hospital, a little hospital, and I guess my mom didn't make it to the Spohn Hospital, and she – I was born there, and down the street from there on Sam Rankin was the two doctors, Dr. Henry Williams, and Dr. Brownlow, and there – in the neighborhood and – across from the cemetery we had a funeral home, the Jackson Funeral Home, and it – there was a doctor, his name was Dr. Anderson – I can't remember if he was a dentist, or a regular doctor, but he was a doctor. And I remember my aunts used to go work for them, clean their house. There was a church across the street that – that's still there.

LYNN SMITH: I think that's the Saint Matthew Missionary Baptist Church that's still there. But – and – and –

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Okay.

LYNN SMITH: -- didn't you tell me that the – the funeral home was where the parking lot for Solomon Coles is now?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes. It – it was right there where the parking lot is.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: And the doctor's office was a few doors down from there, and then across the street there was the Galan Grocery Store where we, once in a while, got a treat of going to buy ten cents worth of ham, and ten cents worth of cheese, and we got ham and cheese sandwiches. That was a big treat.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Right.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: That was a big change from tortillas.

[Laughter]

ADELA HERNANDEZ: And – and then next to that was all this row of little shotgun houses, and they were – looked similar to what we had. And then across from there was – across from the school was that – the little hamburger place where we'd go, and listen to the jukebox, and dance, and eat hamburgers, and it was called The Hornet. I don't know if it was the Hornet's Nest or what, but it was The Hornet, because that's what the – the Coles' team was called. You know they had an awesome band. I don't know if you've heard about their band.

LYNN SMITH: A little bit.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Those – their band was incredible. I mean they danced, and they – you always got to see them at the Buccaneer Parade that we have every year, and they were incredible. They had one non-black band member. His name was Pedro Espitia, and he lived on San Pedro, and he wanted – he loved their music, and he wanted to play with them, and he – he was in the band. And you could tell when – when he was in the band, he was the only light colored person in – in the band, and – but loved being in it, and loved performing with the band.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: And he became a musician later on.

LYNN SMITH: So –

LYNN SMITH: -- the music was the draw?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: He was a –They were – they were –

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- wonderful, wonderful performers in that band.

LYNN SMITH: Now, I think you told me also about an experience where you got to meet Fats Domino?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes. He played in The Cut. In The Cut there were several clubs. There was the – the Palace that was across from the theater, the Harlem Theater. We got to go to that theater once in a while. And there was a club that was upstairs, this is where Fats Domino was, my cousin came and told us he was there, she had seen him, so we ran over there, and this is when you could run in between houses, and the people didn't mind that you ran through their alleys, or whatever – whatever the area was called between the two houses. We ran through there, and up the stairs, and there he was, Mr. Strawberry Hill himself. It was awesome, because I love Fats Domino. And I got to sit on the piano bench with him, and bang on the piano a little bit, and he was really nice, a nice man, and he wrote a song that was called "Dance with Me Annie", and my cousin's name was Annie, and she was there with him. We just had a good time, and then they – they'd shooed us out, cause he was getting ready for his – but we were not allowed down there, at

night. Not because we were in danger, but it was their – like you said, the adult life, the Down Beat Club was one of the clubs where they – I remember it was down like in a basement – kind of thing, and there was a lot of activity, lots of night life, lots – there was a one place on the corner that the doors were always open, and the old men were always playing dominos, and you could hear them slapping those dominos on the table. And – and most of those buildings are gone I think, but I have a lot of fond memories, cause we ran all over that place all of the time. We'd go to the barbecue places – they had some awesome – I can like I said, I can still remember that barbecue, those beans, and the macaroni salad.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Right.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: And they had their own policemen. Mr. Johnson was a very, he was a real nice man. He would always shooed us home, and told us we better go home, or he'd go tell my grandfather, and we didn't want that, so we obeyed, you know, all of the adults, the adults knew my grandfather, everybody knew my grandfather.

My grandfather, when he wasn't working, he wore this suit, and he had a – some kind of a badge, and a big night stick, and a big flashlight, and I don't know if he thought he was a deputy, or he was, I don't know – we always thought that he was some kind of a deputy, because he was always at the courthouse, and he had nephews that were detectives, the Trujillos, and he knew – he always talked about Sheriff Johnny Mitchell, and when they had the elections, he would sit by the radio to find out if Johnny Mitchell won. But, he wore this suit, and – and I have pictures of him somewhere dressed in a suit, and he wore that – he had that big night stick, and --.

LYNN SMITH: Kept order?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes. People respected my grandparents. Well, and I think adults, you know, we – after we moved to San Pedro there was a bunch of kids, and we played with all of the neighborhood kids, and I remember my grandmother grabbing one of those kids by the ear, and taking him to their house, and telling the mother he was doing something. I guess we were fighting or something. But next door to us was a house where these two ladies lived. I called them old ladies, because everybody was old back then to us, but they ran a boarding house, a real boarding house. I'd never seen that since then, and they had a telephone, and the – and they had a parlor, and – and we would go next door to ask them for their phone, if we could call --.

LYNN SMITH: And was that when you were still living in the cemetery, or --?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: No, on San Pedro.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, on San Pedro, okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: And – and they had this house, and they had boarders, and they had a parlor, and they had their phone in the parlor. And their parlor was all velvet furniture, I remember, and lace curtains. Kind of like a hotel, I guess.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Back then. There were two ladies. I don't remember their names, but my grandmother had -- a fig orchard along two fences, and that house was a big house, it had like two or three lots, and it had -- she -- we -- she had the little sugar figs, and the big figs, and our job was to pick those. And I remember those scratchy leaves, and we always wanted to wear long sleeves, because those leaves would scratch you. And we would pick them, and put them in little buckets, and then she'd send us around the neighborhood to sell figs for twenty-five cents. So --.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: She was an entrepreneur, I guess.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Sounds like it. Alright. So, after you went to Cheston Heath, the next school you went to was Oak --

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Oak Park Elementary.

LYNN SMITH: And then -- then after that you went to Roy Miller; right?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Well, I went to Driscoll Junior --

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- High, cause we had --

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- junior highs.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: We went to Driscoll Junior -- now they're called middle schools.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: But after Oak Park Elementary, I went to Driscoll Junior High, and then from there to Miller High School, which is where I graduated.

LYNN SMITH: Very good.
I'm trying to look through my notes, and see what else we need to cover? Can you think of anything else that we've missed, that -- that we -- that you wanted to talk about?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: I want to talk about the fact that the neighborhood, even though it was predominantly black --

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing].

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- we did have white families, and we had Hispanic families. And we learned to speak English, where a lot of kids don't learn English, till they go to school. We learned it as we were growing up, because our playmates were black, and so, we – we learned it. There was a – a family across the street, it was a mother and her daughter, they were the Woods, and they were white. And then the Nesmith family down the street, they were Hispanics.

So we had, not only –predominantly black, but there were a lot of Hispanics there. So, the Northside was made of different – different races, and we all got along, because those were the neighbors that we had to play with. Those are the neighbors who we went to pick cotton with, the Nesmith family, the dad was a truck driver, a cotton picker, he was in charge of picking up people, and my grandmother would send us in the summer to – with him to go pick cotton, and then –.

LYNN SMITH: So that was your summer job?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes, which I hated.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing].

ADELA HERNANDEZ: That's what we did. I told my grandma – I'd rather go clean Dr. Anderson's house than pick cotton, but you did with your grandparents, or your mom, and – or your aunts. My aunts had pets, goats, and dogs, and my aunts were very strict ladies, and they were always – always after us. And I remember my brother had gotten spanked, and he wanted to get even with one of my aunts, and she had a dog, so he took her toothbrush, and – and brushed the dog's teeth with it, and every time she'd brush her teeth, we'd all laugh, because we knew what he had done.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, no. Uh oh. The word is out on that now.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: But – well my aunts are gone, and my brother is gone –

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- so, it's safe right now.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. Safe on that deal. So are there any other remembrances about the neighborhood, about, uh, you know, any sort of events, or parades, or – or anything else that you wanted to tell us about?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Well there was a – a waste water plant, there still is, the waste water plant, and everybody complained about the smell, but we got immune to it.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing].

ADELA HERNANDEZ: I remember my grandmother would take us walking down those roads to find tomato plants, and they grew wild. Well, I worked at the waste water plant after – after I graduated, and got my draftsman certificate. I went – that was one of my first jobs. One of the things I found out was there's two things that don't burn in that incinerator where they burn the waste –

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing].

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- is tomato seeds, and cigarette filters.

LYNN SMITH: Interesting.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: So I found out that's the reason there were tomato plants scattered everywhere.

LYNN SMITH: Wild.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Because the seeds didn't burn.

LYNN SMITH: That's --.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: So, you can imagine what they do in your digestive system, if you ever thought about it.

LYNN SMITH: Well, yeah that's -- that's certainly another thought.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: But there was also a warehouse at the bottom of the cemetery [Old Bayview Cemetery], let's see that would be the east side, because north is over where the bridge [Harbor Bridge] is, and the east side at the bottom, next to it there was a warehouse where they had produce, it was a produce company.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

ADELA HERNANDEZ: My grandmother would send us down there to ask Mr. so and so if he had any bananas, and he'd give us bags full of bananas. And so, there was that, and the concrete, the railroad, and the sewer plant down there. The railroad, I don't know if it operates. I don't think it operates anymore. The sewer plant is still there. The concrete plant isn't -- now it's a concrete theater, the --

LYNN SMITH: We saw --

ADELA HERNANDEZ: The amphitheater.

LYNN SMITH: -- we saw that, yeah.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yeah. That's what that is now, but there was a plant there. And we used to go across the Harbor Bridge [bascul bridge before the high Harbor Bridge was constructed]. We'd walk across Harbor Bridge [bascul bridge] to go swimming in -- at North Beach, and that was when the bridge opened up.

LYNN SMITH: That was the old bascul bridge --

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: -- they called it? Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: It opened up. And then we'd go to the one, the lift bridge on Navigation [Boulevard] to go fishing. We'd fish there. My -- my family were fisherman of sorts. But I just -- I have a lot of

childhood memories, cause, it was an easy time,— we always had food, and my grandfather had — I guess had a salary where we never had to go off to pick cotton in the fields, and I think my grandmother sent us off to get rid of us —

[Laughter]

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- but — so, we'd have something to do in the summer, because she was the neighborhood laundry lady. She did the laundry for the funeral director, for the doctors, for the preachers there. So, I think it was just a time that she sent us off to —

LYNN SMITH: Keep you busy?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- keep us busy, yes, because we never had to leave town and work in the fields like the migrant workers. Even though my grandmother sent me to the fields to pick cotton, I rebelled and would not pick it and walked home from Robstown with my brothers. My aunts and my mom worked, they all had jobs. My aunt worked at the pharmacy, McGee Pharmacy on Leopard. My aunt, I think she cleaned houses. My mom worked at bait houses and at laundries. My grandfather had a salary. So, we were not ever deprived I don't think. Like I said, we lived in a shotgun house, and we didn't have a car, until my aunt married this Cajun from Louisiana, and he had a car, but before that we didn't have a car. And I remember when he [Hinio Clark] got interviewed for that Pancho Villa article. They came to — we were in -- at San Pedro Street already, and they came at, — and it was at night, I think. And they interviewed him, and they asked him about the treasure. I remember he told us later, "You know, those dumb *Caller-Times* people, if they knew — if I had the treasure I wouldn't be living here." But he did own a lot of land, so I don't know.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: It's hard to tell. Well, over the years you've seen changes to that area?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Absolutely.

LYNN SMITH: And can you tell me a little bit about the changes you've seen? And what you think the causes of the changes were, you know, just how the neighborhood evolved over time? Do you have any thoughts on that that you want to share with us?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Well, yes, I've seen the changes, and it has really gone downhill, and it's a degraded, area. Maybe because the city moved on, you know, to the south side, to different neighborhoods. Maybe because the people there began to get educated and move on, and you had different kinds of people. Of course, there's lots — lots of neighborhoods that aren't safe, but, you know, today that place has a stigma. It's, don't go there, what are you doing? I posted some pictures on Facebook not too long ago, cause I was down there, the nostalgic and reminiscing, and I was taking pictures, and everybody on — "What are you doing down there? Are you by yourself? Who are you with?" You know, because it has a stigma, and it has changed. And --.

LYNN SMITH: So did you, when you were growing up, do you remember when they put in I-37 [Interstate Highway 37], or the — when the refineries came in? Do you remember any changes to the neighborhood due to — due to industry or — or infrastructure?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Well we didn't have -- the housing projects weren't there. We didn't have the housing projects.

- LYNN SMITH: So you were there –
- ADELA HERNANDEZ: I don't –
- LYNN SMITH: -- before then?
- ADELA HERNANDEZ: --I don't remember that. Yeah, I don't remember those –
- LYNN SMITH: Okay.
- ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- being there. There were houses.
- LYNN SMITH: It was a – it was a neighborhood full of houses –
- ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yeah –
- LYNN SMITH: -- versus –
- ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- houses.
- LYNN SMITH: -- versus multifamily –
- ADELA HERNANDEZ: Businesses, stores. We had a lot of stores. Actually my neighbor now, across the street, he's 90-years old, his parents had a store, Charles Grocery Store on – on Alameda, close to where we met the other night.
- LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing].
- ADELA HERNANDEZ: They had a store on Staples, but in that area, and there was lots of little mom and pop stores, you know, the theater. You know, I don't remember gas stations. I remember the hamburger joints, and barbecue joints, and the – the bus station, and the school, the pharmacies, and then, of course, downtown we had the two theaters, one had predominately Mexican movies, and the other across the street was cowboy movies, you know, we went to the movies every Saturday. There's a lot of five and dime stores. There were a lot of Hispanic owned businesses, like the Economy Pharmacy, was owned by the De Leon family. Chico Castaneda he owned a loan company, and Mrs. Gonzales owned a record shop, which had later became a bridal shop. So we had a lot of Hispanic owned businesses downtown. The bars. I remember the bars.
- LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing].
- ADELA HERNANDEZ: And the – the shoe shine guy, and the – the photo studios that were on Leopard. There were – you know, it was a busy, busy area.
- LYNN SMITH: Okay.
- ADELA HERNANDEZ: --A busy area where we spent our childhood, you know, eating hamburgers at Bunks, and drinking orange juice at the Orange Oasis, and going to the movies, and then going downtown, and of course, you know, that was where the hub was, downtown. Well, we were close enough to go from the cemetery [Old Bayview Cemetery], and run down the tunnel, and go to the – the library was right at the edge

– at the foot of the tunnel, and we'd go to the library, and go to the movies, and shopping, and all of that kind of stuff.

LYNN SMITH: So, this is the first I've heard of the tunnel. Where – where was the tunnel?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: The tunnel is still there.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: I think they just reopened it. It's on Broadway. You know where Wells Fargo Bank is? That used to be –

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- the Driscoll Hotel. My –

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing].

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- My mother worked at the Driscoll Hotel – my mom and my aunts all worked at the Driscoll Hotel, across – there were these stairs in the sidewalk, and you'd go down those stairs, and they would lead you to the tunnel, which went under Broadway to the downtown area. And the library was right there at that – at the foot of the tunnel.

LYNN SMITH: So, that gave you a safe way to get –

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: -- downtown without having to cross a busy –

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: -- street?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Yes. And at the tunnel there was this blind couple. He played the accordion, and they sang, and they had their little cup, their tin cup. There was a – a little boy that was always with them. I didn't know – later I found out that was my first husband. That was –

LYNN SMITH: Oh my goodness.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- That was him there with that couple. They – because one day he took me to – to San Antonio, he said, "I want you to meet this couple that I used to take care of," and I – and he told me the story, and I go, "Oh, you were that little boy?" We thought that he was their son, but he – his parents would take him to San Antonio and leave him, and he would bring them on the bus, and take them down there, so they'd make money. He played the accordion, and they sang, and – and, you know, ask for alms I guess is the word, they asked for –

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: And it was right there at the – at the tunnel. And I think there were two ways you could come into the tunnel, two sets of stairs. It went down, and it had rails, and you – and you went in – into the tunnel, as we ran up and down there, and to the drug stores. And – the courthouse [the old Nueces County Courthouse] was a very busy place too. I hate to see that courthouse. It breaks my heart to see it deteriorate like that. We used to go down there, and play with the goldfish. They had a – there's – there's a fountain still there, but it had a little pond, and it was full of goldfish. And we'd go down there, and like I say, with my grandfather all of the time. I don't know what he did down there, but he was there.

And then at the end of the hallway, at the very end, was a child support division, and we – every Tuesday my brothers and I would run to the courthouse to go pick up our check from the lady named Blanche, and she would give us this forty-five dollar check. That was a lot of money.

LYNN SMITH: Yes, at that time.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: And then we'd run over there across from the tunnel to a place called Helen Hoods. She had a finance company. I think her maiden name was Stevens, but I remember her name – last name is Hood, and she was a friend of my grandfather's, and he had made arrangements for her to cash our checks, and give us \$15.00 each. So we'd have our child support check. And we – then we'd spend it, you know, we'd go to the movies, into the Bunks, to go eat hot burgers, and everybody remembers the hot burgers at Bunks.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Everybody in my generation if you ask them, did you ever eat at Bunks? Oh the hot burgers!

LYNN SMITH: The hot burgers at –

ADELA HERNANDEZ: The hot –

LYNN SMITH: -- Bunks?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- burgers at Bunks Café.

LYNN SMITH: Bunks Café? And where –

ADELA HERNANDEZ: On the –

LYNN SMITH: -- was Bunks Café?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- On the corner of Leopard and Sam Rankin.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: The building is still there.

LYNN SMITH: Great.

Edited Transcript of Ms. Adela Hernandez' Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

ADELA HERNANDEZ: And – and we'd go down there, or we'd go to Miller's Barbecue to eat the sausages. They had barbecue sausage. And that was next to Dr. William's office on – I guess, it's Sam Rankin also. There's Sam Rankin down there, and Sam Rankin up here by the –

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- by Leopard.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Anything else you can think of you want to tell us?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Well, –.

LYNN SMITH: Have I left anything out? Left any questions out?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: We talked about North Beach. These are the areas that are, you know, that I remember at the neighborhood, Leopard Street, all the five and dime stores, and the photographers. Sears was down there, and then uptown was all of the – the dress shops that we were not allowed to go in, so –

LYNN SMITH: Because you were –

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- my grandmother –

LYNN SMITH: -- little or --?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- Because my grandmother said, "What are you doing there? Those are lady's clothes, you know, what do you want to go there for?" Parisians [Ladies Ready-To-Wear] was the name of one of them, and then the McGee Drug Store, and the H.E.B. was there. We'd go on Saturdays to meet my grandfather on my Dad's - - on my Dad's side, because he was a – he lived at Chapman Ranch, and he would come in on Saturdays with his big truck, they were cotton pickers, and they'd come and buy their groceries for the week, and they'd sit under the truck, and eat their lunch there, I guess, make it a day. And we went to see my grandfather on my Dad's side. We went there to – to catch him. My grandmother would say, "Go see your grandfather; he's over there at the H.E.B., I'm sure" so, we'd go over there. So then the neighborhood, the cemetery [Old Bayview Cemetery], and all that was there, and the Harbor Bridge, the North Beach, downtown, I guess –.

LYNN SMITH: So, different than today when you don't let children –

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Oh –

LYNN SMITH: -- out of your sight.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- Plus downtown is gone. We – you know, there were so many shops, and I have pictures of my mom with all of the soldiers in the – in the background, you know, when it was a busy area.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing].

ADELA HERNANDEZ: My aunt met her husband at the carnival that they had at North Beach. They had a carnival, and a Farris wheel, and my aunt met him there. He was a soldier from Louisiana, and she ran

off – she was in her last year of high school, and my grandfather had bought her a typewriter, and that was a biggy, and she ran off with him, and got married.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: My grandfather was so hurt; he didn't speak to her for a year.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, my goodness.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: That's – that's how – that's how it was.

LYNN SMITH: So --.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: So, we got a car out of it, because we had a car, and we didn't – we didn't have a car, and we'd go buy groceries whenever, I guess, my – when – somebody took my grandmother –

LYNN SMITH: Well I know –

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- for groceries.

LYNN SMITH: -- one thing we didn't talk about was the Model T.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: The Model T, yes. My grandfather, we didn't have a – we had a car, but we didn't have a car. It was – I don't know why he didn't drive it, if he didn't have a license, or – or if it was just a – a very special car, but he had a Model T, and he kept it in the garage, and it was --.

LYNN SMITH: At the cemetery; right?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: At the cemetery. And he only took it out on Sundays. And he would take it out, and back it up, and sit in it, and just listen to it hum, I guess. It was a beautiful car. I mean now that, you know, I'd think about it, cause that – that memory is very vivid. I remember the car. And then one night there was a lot of commotion, I don't know who called or what, but the garage was on fire, and the car burned. I remember those little skinny tires being all charred, and, you know, black and – but it was still, you know, it was still intact, but burnt. And I remember it broke my grandfather's heart. And when – when we moved from there, I don't know, I guess they moved it to Poth Lane, which is the Oak Park area, because my aunt lived over there in one of my grandfather's houses. And so, after they passed away, my aunt who – kind of took over as a matriarch, she – she didn't want to live in that house anymore, so we moved to Oak Park, to Poth Lane, next door to my aunts, next door to the – the shotgun house from the cemeteries, where she lived, we next moved into an even smaller house next door. Sometimes they would disconnect our light, and they run extension cords across the –

[Laughter]

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- to the window to connect to her light.

LYNN SMITH: Oh goodness.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: Because my aunt was a single lady, and she took care of all of the kids, all of us. And the car was parked there in the driveway, and every day there was somebody, some man that would

stop from Hess Refinery – I don't think that exists anymore. Or PPG Industries, and he would – they would stop and ask, “Would you sell us the car?” Oh, no, that's – that's my daddy's car. We're not selling it.” Then Hess Refinery bought out my aunts, and – and my mom had a lot, they had several lots, and they bought all of that land from them. They were the only ones that sold at that time, and this was in the – oh, I'm going to say '60's? Yeah, '60's. And so, they sold the land, and we bought a – they – my mom and my aunt together, they bought a two-bedroom house with an indoor bathroom, and we thought it was the berries.

[Laughter]

ADELA HERNANDEZ: But we still – some of us had to sleep on sofas, because it still wasn't big enough for all of us. My aunt, my mom, and my aunt, by that time, had three kids, and us and three kids, and my – my cousin had left her three kids there, so, we were a bunch. And when they moved to the big house, they gave the car away to the Tom – The Thomas Brothers, who owned a junkyard. So, I don't know what they did with it, but that car, we saw it drive away. “Oh, yeah, we can't take that car. We can't take that jewel to the –

[Laughter]

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- to the new big house.”

LYNN SMITH: So, you had a car, but you didn't have a car?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: No. I don't know why my grandfather – well, we couldn't ask questions, we were not allowed to ask questions. We weren't allowed to. We ate after all of the adults ate. We – my grandfather, like I said, he had s spittoon, and he'd make some signal with his eyes, and that meant bring me my spittoon, and the other signal means, go outside, when company came, and they were old fashion ways, but they were good ways. I wish my – I could talk to my kids with my eyes.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: And have them understand, and – and do what you said?

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- actually the great grandkids now, because the kids are all grown, and the –

LYNN SMITH: Right.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: -- And the grandkids are all grown, but the great grandkids, if I could talk to them with my eyes and they'd listen – they'd probably think I'm trying to say something cool.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Well that sounds great. if there's anything – is there anything else? Are we –

ADELA HERNANDEZ: I can't think of anything else. If there's something else then, well, I'll get back with you.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Sounds good. Thank you so much.

ADELA HERNANDEZ: And you're very welcome. I've enjoyed this.

LYNN SMITH: Great.

[End of Audio Recording for Lynn Smith – Adela Hernandez – 11.18.2014]

Ms. Thurma Hilton's Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 12: Thurma Hilton in 2015 with the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* building in the background



Photographer: Anna Christy, HNTB

Edited Transcript of Ms. Thurma Hilton's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I'm interviewing Thurma Hilton for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on January 27th, 2015 in Corpus Christi, Texas. I'm interviewing Miss Hilton, in order to learn more about her knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. And just other – other things that she knows about Corpus Christi that might make it a little bit unique compared to other places. First of all, if you could just state your – your full name.

THURMA HILTON: My name is Thurma Hilton.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And when and where you were born?

THURMA HILTON: I was born in Corpus Christi, Texas, May 1st, 1941.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Do you – your family did not live in Northside; correct?

THURMA HILTON: No, we did not, as I was –

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

THURMA HILTON: -- growing up.

LYNN SMITH: But you did go to school in – in the Northside neighborhood?

THURMA HILTON: I did. Because schools were segregated, and all of the schools for black children were on the Northside. I started out at Holy Cross Roman Catholic School. Later transferred to Booker T. Washington Elementary School, which was across the street from Holy Cross. From Holy Cross, I went to Coles Junior-Senior High School. I was there for three years. And when I entered Coles in the seventh grade, I was tested, and then moved up to the eighth grade. So, I was there the eighth, ninth year and tenth year. The CCISD schools had integrated just prior to my junior year and I transferred to Roy Miller High School, because Roy Miller was closest – closer to where I lived. Black students, of course, had no transportation that was provided by the school districts, and, so, our parents sent us to school on the city buses. And, so, when – after the schools were integrated, and my father went in and put in a – request for a transfer to transfer me to Miller High School, which was, at the time, my neighborhood school.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, that was fairly close to your house –

THURMA HILTON: Closer to –

LYNN SMITH: -- Roy Miller?

THURMA HILTON: -- my school – [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Alrighty. And then you – what were your perceptions of going to Solomon Coles, and then going to Roy Miller? What differences did you see between essentially an all-black –

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- high school? And -- and then Roy Miller? Did -- were the kids different? Were the teachers different? What -- what was -- how was your experience different?

THURMA HILTON: Well, the main thing was Miller was much larger than the Coles campus. But once I got there, I was -- I became involved in clubs, and the choir, which is, you know, music is my passion.

And there was one teacher, an English teacher, we developed a very close relationship. And, so, she -- I had her in my junior year, and my senior year of high school. And she was one of the teachers who had a reputation on campus for being very strict, very demanding, and just a really good teacher, who had expectations. And she expected you to live up to those expectations.

And -- and, so, we developed a really good relationship.

I developed good relationships with some of the other teachers. There was a -- a Mrs. Earhart [sp], who was the, I guess, the P.E. teacher. Anyway, she was also a dance coach, and I served -- I was on one of the dance teams. It was a jazz dance group, and we performed.

And I sang in the choir. Mrs. Ray was the choir director. I sang in the choir. And for a period of time, I played the piano for the choir when we would practice. So, I was -- and there was some other organizations that -- that I joined. Oh, I was also a member of the Latin club, because I took a Latin class there.

And, so, I was involved at the school. And -- involved in the Y teens group, because the Y.W.C.A. had sponsored a Y teens group on campus. So, I really didn't see that much of a difference. There was a difference, of course, because integration was new. It, you know, students were -- students were feeling each other out, getting to know each other, but I developed some very close friends from among all groups. So --.

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

THURMA HILTON: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Now, your love of music started early; didn't it?

THURMA HILTON: Yes, it did. It started in my home. My dad was -- he loved jazz music, and we would spend time listening to the radio. Do you remember-- either the Saturday morning or Sunday afternoon program of the Texaco Hour [Metropolitan Opera radio program sponsored by Texaco] that they would play the -- the opera music.

LYNN SMITH: No, my --

THURMA HILTON: And --.

LYNN SMITH: -- my family wasn't into opera.

THURMA HILTON: Oh, okay. Well, we -- we would listen to the Texaco Hour, because they brought really good music. So, we'd listen to that. But my home was -- when we were not doing other things, my house was filled with music, because my dad loved music. In fact, he was the one who said -- you are going to take piano lessons.

[Laughter]

So, you know, voilà, there I was taking piano lessons, because he loved music, and, so, I – I got that from him.

LYNN SMITH: So, who – do you remember who you took piano lessons from?

THURMA HILTON: Oh, yes. Mrs. Martin, Mary Bell Martin. She – she lived on the Northside. She lived across the street from Holy Cross Roman Catholic Church. And, in fact, she was really a faithful and devoted parishioner of Holy Cross Church.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

THURMA HILTON: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, you – after – after high school you – you left [Corpus Christi] for a while?

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And then what brought you back?

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing] After high school, I was thinking about that, I wasn't gone a long time. I – it was my first visit, as I think about it. My first visit to El Paso came after high school, because I had a very close cousin whose family had moved to El Paso. His dad was in construction. And his family – his dad took a job in El Paso. And they moved from here in his senior year, and, so, the – that cousin stayed with my family to graduate, to finish high school. And, so, then I later went and visited them, but I came back. But when I entered college I started here at Del Mar.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Did you know what you wanted to study at that time?

THURMA HILTON: At that time, no. I thought I wanted to study nursing. But it is interesting, my dad reminded me later that when I had started at Del Mar he told me that my advisor at Del Mar had called him, and suggested that I pursue a writing career, because of my performance in – in the English classes there. So --.

LYNN SMITH: So, it was a carry-over from this really good teacher at –

THURMA HILTON: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: -- at Roy Miller?

THURMA HILTON: Roy Miller. [Agreeing] And, before that –

LYNN SMITH: And your natural talent, obviously.

THURMA HILTON: And also, before that, at Coles High School, there was an English teacher, who I developed a really close relationship with, and she was a mentor. And then when I moved to Miller there was an English teacher, who became a mentor there. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Interesting.

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, you went away to school. You went to Minnesota –

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- right? And – and what school did you go to there?

THURMA HILTON: I – when I went to Minnesota I went to – it was a school – well --.

[Laughter]

It was one of those things – oh, it – it was a technical school.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

THURMA HILTON: I went to – it was an x-ray technology school that I went to.

LYNN SMITH: Cause you thought you wanted to pursue the –

THURMA HILTON: I thought –

LYNN SMITH: -- nursing?

THURMA HILTON: -- I wanted to – yeah, to do that.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And then you went to A&I; right?

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: In Kingsville?

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing] And what led me to that when I returned home, I had applied for a job here as an x-ray technologist. And, at one of the hospitals, it was Driscoll Hospital, as a matter of fact, and I was not hired yet. I kept seeing that ad. And, so, of course, obviously, I had applied at some other places. And, that area of the hospitals had not opened up. It was still pretty segregated, and that was the bottom line. And, so, I said, okay, that's not going to work. I'll do something else.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. I'm flexible –

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- right?

THURMA HILTON: Yeah. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, – so, you made – made your way back to Corpus Christi?

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And – and what did you do when you first got back? –

THURMA HILTON: When I first got back I was looking – trying for the radiology technologist job, but didn't get it. Then I went into the nursing program at Del Mar. Okay? And then I worked as a nurse here at Spohn Hospital for a year. Then I went to El Paso, and worked initially at Sun Tower. It was a private

hospital. After that I went to work at William Beaumont General Hospital, which was a military hospital. I worked there for the five years. And then decided to come back, and then go back to college, and to get my degree in Journalism and English. And –

LYNN SMITH: And that was at –

THURMA HILTON: -- still --.

LYNN SMITH: -- A&I?

THURMA HILTON: That was at Texas A&I.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

THURMA HILTON: And still I wasn't sure that I -- wanted to work as a journalist, because while I was at A&I – an opportunity came up to apply for a scholarship to Trinity in San Antonio in Urban Development. And, so, I applied, got the scholarship. But, in the meantime – at the end of that school year, just before graduation from A&I, my dad died. And that changed everything. So, I had already applied to the *Caller-Times* [newspaper] – and had already gotten a summer job – an internship at the *Caller-Times*. It was unusual, because internships are usually between your Junior and Senior year but instead, this internship was for the summer after I had graduated from A&I, because I had not planned to stay in Corpus Christi, but needed a summer job before graduate school. I was going to go away to graduate school in the fall. My dad died in early May. That changed everything. So, while I was at the *Caller-Times*, I applied to become full time. And then I was brought on full time, as a reporter there at the newspaper.

LYNN SMITH: And you were there for how many years?

THURMA HILTON: I was there for 16 years.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And, while you were there, you helped produce a part –

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- of the Centennial issue?

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: You want to tell us a little bit about – about that?

THURMA HILTON: Okay. I was – I forget at what point I was in my career there. But the *Caller-Times* in celebrating its centennial anniversary produced a centennial book of – of both the newspaper and the city of Corpus Christi. One of the hats I wore at the newspaper was as Religion Editor. I did other things, but I was Religion Editor, so, the topic that I covered for the centennial edition was religious life in Corpus Christi. Went back and did a historical piece on religion here in Corpus Christi.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, you were – you were a reporter for quite a number of years? Which means –

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- that you were at the paper all of the time? Which means that you knew what was going on in current events? So, -- So, during your time at the paper, and also during your time at Corpus Christi, you've, I'm sure, noticed changes that --

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- have occurred in the Northside area?

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And, so, if you want to kind of just think about, or tell us about what you think the factors are that have been game changers, I guess at -- at Northside?

THURMA HILTON: Okay. Growing up, of course, Northside, because, once again, the city was segregated, the Northside was a live bustling area, because that's where the businesses were. That's where the medical -- the doctors had offices there. The dentist offices were there. The pharmacy was there --

LYNN SMITH: And these were --

THURMA HILTON: -- on the Northside.

LYNN SMITH: -- all of the businesses of the African American community --

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- right?

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing] Yeah. These were -- these were the -- the African American doctors, the African American dentists, the owners of the drug store. The Harlem Theater was there. And then right next door to the Harlem Theater was an ice cream parlor, where you could go to hang out -- it was just the life of the community. It -- the Northside, filled the need, met the needs of black citizens in this city, because that was the hub of activity there. There were restaurants. There were night clubs. There were barber shops. There was -- let me see, a drive-in, you know, where they served food. But it was whatever black people in the city needed. There were, of course, grocery stores. However, I didn't live there, but where -- over where I lived there were a couple of mom and pop stores, and then an HEB store came in that served the community, you know, where I lived.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing] Is that -- that HEB that's on Staples, or was that a different HEB?

THURMA HILTON: No, it was a different HEB on Agnes Street --

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

THURMA HILTON: -- That where -- when I got old enough to go to the store with my mother, we shopped at HEB.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

THURMA HILTON: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Alrighty.

THURMA HILTON: And then over the years, there was lots of activity. Of course, Northside was where, as I said, my piano teacher lived. I would go for piano lessons. We would have social events. Mrs. Martin, the piano teacher, particularly at Christmas time, she would have – we would have our recitals at her home, and then she would make a – make it into a grand event. And I – over the years – when things began to change, I would hear from people who had businesses in Northside, who were impacted by the changes, they said it was integration. As – neighborhoods and businesses became open, and available for black people to use– then Northside businesses started to lose business, if you will. And, some of the population was beginning to disperse– moving out of that area because there were more options. So, it was integration that I kept hearing was the thing that killed businesses.

LYNN SMITH: So, that was definitely –

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- one of the factors in --?

THURMA HILTON: One of the factors. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And what other factors did you see that might have affected Northside?

THURMA HILTON: Well, I think once people started to move away from the area, and that's, I think, you know, economics, was the main thing.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

THURMA HILTON: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

THURMA HILTON: You had also the Port [Port of Corpus Christi] – that used to be one of the major employers here at that time. We had the Longshoreman, and they had a – had a Hall the Longshoreman's Hall over on the Northside and I'm not sure if the building is still there.

LYNN SMITH: It's still there.

THURMA HILTON: Okay. So, I don't know what's going on in that particular industry, at this point. Although I know that the Port is doing very well – I don't know where it ranks, in terms of being one of the major employees in the city, but they are doing a booming business with the, you know, imports and exports.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Thank you.

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Is there anything else you want to tell us about this – this morning?

THURMA HILTON: Well, yeah. You know, that was a period of time, and I – I forget the years when – when all of these things occurred, but – but Hillcrest used to be a segregated community- - neighborhood. Once, Corpus Christi started its march south, in terms of new developments, new neighborhoods being built, and people started migrating from – from the Hillcrest area to the south. And the Saxet Heights area out south, those were predominantly white families who built those homes, and lived in those homes. And then

once integration occurred, when the city said, you know, neighborhoods had to be opened, and there were black families that started moving into the Hillcrest area, then you had a larger migration of white families who were moving out. And then that's when it became predominantly a black and Hispanic neighborhood.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, this has – this has been really good. And I'm –

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- very much appreciate it.

THURMA HILTON: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Is – if there's nothing else that you can think of right now, we could – we could conclude –

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Or, – or, we could go on.

[Laughter]

THURMA HILTON: Okay.

LYNN SMITH: So did you have just some closing remarks about your perspective on changing Corpus Christi in general, and – and maybe the Northside neighborhood?

THURMA HILTON: Well, I think change occurs, it's – it's natural for change to come about. The change I see occurring, some people are – are being displaced, but that's a part of change. Change, in and of itself, is not bad. It can be good. It can bring about good and positive, and better things, if you will, for people. I think through this project, the oral history project, preserving what has occurred over there, so, it's something that's – that's good, because structures have a finite life. And sometimes it's – and change can be good, and we, you know, we can learn to embrace change. But of course the people who are being displaced need to be fairly compensated.

LYNN SMITH: Well – I just wanted to say that I really appreciated –

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: you coming in this morning. And thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

THURMA HILTON: Thank you. It's – it's been fun. I've enjoyed it.

LYNN SMITH: Thanks.

[End of Audio Recording for Lynn Smith – Thurma Hilton – 01.27.2015]

Mr. Sam Johnson's Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 13: Mr. Sam Johnson in his barber shop in 2014



Photographer: Anna Christy, HNTB

Edited Transcript of Mr. Sam Johnson's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith and I'm interviewing Mr. Sam Johnson for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge L mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on December 17, 2014, in Corpus Christi, Texas, and I'm interviewing Mr. Johnson, in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. First of all, thank you for being – for allowing us to be with you today, and

SAM JOHNSON: You're welcome.

LYNN SMITH: Please tell me your name and when and where you were born?

SAM JOHNSON: My name is Sam A. Johnson. And I was born in Wharton County Texas. That's about 59 miles this side of, south of Houston.

LYNN SMITH: You bet.

SAM JOHNSON: Yes, I'm 80 years old.

LYNN SMITH: All right.

SAM JOHNSON: Born April 4, 1934.

LYNN SMITH: Very good.

SAM JOHNSON: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, go ahead.

SAM JOHNSON: And my reason for coming to Corpus Christi, I had gone to barber college in Houston, Texas. And, in 1952, I received my license. So, while I was in Wharton one year, I went there to a cousin of mine's place. Then, a friend of mine that had gone in the service, and he got discharged, he came one day and said Sam, said let's go to Corpus, and we may can go to work at the Reynolds Metal Aluminum Company. Now, I came to Corpus with the intentions of working there six months, to get some money and go to California. But I also had a friend of mine that told me he had a brother living in Corpus that owned a barber shop, and I asked him for a job when I got to Corpus. And it was on the Old Line. The place is the east side of the Solomon Coles High School, at the time, and his name was Mr. Dennis Thomas. And I got a job from him. And I went to work there. And while I was at the Old Line, and business was picking up pretty good, but it's not the best. So, there were other businesses in that area too. Yeah, they had the Kuykendall's Cleaners, Tommy's Mom and Pop Store, Ratan's Café, Kelley's Rooming House and Club, and Bailey's Funeral Home. And also, there was a Pridgen and Kline's store that I think deals with farm products. But anyway, after a while, they said they were going to – there was a draw bridge [bascule], and they were going to build a new bridge. And, because of that, they had – we had to move. We had to leave that area. And, but, before that – we moved to Sam Rankin Street. But before I talk about that; also, the cotton pickers, I don't want to miss that. The cotton pickers used to come to the Old Line. What happened on the weekend, they would come from Robstown and other areas – King Ranch, Robstown, all out on the deep south side of Corpus, and they would be on Leopard Street, but would walk down to the Old Line area. And that's where the clubs were. So, they'll have some fun to be there the weekend. But all of that changed when it came time for the bridge to be built. Of, but

before I go there; I, during that time, I met the most beautiful lady in Corpus Christi, Texas. And, after six or eight months of courtship, I asked for her hand, and we got married.

LYNN SMITH: And what is this beautiful lady's name?

SAM JOHNSON: Connie – Connie LaDelle Debro. But I changed it to Connie LaDelle Johnson.

[Laughter]

SAM JOHNSON: Yes, and out of that relationship – the Lord blessed us with four children, one son and three daughters, and their names were Sandra Laverne, Savannah Lynn, Evelyn Joyce; and, of course, Sam, Jr.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Of course.

SAM JOHNSON: Yes, Sam Jr. So, well, we married and – and this was in 1955 when we married. And, in the meantime, I moved to work on Sam Rankin Street. Now, on Sam Rankin Street, I worked at Elmo's Barber Shop. That was where the cluster of all of the business were, because it's made up of Sam Rankin, Ramirez Street, Staples Street, and Alameda. And we had a theater. We had a photographer's shop. We had night clubs; Skylark. We had dance halls, pool halls. Matter of fact, it was five barber shops right in that area. I can give you the names of those shops; Kuykendall's Barber Shop, Lawrence Holt's, Elmo's Barber Shop, Stepper's Barber Shop, Graham's, and the ILA Hall Barber Shop. I think Mr. MacKnight ran that shop. And we had Little Dan's Barbecue Pit, barbecue which was real good, Red's Drive Inn, Harlem Theater, a grocery store. And there was a lady there named Juardine; cooked the best food – soul food anywhere in the country, in the city very good. And, we ate there all the time; and Taylor's Confectionery. All of these businesses were right in that area, cluster which was very nice. And, but as I worked for Elmo about eight years, then it was time – my family was growing, and it was time for me to get my own business. So, I opened my own shop at 1715 North Port [Avenue]. I was there 25 years. My business grew. I had a dry cleaner and barber shop and, because of that, my business thrived, and I was able to add two barbers with me, which was very nice. So, then I moved over here after 25 years. I moved over on Kennedy Avenue, 1426 Kennedy. And this is where I enlarged, and had a beauty shop for a while. But it did not pan out as well as I expected it to. But I was blessed with enough business to raise the family, and to employ three barbers, which was a blessing. But I want to talk about too the Juneteenth Celebration. That's when I first came to Corpus. That was one of the things that we enjoyed, because the barbers would close up the shops on Juneteenth and some would work a half a day. But we would have baseball games, rodeo. I never could ride but just rodeo.

[Laughter]

SAM JOHNSON: Bull riding, horseback, you know, horse saddle bronc riding and baseball. The team was referred to as the Corpus Christi Bluejays. They were there. And, now my memory is coming back to me. I had the opportunity to see Satchel Paige, baseball player; Don Newcombe, Hank Aaron, Willie Mays. See, they used to come through barn storming, and they would play an exhibition game with the, of – I'm thinking of the Corpus Christi professional team they had here at the time. I think it was the Corpus Christi Giants. They had them there, and they were playing an exhibition game with them. And I had a chance – Sam Toothpick Jones; a lot of those professional athletes. Then, there was a pool hall that Skinny Marshall had. And at this pool hall, Don Newcombe and Satchel Paige would come in, and visit that place, and some of the other athletes; Ezra Charles, professional boxer. He would visit

Skinner's Drive-in; Skinner's place. So, I never did get a chance to talk with him, but I was able to, at least, view 'em, see 'em. So, but let's get back to the Juneteenth Celebration again; no, not necessarily Juneteenth but the NAACP. Dr. H. Boyd Hall was the president. And there was a time, Walter White was the International – he was the chairperson of NAACP, and Thurgood Marshall came. We had a parade over here on the Northside. And at the exposition hall, they held a conference, and the barbers served as the ushers.

LYNN SMITH: Did you tell me that was in the 1950s?

SAM JOHNSON: That was in the '50s.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

SAM JOHNSON: Yes. So, it maybe; yeah, it was in the '50s. So, check that out.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

SAM JOHNSON: Yes. And that- - that was real good. Now, one other thing, a Mrs. Dorothy Benson-Brown; see, for a while the 19th of June decided they were going to quit celebrating so big. They were kind of looking forward to the Fourth of July. So, they kind of, say, well, we're gonna celebrate Fourth of July. But that changed. And what happened was Dorothy Benson-Brown; she said she saw the need for black youth needing to be aware of their culture. So, what she did, she start having fashion shows, arts and crafts, and this was from a one or two-day affair. It was three, and then after a while, she went for a whole week.

LYNN SMITH: Wow!

SAM JOHNSON: Cause she got the community involved, and when the community got involved in it; well, the businessmen I know had a place over at one of the parks where I talked about my profession and other businesses they brought in; business like barbecuing. They had food over there and different things. And they had fashion shows. The ladies would dress up real good. Then, we had a Miss Black Corpus Christi. Yeah, HIALCO was a part of that affair. And, then, after a while, we served. Then had beautiful, beautiful young ladies that dressed up; and, matter of fact, one of my daughters was in, and she came in third.

LYNN SMITH: Very nice.

SAM JOHNSON: Yes, and that was very nice. We were proud of her.

LYNN SMITH: Which- - which daughter was that?

SAM JOHNSON: That was Savannah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

SAM JOHNSON: Yeah, Savannah. She came in third in that. And that was wonderful. So, that's – that was some of the highlights that we had. And, one other thing, I don't want to forget. These are folks from Austin. Let me get this information. Let me get it. I have my notes here.

Edited Transcript of Mr. Sam Johnson's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: Mr. Johnson was kind enough to make some notes. So, he is- - he is prepared.

[Laughter]

SAM JOHNSON: That's right.

LYNN SMITH: Just have to find the right page.

SAM JOHNSON: Page, that's right. All right, I'll have to, you know; I don't think I wrote that down. Uh huh, ask me something else.

LYNN SMITH: All right, just a second.

SAM JOHNSON: It was the Travis County Constant Posse. They emulated the Buffalo Soldiers. And they came to Corpus, and came by my place, and I gave them some treats and they were all thirsty, and I had soda pop here for them. Yes, and that was beautiful. And Bob Jones was the one who initiated that plan. They reenacted the Buffalo Soldiers. And that was – it was a great experience because a lot of the children came to the shop, and they were excited about it. Yes, beautiful horses, and they rode all over the neighborhood on the horses. So, that was real – one of the beautiful attractions that we had.

LYNN SMITH: Was that during Juneteenth?

SAM JOHNSON: That was during the Juneteenth Celebration.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

SAM JOHNSON: Yes, it was. That was real nice. And also, the Juneteenth, we would march from the Hillcrest Park over to Solomon Coles Gym, and they would have speakers come in. And the speakers would do – would speak and excite the youngsters, and, as well as, the entire community. It was a very rewarding thing. They'll give us a chance to exercise cause it was not a short distance from here.

[Laughter]

SAM JOHNSON: To over to Solomon Coles. So, so that's - - All right. The wife and I was honored, as a family- - family of the year. Yes, LULAC did that for us. And we were at the ritzy hotel, beautiful banquet, real nice. Most of the family was there, and that was real wonderful. And we got a certificate. We got a plaque for that, and that made me feel nice. And also, even in the business here, they said I'm the legend.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: So, you've been barbering in this community for how many years now?

SAM JOHNSON: Sixty-one years. Started on the Old Line, and I'm here at Hillcrest, and I had told them 25 years on Port [Avenue], and I got over 25 years here. So, I want to go to another street for another 25 [years].

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

SAM JOHNSON: So that concludes my - -

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

SAM JOHNSON: But, thank you so much.

LYNN SMITH: Well, thank you.

SAM JOHNSON: For thinking about me.

LYNN SMITH: Well, we appreciate your participation, and we're going to get pictures of those certificates and plaques you've got over there.

LYNN SMITH: But, just a minute, I forgot to ask you about one thing, that you're a reverend also, right?

SAM JOHNSON: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Tell me about that.

SAM JOHNSON: Well, I have been in the ministry now. Oh, I've have to think about that. Ah, right at 30 years now, because I pastored in Aransas Pass for ten years. And have pastored at Thomas Chapel Church of God in Christ in this city. I've been there four years. And, before then, I was associate minister at Greater Shiloh, which is a Church of God and Christ, which is here in the city too. I served there, as an associate minister. So, it's been a blessing, and I've enjoyed it, and I'm as excited about it, as I was when I first started.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

SAM JOHNSON: So, it's been a blessing.

LYNN SMITH: Do you want to tell us about your call? When you decided to become a minister?

SAM JOHNSON: Yes, they told me I had been running for years, which is true. I knew a call was on my life, but I didn't want to, you know, admit this. They said, "You're going to preach. "No, no I'm not. No, I don't want to." But I was – I got sick. And ah, while I was sick, He began to talk with me about it. He said, "You ask – you encourage everybody else to go preach, and this; but then you won't do what I've called you to do." And, you know, it bothered me the time that I was sick. I had walking pneumonia, yes. And, I said, you know, Lord says, "I'm ready now, I done ran, I'm tired." And did you not know a burden was lifted off me. And in two or three days, then my strength began to come back, my color and everything, yes. So, when I got up, I went and called my pastor. I went and talked with him about it. And he said now, just make sure – you know, sure that the Lord called you, cause I can't tell you.

[Laughter]

SAM JOHNSON: Yes, and I prayed about it; and then, looked like my health just over night.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

SAM JOHNSON: I got well, yes. And from then on, I had a hunger for it, yes; couldn't get enough of it. And at the shop they told me, say, "Something must be wrong with Sam, all he wants to do is preach."

[Laughter]

SAM JOHNSON: All the customers, you know, yes.

LYNN SMITH: Well, they didn't quit coming, because of that.

[Laughter]

SAM JOHNSON: Sure didn't. So then, but I think some of them was getting bored, because they'll tell the other barbers. Say, "I didn't come for church. I came to get a haircut."

[Laughter]

SAM JOHNSON: But, in spite of all of that; yes, it's been a blessing. My wife was right there with me. Yes, three of my children. I'm their pastor now, yes. And ah, it's just been a blessing.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

SAM JOHNSON: Yes, as a family, we stay together. We worship together, yes. Now, I've been about four or five years at this place, where I am now [Thomas Chapel Church of God in Christ]. And, I kind of want to evangelize, but I'll wait a while on that.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

SAM JOHNSON: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: All right.

SAM JOHNSON: Okay, then.

LYNN SMITH: Well, that was sure a part of your story that we're glad that we were allowed to hear. So, thank you again.

SAM JOHNSON: Thank you. All right, you're welcome, yes.

[End of Audio Recording for Sam Johnson 01-07-2015]

Mr. Doward Kinney's Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 14: Doward Kinney in 2015



Photographer: C. Lynn Smith, HNTB

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I am interviewing Mr. Doward Kinney for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on June 24, 2015, in Corpus Christi, Texas and I am interviewing Mr. Kinney, in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside in Corpus Christi, Texas.
Thank you for being here.

DOWARD KINNEY: Thank you.

LYNN SMITH: First, if you just want to state your name, and when and where you were born for the recording?

DOWARD KINNEY: My name is Doward Evans Kinney, and I was born in Corpus Christi, Texas, Nueces County.

LYNN SMITH: Which hospital, you think?

DOWARD KINNEY: Spohn Hospital.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And when is your birthday?

DOWARD KINNEY: December 5, 1957.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. I was wondering if you would start with just kind of how you are connected to Northside? 'Cause you didn't really grow up on the Northside, in terms of the schools that you went to, right? You were on the south side?

DOWARD KINNEY: Correct.

LYNN SMITH: But you have ties to Northside? You want to tell me how - -how that works?

DOWARD KINNEY: Yes. My mother's family was on the Northside. Her mother, her sister, and a lot of times we visit, and we stayed over there. We went to church, and they had a lot of cafes and stuff, and we ate over there.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, where was your grandmother's house?

DOWARD KINNEY: Well, I remember really off of Ramirez [Street], behind a barber shop, when I was a little boy.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: But she also stayed on Chipito [Street], and then she moved to Northside, her and my auntie.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and that was North Side Manor Apartments?

DOWARD KINNEY: Correct.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And what was your mother's name?

DOWARD KINNEY: Beatrice Inez Kinney.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And what was your aunt's name?

DOWARD KINNEY: Lilly Marie Williams.

LYNN SMITH: Williams. Okay. When you were little, and you were over there, how do you remember the Northside? I mean were the people close? What was - -what was the reaction, or the interaction there?

DOWARD KINNEY: It was a real close, friendly, seagoing neighborhood like people would come in and out. It was a really loud vibrant place for people to come in and out, and enjoy their selves, when I grew up. 'Cause everybody had different business supporting their community.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, do you remember any of the names of any of the businesses that were down there? You were little, so, you might not.

DOWARD KINNEY: I remember the King Liquor Store was on the far end from my grandmother's place. And I remember Skinner, that was on my dad's side, she used to cook, she had a cooking place. And then Mr. Crecy had a Liquor Store. Then it was St. Matthews further up, and the [Old] Bayview Cemetery. And I remember our union hall [International Longshoremen's Association (ILA)] where I started working at.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Well, one of the things I definitely want to ask you about is the longshoremen - -The International Longshoremen's Association in Corpus. But you had a couple of jobs, before you started that didn't you?

DOWARD KINNEY: Oh, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Where did you work, before then?

DOWARD KINNEY: I did little jobs when I was in school. I was a dishwasher, and then I became a fry cook at Ship Ahoy [Restaurant] on the Bay [Corpus Christi Bay].

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

DOWARD KINNEY: On Ocean Drive.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: And I did a few turn-around in construction, new construction jobs.

LYNN SMITH: So, tell; explain a little bit about what a turn-around means? So, that other - -other people will understand - -

Edited Transcript of Mr. Doward Kinney's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

DOWARD KINNEY: Well, turn-around is when a sub-contractor, like Bay, or Coastal hire - - hire men for specific skills, to go into a refinery to redo, overhaul a certain facility they want to fix up, after so long. They - -they fix them. And new construction is, you start from the ground up, and build it up.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. So, you got some construction experience.

DOWARD KINNEY: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: And then, what got you started with the longshoremen?

DOWARD KINNEY: Well, I got a history I want to tell you.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: My great-uncle, my dad, and then come me, the third generation.

LYNN SMITH: Wow, so you knew all about the longshoremen?

DOWARD KINNEY: Yes, I did. And I just wanted to try different things, before I went there. I know I had a job there.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, you figured you'd probably end up there, but you wanted to try a few other things first?

DOWARD KINNEY: Yes, mam.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. That sounds good. So, tell me a little about when you were with the longshoremen, what, you know, what were the different things that you did? What were the different unions? You were with some different locals? Right?

DOWARD KINNEY: Uh, huh. [Agreeing] The first union I started out with, [Local No.] 1225, on North Staples [Street] and Ramirez [Street]. And that was the Deep Sea Local. Where we'd throw bags, I didn't have no seniority, or nothing, so, I already knew what my job was, go straight down to the vessel, and they would have pallets come in with bags. And we had to unload them, and store them in a way that they wouldn't shift when the boat was going.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

DOWARD KINNEY: So, that was the first job I had.

LYNN SMITH: Were they bags of grain? Or, what were they bags of?

DOWARD KINNEY: Fertilizer, grain, back then, oh. Lime - -lime, anything that could move on the Port [Port of Corpus Christi] what they wanted to handle in bags, we did it.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. And what did you do next, after that?

DOWARD KINNEY: Then, about a year later, a man confronted me, and said, "You're a good worker." His name was L. B. Buggage and he had gang in the Warehouse [Union]. So, I joined the

Warehouse, that was my first union I joined on the waterfront, the Warehouse [Union]. It was [Local No.] 1281. Then after that, I joined the big local, [Local No.] 1225.

LYNN SMITH: And what did they do?

DOWARD KINNEY: They- -they're the ones that would load the bags on the ship, and unload the ship sea-going vessel.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. Was that where you stayed? Or, what did you?

DOWARD KINNEY: Right now, that's where all the other locals merged into this one local, and that's the Deep Sea Local, so we could be more competitive and more efficient doing the work. But I left off one local, later on it was [Local Union No.] 1347, the Cotton Headers Local. Back then, when my dad and them start, they didn't have no machines to work the cotton. They had to break it down like a pyramid. Start from the back [of the trailer], flip them bales, and they had dollies, and keep on knocking it down. Until they get all the way to the front end of the trailer. So, you need a strong back, you know, hard, real hard. A heart and a mindset that you were gonna do that work, 'cause it was hard, before they got the squeezes in.

LYNN SMITH: I bet. Wow. Okay. And then, at some point, you had some leadership. Well, your whole family had leadership roles, over the years, right?

DOWARD KINNEY: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: With the longshoremen?

DOWARD KINNEY: Yes, mam.

LYNN SMITH: You want to tell me a little bit about each one of those people? And your great-uncle and your dad, and you, and what your leadership roles were?

DOWARD KINNEY: Well, my uncle was in the Warehouse [ILA Union], and worked a little bit Deep Sea [ILA Union]. And he had an office in the Warehouse. I that's as far as they told me, but my Dad was in the Cotton Headers, and he was on the executive board on the Deep Sea [black ILA Union] when - -when we merged.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And that was the 1983 merge?

DOWARD KINNEY: Yes, mam.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: 'Cause we were segregated, at first. But when we merged, that's when we would all hang together.

LYNN SMITH: Right. You don't have to call me mam.

[Laughter]

DOWARD KINNEY: Okay.
[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: You can just call me, Lynn.

DOWARD KINNEY: Okay.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, when you all got together, so, the advantage of - -of all the -
-the separate locals merging into one local. Tell me one more time why that was so important?

DOWARD KINNEY: At first, it was a judge order for, 'cause we were segregated.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

DOWARD KINNEY: Back in '83 [1983], and the judge wanted just one local.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: Said, "He didn't want black over on this side and white over there. We all
doing the same work, let's put them together."

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing] Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: So, it came down on a federal order that we merged April 1, 1983.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: And we became one local, the Warehouse Local became Local 27. And
The Deep Sea became Local 26.

LYNN SMITH: So, you still had two separate locals, but the white and black versions of
those locals had been merged?

DOWARD KINNEY: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: Correct.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And then later, those two locals are, or, was it just two locals?
Or, more than that?

DOWARD KINNEY: It was three locals, 'cause the Cotton Headers Local merged with the
[No.] 27 Warehouse Local (who worked with cargo on the docks/ground).
And then the [No.] 26 Deep Sea Local (who worked loading and unloading cargo on the ships - -

LYNN SMITH: Right.

DOWARD KINNEY: The Warehouse Local, then the [Local No.] 27 merged in 1997, somewhere around '97 [1997], '96 [1996], somewhere, merged with [No.] 26 [Deep Sea] Local. So, everybody was in one local.

LYNN SMITH: One local, okay. And you said that was just in better, in terms of - -of - -

DOWARD KINNEY: Efficiency.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: Or, man power, and everything.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: You wanted have to need a guy over here, and he's skilled in something else. You have everybody in one place, and you could use them, as you will.

LYNN SMITH: As you needed, okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. One of the other things I wanted to ask you about was the longshoremen [ILA] Hall that was in Northside, before the merger of the black and white locals. So, there was a hall, and you - -you went there?

DOWARD KINNEY: Uh huh, [Agreeing]. I went to both of them.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: The big hall was Local 1225; it was on the corner of North Staples [Street] and Ramirez [Street].

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: We had a little hall further down, on Ramirez and San Pedro, it was just a house, but we made it into our union hall, Warehouse Union Hall.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright, for some reason, I thought that both of those were located in that brick hall.

DOWARD KINNEY: No, mam.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Well, that's good. That's good to know. So, what happened in each one of those locations? What - -what was the purpose of the hall?

DOWARD KINNEY: Well, it was for the gathering of the membership, and so we could get our work assigned orders.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: And, what I remember most is, back then, we used to say prayers, before we go to work.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

DOWARD KINNEY: And on a Friday, anybody associated with the Local 1225 that was hurt, shut in, or needed help, the committee would talk about it, and we would pick up a collection to support the community.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

DOWARD KINNEY: And then we would have our meeting on a Thursday, I believe, I'm not quite sure, it's been a good while ago.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

DOWARD KINNEY: You know, and we would discuss different things about the community, and how we could improve our living conditions in the community. 'Cause we all stayed there.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

DOWARD KINNEY: That's what I remember.

LYNN SMITH: That's great. Yeah, I had not heard that part. So, that is - -that is really great. I'm trying to think the only other thing that I think we talked about in the pre-interview, that we haven't really talked about much is, that your grandmother went to a particular church in Northside, didn't she?

DOWARD KINNEY: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Which one was that?

DOWARD KINNEY: St. Matthew, one of the oldest churches there.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. St. Matthew's Baptist, right?

DOWARD KINNEY: Correct.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And, do you remember anything about activities that they did? That you were able to go to? Or, did you just visit it occasionally, since you all lived on the south side?

DOWARD KINNEY: We visited - - visited it occasionally, that's where my mother came from. And my grandmother and my grandfather met there.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, that makes it interesting

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, that was definitely an important church for your family.

DOWARD KINNEY: Yes. Yes, it is.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to tell me about today?

DOWARD KINNEY: There is about the one thing, when the local - -black local was there.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

DOWARD KINNEY: It really helped out the community, because a lot of people didn't have the best advanced education, and didn't have the skill set, but the union would teach them different skills. And the pay was good enough where they could have a future, and a plan for their family. And they could move up the ladder, 'cause they could support their family. Send them to school, and all. And plus it had benefits, health benefit, retirement benefit. That, 'cause - -

LYNN SMITH: Go ahead. Well, I was just gonna say, go ahead.

DOWARD KINNEY: That's what - -that's what I think is missing today. That the circulation of the money all went through the [ILA] union. Went through the community to support the community, and that's why we had all kinds of business. 'Cause you had people have restaurants, and all kinds of different business to support a community, a living community, a thriving community.

LYNN SMITH: So, so, you saw it pretty much thrive, until the [ILA] hall went away? Until the hall closed? Or, did you see some changes prior to that in the Northside community?

DOWARD KINNEY: I seen a big change, after that [after the hall closed].

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: But it - -it was still going on, because you still had the seamen.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

DOWARD KINNEY: The shrimpers, the base people [Army Depot], and rental people still was there, but it was like, you had the regular longshoremen there. 'Cause, like I said, a lot of them didn't have a high school diploma, and all. And they were making decent money to take care of their families then. They had to go and try to make another way to survive for their family.

LYNN SMITH: So, when the - -the locals merged, did you see black longshoremen - - not have as much work?

DOWARD KINNEY: Well, it depend on the - we went under a different seniority system. So, a lot of them didn't have work, and stuff, because they went under a different [seniority] plan then. Like apples and oranges, each one had their own seniority system. But we all had to go by the overall union specific charter and protocol from New York. But as far as managing our own hiring procedure and seniority system, they was completely different. And that's what hurt us bad, because we [the black ILA locals] had like Double A, Triple A, and A B C, while they didn't have that. They had Gold Stars and a different formula all together. So, when you got to merge something like that, it's always gonna be somebody get cut short.

Edited Transcript of Mr. Doward Kinney's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DOWARD KINNEY: And that's what happened to a lot of them.

LYNN SMITH: So, it was more than just the closing of the [ILA] hall. There was also - -

DOWARD KINNEY: The merger.

LYNN SMITH: The merger changed opportunities, and - -

DOWARD KINNEY: Yes, loss of opportunities back when the merger.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Well, that's - -that's interesting, 'cause I hadn't heard exactly that. So, I appreciate your - -your sharing that. Alright. Well, anything else you can think of?

DOWARD KINNEY: That's – that's about it.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, thank you so much.

[End of Audio Recording for Interview with Doward Kinney 06.24.2015]

Mrs. Virginia Lerma's Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 15: Mrs. Virginia Lerma in 2015



Photographer: C. Lynn Smith, HNTB

Figure 16: Virginia Lerma in 1959



Photograph courtesy of Virginia Lerma

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I'm interviewing Mrs. Virginia Lerma for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation – and it's being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on December 18th, 2014 in Corpus Christi, Texas. And I'm interviewing Mrs. Lerma, in order to find out more about her knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. First, Mrs. Lerma, would you tell me your – your name, and when, and where you were born?

VIRGINIA LERMA: I was born on the –it's – where – Staples goes straight that way by the store like that. It's called Saint John's Alley [San Juan Street]--.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

VIRGINIA LERMA: That's where I was born. But it was close to a store [Galan Grocery].

LYNN SMITH: So, you were born in Corpus Christi?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Oh, yeah. I was born and raised here in Corpus Christi.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And, so – and your full name – do you have your full name?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Before – before I got married it was Virginia Campos.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Before I got married.

LYNN SMITH: And –.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Now it's Lerma, because of my husband, but – but --

LYNN SMITH: Lerma, because you got married.

VIRGINIA LERMA: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And what – what's your date of birth?

VIRGINIA LERMA: July 9, 1924.

LYNN SMITH: Very good. Okay. And you grew up in – in the Northside neighborhood?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Oh – oh, yes. That's where we grew up. Me and a cousin that – I have a cousin that's older than me, and we were together all of the time. She's still [alive] – when we get together, we keep thinking about those days, you know.
[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

VIRGINIA LERMA: We were raised together by my grandmother. She raised us.

LYNN SMITH: So, what do you remember about that time?

VIRGINIA LERMA: I remember that everything was quiet, and you know – there was no problems. I remember the house that we lived on, didn't have – didn't have any windows. But we – we weren't afraid, because there was nobody doing anything bad at the time, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

VIRGINIA LERMA: And a, but there was not a – not a black person in the area. Not a black person – now it's called – it's – every – that's what the Port [of Corpus Christi], I mean that's where the black people lived you know. But before that not even one. It was all Mexican people there, everybody. I know the names of everybody that lived in the neighborhood.

LYNN SMITH: So, you had lived there from the time you were born, 1924, to what – to when?

VIRGINIA LERMA: To 1940.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: No, 1942.

LYNN SMITH: Nineteen forty-two?

VIRGINIA LERMA: When I got married, yeah. But, even though, when I got married, we lived on Lake Street.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: It wasn't the, there the other – like, where that – I tell you where that [Galan] store is? Well it's close by, but that – but it was a little further, to Lake Street.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So tell us, again, for the recorder, about that store, and what you did at that store.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Oh, they were very nice people. I remember his name was Antonio Galan – Galan, and the other Galvan. There were two stores. One was Rafael Galvan and the other Antonio Galan, you know. And they're just a block away from each other, and two story building stores, you know. And they – they both died, they're all gone. And – and my mother said that Rafael Galvan's wife was his comadre [godmother]. They were – I don't know, she baptized somebody there, you know, or something like that.

LYNN SMITH: And he's – you were talking about when you were a little girl – what happened when you would go there? Would they give you stuff?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Oh my God, yes. I remember they used to pick me up, and sit me on the counter, and give me cookies, and candies, and things like that, you know. And I remember one day I was running, and I was a little girl -- I must have been about four or something like, or three, I don't know. But I remember running, and Mr. Galan started running after me, and he had a string hanging from his hand, and I – I thought oh you know, I – I was scared, because he has a string in his hand. And it was, because he wanted to measure my feet to get me some shoes.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Oh. He was going to use the string to measure your – feet?

VIRGINIA LERMA: But he scared me, because I thought I was bad, you know.

LYNN SMITH: He was going to tie you up or –

VIRGINIA LERMA: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: -- something?

VIRGINIA LERMA: I thought that --.

[Laughter]

VIRGINIA LERMA: I'll never forget that, because I was running and running, and --.

LYNN SMITH: Oh goodness. You were also telling – telling us that some of the streets had different names then.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Oh, yes. Those days, yes.

LYNN SMITH: What – what --?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Well, I was born at Saint John's Alley, Saint John's Alley. It was there right next door – it's like at – like Staples goes like this, and Saint John's Alley goes like that, you see, like that.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Here's Staples and here's Saint John's Alley. And the store was –

LYNN SMITH: Parallel to the –

VIRGINIA LERMA: -- right here, right across from us. And then we lived on Chipito [Street] too.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: And I remember that my sister used to keep me, because my mother was gone. She's married, and she left. And my grandmother raised us. We were living close to a railroad track. And one day my sister was going to hit me. And she was – she was running after me. I got ahold of the train was passing, and I went, and climbed the train, and got on top of the train. I really did.

[Laughter]

VIRGINIA LERMA: And I remember seeing people looking at me, and crying, you know, and – but I was – but I loved, I was - - I was on top of the train. The train was going. And then I – I was looking for a place to jump, you know, that I wouldn't get hurt. So, I went down the – the rails, and then I jumped, and it was –everything was okay.

LYNN SMITH: You jumped from the little ladder, and --?

VIRGINIA LERMA: And – and there used to be a – a – a river there. It was called, El Puente de los Amores, the love – the bridge of love, it was there too. We, uh on the – on top of the railroad tracks, the – that bridge would cross around on top of the railroad tracks.

LYNN SMITH: Oh. Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Yeah. I never – I still love to go see those places, you know. I – I do.

LYNN SMITH: So, you have very fond memories of that area?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Oh, yes. I remember – oh, I was happy. We were very happy, you know, with my grandmother. She was a very good lady. She taught us how to pray all of the time. All of the time. She taught us how – I remember when we were little, and she would kneel us – we would kneel down with her to pray all of the time. And a lot of things happened, you know. She'd tell us about God and

Christ. When we were lying down with her, you know, she was telling us about Jesus Christ, and Our Father and all of that, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Did you go to –

VIRGINIA LERMA: She was very --.

LYNN SMITH: -- church in that neighborhood?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Oh, yes. I went to Sacred Heart.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Yeah. We used to go – and I was baptized there, and I baptized all of my kids there too. We were all baptized at the same church.

LYNN SMITH: Very good.

VIRGINIA LERMA: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: So, how did you meet your husband?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Let me see. I remember that – there was when we moved to Lake Street, we were living close to Lake Street, we didn't live on Lake Street, we lived on Josephine, but it was close to Lake Street. And I think that's where I met him. Oh, I had a cousin that used to be a police officer, and he invited – he went to see, he had a sister, and – and he had been to the Army, you know, and he was back, and he was a police officer, and they were going to have a party or something, and he went to my grandmother, and he – he wanted me to go, cause he wanted to take my sister and me, and he could take both of us. And that's where I met my husband.

LYNN SMITH: Very good.

VIRGINIA LERMA: And they had a party, you know, and that's where I met him.

LYNN SMITH: And, so, once y'all got married, you left the neighborhood?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Yes. That's when I left the neighborhood, when we got married.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: But I still love to go there. I still love to go, really.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: So, --?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Every once in a while, I'll – I'm driving. I'm 90, but I'm still driving. But you know something, my grandmother used to teach us how to – to – to pray. She taught us all of the time to pray, my grandmother. She was very sweet. And she had a hard time raising us. A hard time raising us.

Because she didn't have any money, and nothing, you know. I remember we used to go Cheston Heath School, you know. It was over here where the, the –

LYNN SMITH: Cheston Heath?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Cheston Heath. You know where --

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

VIRGINIA LERMA: -- the courthouse is?

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

VIRGINIA LERMA: That's where Cheston Heath used to be.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: The school that we used to go to. And I remember, in those days, people didn't have any kind of help in those days. And a lot of kids would get together, and – and go look in the trash cans, and when they would get out of school, you know, I remember that.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

VIRGINIA LERMA: And we used to go to a place that was right across from the depot – the depot, where the train used to, and the depot was on one side, and on the – this side there's a – it's Pridgen-Kline [produce house at northwest corner of W. Broadway and Media streets per 1927 Sanborn Map] I think it is, it was a – they had all kinds of vegetables, and things like that. It was like a store. And they would throw it in the trash cans, the ones that were no good, and you know, kids would go pick them up one day –

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

VIRGINIA LERMA: -- you know, and take them home.

LYNN SMITH: Well, it was the depression then –

VIRGINIA LERMA: Yeah –

LYNN SMITH: -- wasn't it?

VIRGINIA LERMA: -- it was The Depression, yeah. And I remember that – that there was a young girl, named Victoria, she was the oldest of all of the kids there, and the – the men that were working there, they would take her into a – one of the train cars, and take her in to close the door. What are they going to do, you know?

LYNN SMITH: Oh dear.

VIRGINIA LERMA: They would take her in there.

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LYNN SMITH: Wow, that doesn't sound good.

VIRGINIA LERMA: [Agreeing]

[Laughter]

VIRGINIA LERMA: It was Pridgen-Kline, the store. A huge – but it was all vegetables, you know, and fruits. I'll never – forget that.

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

VIRGINIA LERMA: And we used to feel bad, because she was like the – they would take her in the – in that car. It was one of the cars – the train – what do you call the train, like, you know, the ones that the train have?

LYNN SMITH: A caboose, or --?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Yes. And they would just take her in, and lock the door, close the door, you know. We were all looking –what's going on, you know. We thought they were going to – they were going to beat her up, but don't. And they wanted to do something else.

LYNN SMITH: Oh dear. Alright.

VIRGINIA LERMA: [Inaudible].

LYNN SMITH: Well, so, it was you and your sister that lived with your grandmother?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Oh, yes.

LYNN SMITH: And what was your sister's name? Or is she – is she still with us?

VIRGINIA LERMA: She's still – she's still alive.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, great.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Her name is Maria Leonor – Maria Leonor Trejillo. But her – her husband's name is Avidas, Maria Avidas.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And does she live in Corpus Christi too?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Yes. She lives on Gollihar Street.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: She's close to Gollihar [Road], yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: She's still there. She's older than me. She's 92.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

VIRGINIA LERMA: I'm 90, and she's 92. But we were raised together. We were – we were always together. Always. My grandmother didn't want us to walk out of the house by ourselves, I remember the two of us had to go together all of the time. I remember we used to walk all of the way to downtown, and we would see Last Street and Black Street, you know, walking around on Leopard Street.

LYNN SMITH: So –

VIRGINIA LERMA: There's the big names on – on the corners of the --.

LYNN SMITH: -- so Last Street, what is that called now?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Last was – it's Alameda.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Alameda was Last Street.

LYNN SMITH: And Black Street, what's that called --?

VIRGINIA LERMA: It's Staples. It's Staples.

LYNN SMITH: And that's called Staples now?

VIRGINIA LERMA: It's Staples, yeah. That's what they call it –

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: -- now. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Now, it seems like the other day that I was here, you told me that – about Water Street, and that Water Street used to be at the water.

VIRGINIA LERMA: That's right. Sure, it was. We used to go in. I was stunned when they built that, what do you call it, it's –

LYNN SMITH: Shoreline Boulevard?

VIRGINIA LERMA: -- the Shoreline, they built it up. It wasn't there, because I used to take care of a little boy there, when I was about 14. I used to take care of a little boy named Howard Lee Rice, and I loved that little boy so much.

And it was close to – to Water Street, and then I would get out there, and I would get out there, and go in the water on Water Street. And – and I loved that little boy, and – and they offered me a better job with more pay, and I hated to leave it, but I – I had to get the other one that was paying me more money.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

VIRGINIA LERMA: But I used to come home at night crying, because I wanted to see that little boy. I was so used to him. You know what he is now? He's – he's – the one's that made the medicine, what do you call them?

LYNN SMITH: A pharmacist?

VIRGINIA LERMA: He's a pharmacist – he's a pharmacist.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

VIRGINIA LERMA: His name was Howard Lee Rice. I will never forget, because I loved that little boy. But – but his – his father was his father, but the lady wasn't his mother. But I think they gave him to him, because that was his little boy. And she would wait for me to get there to leave, and I would stay with him all day, you know. And I loved that little boy.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

VIRGINIA LERMA: And that was Howard Lee Rice [sp]. He must have been about two years old, or one and a half years. But he was little, but I loved him. I remember coming from the other job, and I would cry, because I – I was missing him, you know, because I would take care of --.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: And he's still there. He's a pharmacist, you know, pharmacist.

LYNN SMITH: So was that your first job?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Yeah, that was my first job, taking care of him. And then they offered me this other job that would pay more money. And because they used to pay very little at the time, they were paying \$0.30 a day, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Thirty cents. Some –the biggest pay was \$0.50 a day, in those days.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: In those days I remember.

LYNN SMITH: So, how old were you when you had your first job?

VIRGINIA LERMA: I – I – I must have been about 13.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Yeah, because I used to take care of him. But he was so precious. And he's still there. James, my son – he looked for him, and he found he is a pharmacist.

LYNN SMITH: Is he a pharmacist here in town?

VIRGINIA LERMA: No, he is with a pharmaceutical. I don't know where they make the – the medicine there. What do you call – pharmaceutical, or what do you call it?

LYNN SMITH: Oh, a pharmaceutical – company?

VIRGINIA LERMA: -- Yes. That's where he is.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Right.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. But is that in Corpus Christi, or is it somewhere else?

VIRGINIA LERMA: No, it's somewhere else.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: It's somewhere else.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. But they found –

VIRGINIA LERMA: [Inaudible].

LYNN SMITH: -- but he found him? That's great.

VIRGINIA LERMA: But he found – he looked for Howard Lee Rice –.

LYNN SMITH: And, so, he's doing alright?

VIRGINIA LERMA: He's doing alright. That's what my son told me, because he looked for him, you know –

LYNN SMITH: That's wonderful.

VIRGINIA LERMA: -- on the computer.

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

VIRGINIA LERMA: He was – he's still there. I remember I used to go, I loved – I used to love him, because I was with him all day, because the lady was just waiting for me to come. She was already dressed and everything to go, you know. And I was the one to stay with him.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

VIRGINIA LERMA: And he was the sweetest little boy. I'll never forget –

LYNN SMITH: That sounds like a good memory.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Oh, yeah. I'll never forget that, because when I come from the other job I was crying, because I missed him, you know. Oh, I wanted to see him, but I couldn't go.

LYNN SMITH: Wow. Okay. Well, is there – I was trying to think of anything else that I needed to ask you.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Okay.

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LYNN SMITH: But I – I can't remember anything else. But there might be. Is there something you can think of that you want to tell me about Northside, and your memories of there?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Well, I remember that my – my uncles told me that – that there was no channel for the ships or anything. They used to cross – you know where the – where the – where the –

LYNN SMITH: The draw bridge was, or the Bascule bridge?

VIRGINIA LERMA: We used have a – my mother said they made that – they – they made the canal for the ships.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

VIRGINIA LERMA: But before then they cross walking.

LYNN SMITH: You could just walk across there?

VIRGINIA LERMA: My mother's brothers – they crossed my mother said -- walking

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

VIRGINIA LERMA: My uncles were fisherman, my mother's brothers, and they used to walk, all the time walk. All the time walk. They said, my mother, and after that she said something, I don't know if it was 1919 or 1920.

But they made the ship channel and they brought a lot of black people to make it. And I think that's when they stayed here, you know, but before there were none – there was none of them people, not one of the black people around there.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Well Ms. Lerma, I sure do appreciate your talking with us today.

VIRGINIA LERMA: I don't know why she said –

LYNN SMITH: Your sister?

VIRGINIA LERMA: -- I'm going to kill my sister and it's okay.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Your sister thought it was okay to kill you?

VIRGINIA LERMA: Yeah [Inaudible].

LYNN SMITH: Do you get along now?

VIRGINIA LERMA: I – and that's why I – I used to hold – got ahold of the train when the train was passing, you know, and I – and I got up on the train.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well thank you, again.

VIRGINIA LERMA: Okay.

[End of Audio Recording for Lynn Smith – Virginia Lerma - 12.18.2014]



Mr. Joel Mumphord's Edited Oral History Transcript

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith interviewing Mr. Joel Mumphord for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on November 18th, 2014, in Corpus Christi, Texas, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Mumphord in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. First, please tell me your name and when and where you were born.

JOEL MUMPHORD: My name is Joel Mumphord, and I was born in 1959, in Victoria, Texas.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And— you've lived in Corpus Christi for a long time. Currently, you're — you're serving in — in what type of job?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Well, I'm serving in the role of the Election Administrative Officer for the Nueces County Democratic Party.

LYNN SMITH: Great. Okay. Let's — let's look now at — at when you arrived in Corpus Christi, Texas? What year was that?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Well, my family, we — they left Victoria in the year of 1963, and lived in Corpus Christi area, 309 Coke Street, which is Ben Garza neighborhood, and we stayed there up until 1969. Then we moved to — moved to Hillcrest in February of 1969, 2011 Palm Drive, and that's where I grew up in Hillcrest, and went to Crossley Elementary, attended Robert Driscoll Junior High School, which it was called— junior high school at that time, and then I went on to Miller — Roy Miller High School, and graduated in 1979.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and when you were at Crossley Elementary, what are some of your memories of being a kid there?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Great memories that was, now that we will reflect on that, I remember this one teacher all the, young man or little boys were so crazy about Miss King, but the memories was great, because like I said we — we just had a — as a young lad we just — we just had a great time as being young people, you know, having fun, participating in all the activities, and whatever that took place at Crossley Elementary at that time.

LYNN SMITH: So what type of activities were your — your favorite ones?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Track. They called me speedy. They called me little Joel — [Laughter]

JOEL MUMPHORD: -- at the time and — and I felt fast, and there was three of us, Guy Nickleson, and myself, and Clarence Winn, and who was the fastest guy in — in elementary.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And then, when you weren't in school, like in the summers, what did you do?

JOEL MUMPHORD: In the summertime we helped out – helped my father out. He had a little side job landscaping and stuff, so – and then I would cut yards in the neighborhood, and I thought I would become rich making \$6.00 every time I cut a yard.

[Laughter]

JOEL MUMPHORD: You know, so – but, you know, just the normal things that young people did growing up.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Did – I think you'd mentioned that you spent some time in T.C. Ayers Park, and – and what type of activities were going on there?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Well, T.C. Ayers was a – a recreational facility where all young people hung out in the summer time. They had a lot of activities where one; I recall that they used to take us out in the – in the Bay to go fishing, you know, the City of Corpus Christi was closer. That type of activity, and I would love that, and I love to fish, and then we had, like – like I said softball games, and it was just a place to keep you busy in – during the summer if you didn't have nothing else to do.

LYNN SMITH: That sounds good. Alright. Let's see, you then went onto Roy Miller High School?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Yes'm.

LYNN SMITH: After – well after Robert Driscoll, is there anything that you want to tell us about your experiences at Robert Driscoll first?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Just played football, met a friend of mine – met – we was – had the same birthday. He was born in 1959. I was born in 1959. October 21st, October 21st, and we became good friends, and we was on the same football team, and --.

LYNN SMITH: And who was that?

JOEL MUMPHORD: His name was, oh God, it mistakes me now, but his name --

LYNN SMITH: That's okay.

JOEL MUMPHORD: -- his name was Wilson, and now he's living in Dallas now, but we became good friends because we had the same – as a matter of fact there was three of us had the same birthday, Russell, Wilson and myself, we all had – was born October 21st, 1959, and was all on the same football team.

LYNN SMITH: That's pretty – pretty –

JOEL MUMPHORD: Oh, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: -- it's an interesting coincidence.

JOEL MUMPHORD: Um-hum.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So then you went on to Roy Miller, and you played football again at Roy Miller; right?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Yeah. We played football and ran track at Roy Miller High School. Those – I made the – the varsity team in my sophomore year, okay, and first year when I made the varsity team we went on and we made the playoff in that year, and so – and then the next year I played football, and the next year I played football, and graduated from Miller, and then after graduating from Miller I attended a semester at Del Mar College. And then I ran into or met the sheriff of Nueces County, Solomon Ortiz, and he asked me to come work for him, and I did. I accepted the position.

LYNN SMITH: And what position was that? What was your job?

JOEL MUMPHORD: A jailer at Nueces County, and then he went on, and he sent me to become a certified peace officer, and I did six months, and graduate from the academy, and became a certified peace officer through the state of Texas.

LYNN SMITH: Very good. Alright. Let's see, now you had described to me, when -- during our pre-interview, about some changes that you saw in Hillcrest. Do you want to tell us about those?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Well, a lot of changes have – have come about in Hillcrest. I, you know, there were – changes are going to be – going to be made, I mean – well, not made, but come about. When you have home owners who transition, who move on, and leave property, and then we have the, I say the encroachment of refinery, buying out property, and reducing the population in Hillcrest, and that came about also losing our elementary school in Hillcrest. Once you lose the elementary school, well, you're doomed, your – any neighborhood, any community. Once you lose that school it's – it's – it's dead, and so that's what happened. Hillcrest – Hillcrest, when I was growing up, was one of the most beautiful places that you can drive – drive through. Like I said earlier, landscaping was beautiful, everything was immaculate, I mean, everybody knew each other, everybody helped raised each other's family kids, what so ever, everybody – we have several churches in the neighborhood, and so, if you drive through Hillcrest now, it's not the same. It was definitely not the same, grass is tall, there's lack of funds that goes into Hillcrest. Personally I think they deliberately reduce property valuations over there in order for refineries to purchase property at a low cost, because at one time – and – and – and, you must know that property in Hillcrest is the most valuable property in Nueces County. The police did a survey a year ago, and discovered that the Northside has the lowest crime rate in Nueces County. It was safer to live in – in Northside Hillcrest than anywhere else in Nueces County, and so that's one of the plus that we have coming out of Hillcrest right now, but other than that it's –it's done deliberately. There's been several lawsuits due to the fact that releases from refineries have caused injury to people, property, and – and, so, Hillcrest has been just like it was Iraq, you know, it's just, the city council, the county government, in my opinion, have totally forgotten about the Northside. The only time the interest came to the Northside was when Whataburger Field, the Ryan's decided, they chose a spot to build Whataburger Field.

LYNN SMITH: Nolan Ryan's family?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Nolan Ryan's yes, and so if you notice, Port Avenue is solid concrete now

LYNN SMITH: And it wasn't before?

JOEL MUMPHORD: No. It was just one road of asphalt, lighted, now it's all lighted, beautified. I mean, there was a plan for the Northside, but that plan has gone out the window now to beautify Hillcrest again, but no more. I – I – I don't think – we were trying to get in this last lawsuit, and CITGO was found guilty. They was found guilty, but the judge says they wasn't guilty enough that they should be – assessed punishment that they should buy out Hillcrest, but they was found guilty. Well, not only were

they found guilty, but they – what's the word? When you are found guilty you have to pay a – a penalty, but what's the word? What's the correct word for it?

LYNN SMITH: Punitive damages or – I don't know. I don't know what the word is.

JOEL MUMPHORD: Well, yeah, but the word is restitution.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

JOEL MUMPHORD: But anyway, they were found guilty, and the judge didn't feel like they should be punished enough, or the person shouldn't be, because now corporations are people I guess, are not people, whatever. But – but now it's just like Hillcrest just – just – is just forgotten by city council, by this county government, was just totally forgotten.

LYNN SMITH: You've mentioned about the Crossley – of the – the closing of Crossley Elementary, and I think you – you told us a little bit about why they said they closed Crossley. You want to explain that?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Well, they alluded to the fact that the pollution, from the refineries, you know, could harm the kids, and so in order to avoid lawsuits they move them to Solomon Coles away from the contaminated area, what they would call Hillcrest. One description that they used to say, that the entire Northside was contaminated, but not contaminated enough to prevent building Whataburger Field, and to improve the Northside to come to this area, now if you notice Whataburger Field being built, Brewster's Icehouse, all of these are on the Northside now. This is how valuable this property is, they have turned the Northside – the Concrete Street Theater area, and now they designated it is as a music district, okay-

LYNN SMITH: And that's near the water?

JOEL MUMPHORD: And that's near, not only near the water, but near the Northside where at one time, I know, they fought to – because we had a – this cesspool where the odor was so strong you can smell it in Hillcrest, okay, if the wind blew the right way it would – you could smell it in Hillcrest, and so no one wanted to come into the Northside area except the Port Authority that conducted business on the waterfront. But now improvements are taking place, the new bridge will come in, and – and I applaud that. I – because time is – is taking toll on the old bridge, and we need a new bridge, no doubt about it. I'm not totally – I'm not against that. Here we go again, will those—who are left in Hillcrest, will this new bridge will have an impact, the residents who still own property in Hillcrest, it can be a plus or it can be a negative, it depends. The majority of your home owners in Hillcrest are seniors now, up in the eighties, who still own their property. So when you're talking about them participating in – in the new developed area, that some may not be around to see it, or some may be around to see it, and they might be shut off from the rest of, you know, you say, so to speak, the world, but --.

LYNN SMITH: You're mother is still in Hillcrest –

JOEL MUMPHORD: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: - - right?

JOEL MUMPHORD: She's still in Hillcrest. Now I can – we can sit on her porch and watch the fireworks from Whataburger Field, watch the ships go by, we can hear the music from Concrete Street Theater, and see the beautiful lighted Harbor Bridge, and the fireworks and lights of Whataburger Field, and they offered to buy her out, and they just want her property, not her house. They just want her

property for \$105,000, my point was where will she go to purchase a comparable property? The lots in Hillcrest are totally different than property in a new development. Where can she go on the south side and purchase a home for a \$105,000 at 80-years old. She cannot purchase a decent home. "Well, the refineries say, we don't want the house, just the land." No, she can't accept an offer for a \$105,000 because it will not give her enough money to buy a new property outright, with no loan. She would not want to purchase a property that needed a lot of work at her age and \$105,000 would not purchase a property in as good a shape as what she has. Lots on the south side start at \$40,000 each, but – but anyway, and so my argument has been that people sell their house at \$38 a square foot – or lease their property if the refinery wants it then lease it, because the refineries need space now. They need land because they have nowhere for this Eagle Ford Shale they have no excess property to store their petroleum.

LYNN SMITH: Um-hum. Okay. Well, I think that gives us a pretty good idea. Is there anything else you can think of that we need to know?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Well, the thing of it is, is that in about a few years, and when this bridge is – is finally started, and TxDOT or the state of whoever starts purchasing property. The Northside will be of blemish, it will be a ghost town. There will be no more Northside. I – and – and I was thinking the other day, I was driving by, why no one is concerned with the two cemeteries, historical cemeteries that are left in Hillcrest. The state of Texas, the historical society, the county, the local government, no concern with the two historical cemeteries in Hillcrest. You see the old – the monuments sitting out there, no fence around it or anything to guard those two cemeteries.

LYNN SMITH: That's an interesting question. Cemeteries in the state of Texas are – are protected by the health and safety code, and so there – I know that they are –they're aware of the cemeteries, and – and they're going to, you know, do what they can to avoid any impact to those cemeteries.

JOEL MUMPHORD: Right, and so that's one reason why they are not going to go past Peabody Street--

LYNN SMITH: Um-hum.

JOEL MUMPHORD: -- because of those two historical cemeteries.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

JOEL MUMPHORD: Now they are talking about improvements along Port Avenue, okay, you – you don't put a solid concrete street down, and not want to improve that area, so – but we're hoping that the refineries will come together and just buy out Hillcrest at a decent price per person, and just buy out Hillcrest. Well, some say what is a decent price? Well, like I say, the appraisal district has lowered the property valuation in Northside. So, when you go to sell your property, "Well it's only worth \$32,000, when you're sitting on three lots, because most of the Hillcrest homes are sitting on two to three lots. No if, and, but, about it.

Okay. A hundred and five thousand [dollars] [\$105,000] – if you're going to make a comparison like I told the former Mayor Henry Garrett, there are homes selling in new subdivisions that have 1,800 square feet sitting on a small lot, and the asking price is \$165,000 to \$200,000. Well, where will these Hillcrest people go who have two to three lots? I know those lots are valuable, at least to the people who own

them now. Maybe not to others – maybe they want to say not to you at this time, but we know better. I have advised my mother not to sell her property, but to lease it.

LYNN SMITH: -- she's got a big property?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Yes, and so, you know, we can drive in her yard all the way around and come back out, you know, so her home has 1,600 square feet. And, so she has a living room a little bit larger than this [conference room], and a separate dining room, kitchen, you know, and – so you cannot get that on the south side.

LYNN SMITH: For what she can get –

JOEL MUMPHORD: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: -- for what they're offering her?

JOEL MUMPHORD: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. I think that's – that's an important point. Is there anything else you want to bring up?

JOEL MUMPHORD: I just, at this point, you know, I just think that if people will stick together in Hillcrest and support one another, and say no, we're not moving out unless we get "X" amount of dollar for our property, then I think we can be victorious, because I would hate to see someone who has been in Hillcrest for all of their life and then they transition out, and then they start having problems, because most people who have – that I know of, who have sold their property are still paying for their new property. The new property that they bought, they only had forty, fifty-nine thousand, sixty-nine thousand from the sale of their Hillcrest property, and so they put a little down payment on a home, and some are still struggling to pay for their new property, whereas the Hillcrest property was paid for. That's –that's just not right, when you uproot people from Hillcrest, a place where – and still on Sundays you have people come back home. During Labor Day, we had what we call is Come Back Home Day, Labor Day weekend, every two years. We have everyone to come back home to Corpus, and – and we have a good crowd who comes back home, and celebrate – just to see each other. It's just like one big family reunion that includes folks who have moved away, who come back home and those who still live here, on Labor Day weekend, so --.

LYNN SMITH: So what year was your last reunion? Are you due this year or --?

JOEL MUMPHORD: -- 2015.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, 2015. Alright. Well, thank you so much for visit us –

JOEL MUMPHORD: You're welcome.

LYNN SMITH: -- this morning.

JOEL MUMPHORD: I hope I was very helpful.

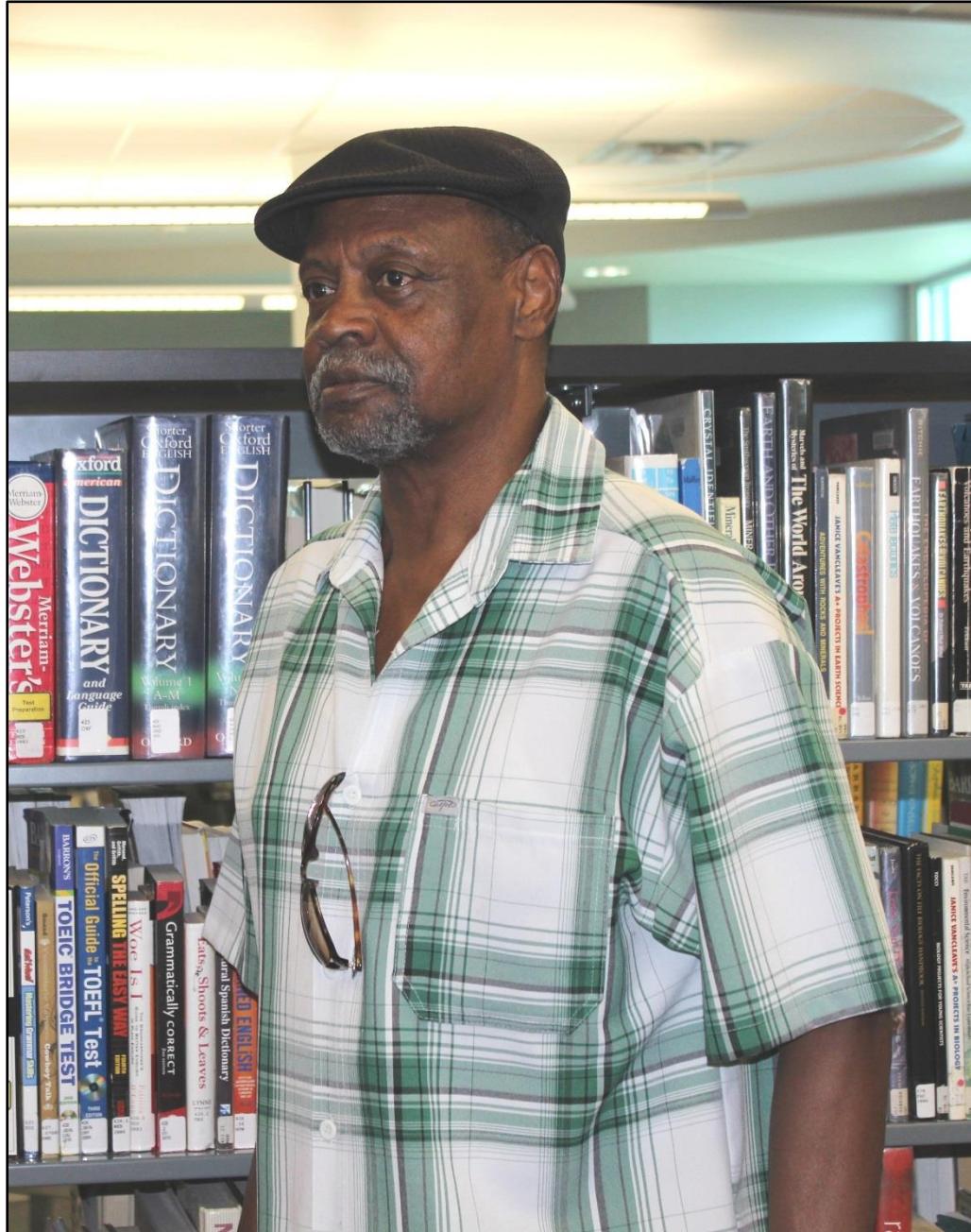
LYNN SMITH: You were. You – every perspective on Northside is – is more information, and we really appreciate it.

JOEL MUMPHORD: Thank you.

[End of Audio Recording for Lynn Smith – Joel Mumphord – 11-18-2014]

Mr. Herman Polk's Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 17: Mr. Herman Polk in 2015



Photographer: C. Lynn Smith, HNTB

Edited Transcript of Mr. Herman Polk's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I am interviewing Mr. Herman Polk for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on June 24, 2015, in Corpus Christi, Texas. And I am interviewing Mr. Polk in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Thank you for being here. I appreciate it. And first, if you would just tell me your name, and then when and where you were born?

HERMAN POLK: My name is Herman Polk. I was born June 14, 1947, in Hearne, Texas.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And if you'd kind of just tell me the names of your family members, your siblings, your mom, your dad.

HERMAN POLK: My father was Melvin Polk. He passed away 09.10.2001. My mother, Mildred Polk, she was born February 27, 1926.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: And my brother, Melvin, he passed away March 28, 2004.

LYNN SMITH: I'm sorry, that's a lot of loss.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: So, when you were young, your family came to Corpus Christi. What brought you here?

HERMAN POLK: My father was asked to come here to fill in on the longshoremen, and help them out with the longshoremen.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And about what grade were you in then?

HERMAN POLK: Fourth grade.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, what school did you go to when you got here?

HERMAN POLK: I attended Booker T. [Washington] Elementary on Sam Rankin.

LYNN SMITH: Alright, and where did you all live?

HERMAN POLK: We lived on Winnebago.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Was that a house, or apartment?

HERMAN POLK: House, house.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. And after going to Booker T. Washington, where did you go to school?

HERMAN POLK: I attended Solomon Coles Junior-Senior High School.

LYNN SMITH: And what year did you graduate there?

HERMAN POLK: I graduated in 1965.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, what activities do you remember doing in school? What were you involved in?

HERMAN POLK: Football, basketball, track.

LYNN SMITH: Did them all. Okay.

HERMAN POLK: Right. Right.

LYNN SMITH: What do you remember about the Northside? I believe you told me something about T.C. Ayers.

HERMAN POLK: Yes, T.C. Ayers was our hangout spot. It was a recreation center, but it was a hangout. Mr. Charles Bolden was the director, and he had guys like Calvin Reed and Clarence Winn and all worked there. You know, but we always played for the school, and we played at nighttime there, and all the time. You know, in the ball park, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, they had baseball at T.C. Ayers?

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, the park was right there. Every night they had games there, so, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. And at some point, you worked, or maybe hung around at a barber shop. Tell me about that.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, on Saturday morning, we would, you know, go to the barber shop, hang out, help them a while, sweep the floor a little bit. And, you know, just make a little change. I didn't have to do it, but I did, you know. Elmo would bring me home at night, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, you had a pretty close relationship with Elmo?

HERMAN POLK: Yes. Elmo Adam had a son, a little younger than I was, got in a bad accident in Houston where he was paralyzed. Elmo got me to take him and his son to Dallas, to the Rehab out on Harry Hines. And, from then on, just close 'cause his son was always in bad shape.

LYNN SMITH: Hum, wow. Didn't you tell me that there was some kind of system at the barber shop? That it was super busy, and?

HERMAN POLK: Yes, at the barber shop [Elmo's Barber Shop] on Saturday morning, back in the days, Corpus was booming, a lot of business men, and guys off the ship, they'd be in a hurry and a rush. And they - - and they wanted to know who's next? Who's next? And I would say, "I'm next." "Well I will give you \$5.00 to get your spot". I don't care, I'll sell you a spot, and that would go on a few times, you know.

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LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: And make a little change, oh, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: So, people who had a little time could just wait on their turn and?

HERMAN POLK: Right. I was in no rush, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright. And then, at some point, you all, your family moved from the house on Winnebago over to Hillcrest, right?

HERMAN POLK: Right. Right. Right.

LYNN SMITH: Where - -where did you live in Hillcrest?

HERMAN POLK: On Noakes [Street].

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: Noakes and Van Loan [Avenue].

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Noakes and Van Loan. And what about your first job that you called a job, versus the - -the Barber Shop?

HERMAN POLK: Oh, we was like dish washers down at the Old Nueces Hotel.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, okay. That was downtown, right?

HERMAN POLK: Downtown, yeah. A lot of fun, you know, me and my friend, we would go down there to work, and what have you.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Sounds like you were pretty enterprising? You were working- -

HERMAN POLK: Oh, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Really, really young.

HERMAN POLK: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.
Yeah, that's what people did back then, you know.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, we didn't hang out, and stuff, you know. We was either working or playing sports, you know. We didn't play no video; we didn't have no video games. We didn't sit around, you know.

LYNN SMITH: I understand. We didn't have those when I was a child either.

[Laughter]

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HERMAN POLK: I, yeah, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: So, your dad was a longshoreman, and so,

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: What do you remember about your dad being a longshoreman?

HERMAN POLK: Well, I remember my daddy, he had a - - he had a crew, a group of guys they were very very close. And they had a club they called, the Young Men Progressive. And my father was the president of that, then he was the president of the I. L. A. [International Longshoremen's Association] longshoremen, and the guys just gravitated to my father, you know. And they liked to be around him, and stuff, you know. I started working with him, and when I started working with him, he just got a way, you know, just more in the office and stuff, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. He was a leader of the longshoremen, wasn't he?

HERMAN POLK: Yes, he was the president.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: What year? What years was he president?

HERMAN POLK: He was president quite a - -quite a few years, even before - -before the merge, and after the merge, you know. And, the white guys and the Spanish guys, and all they, like I say, they - - they gravitated to my father, liked having him be in charge, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Very good. So, the merge - -the merger was in 1983, right? Where the black and white longshoreman unions here in Corpus Christi merged?

HERMAN POLK: Right. Right.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And he remained President, alright. Now, you told me a little bit about black Local No. 1437.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, Local, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Tell me about them a little bit.

HERMAN POLK: Local 1347 was called the Cotton Headers. They would put all the cotton in the warehouses for it to be loaded on the ships. And it was, there was, there wasn't that many of us. There was old guys and stuff that they put that cotton in there. One year we put cotton all on the outside about 60,000 bales. The warehouses were full already, and they was just hoping it wouldn't rain, you know. And they won out on the gamble that it didn't rain, and got it loaded out, and.

LYNN SMITH: Wow, that - -that's good.

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HERMAN POLK: Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: So, how old were you when you started working with the longshoremen?

HERMAN POLK: First time, just, oh, I guess, 15 when I first went on the first ship, you know. But then, as I got a little older, 16 when I was, you know, a junior or senior in high school, I worked - worked regular, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Just part-time, but regular?

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you know, Saturdays, you know, weekends and little summer - summer, you know. That was my summer job then. With my dishwashing days, we was little kids almost like that.

[Laughter]

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Now you also said that you were a member of St. John Baptist Church, right?

HERMAN POLK: Right. Right. Right.

LYNN SMITH: Tell me a little bit about the activities that you did there?

HERMAN POLK: Well, at St. John - at St. John, we had a, right before the - before the split, before the split St. John was one big church, and we had band, we had church band. And band and we would take big trips to Chicago, by Andrew Jackson's home in Chicago, and here and there. And the band director from Coles School was the band director at St. Johns, and had uniforms, and everything.

LYNN SMITH: Was it Don Haynes?

HERMAN POLK: Right.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: You heard of him?

LYNN SMITH: I did, I read some articles about him.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, his son - his son is a band director in Austin, at L.B.J. [High School].

LYNN SMITH: Very good.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah. Mr. Haynes was a good man. A very good man. Pastor Branch he believed in the youth. We had a lot of youth activities, good picnics, go bowling, skating, you know, hay rides, and all; we do it all the time.

LYNN SMITH: Nice.

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HERMAN POLK: Yeah. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Now, you said something about your mother was over a girls group?

HERMAN POLK: At church group, I think they call it The GA Girls, or something. Some kind of auxiliary for young - -young teenage girls, and stuff. And they still, a lot of them still pretty close with my mother, you know, 'cause my mother never had no daughters. And they are like our daughters in some ways.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Your mother's name is Mildred, right?

HERMAN POLK: Right.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Now, you went into the service for a little while, right?

HERMAN POLK: Right.

LYNN SMITH: Nineteen sixty-six.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and then you stayed in a couple of years, right?

HERMAN POLK: Right. Right.

LYNN SMITH: Went to - -went to Korea?

HERMAN POLK: Right. Right.

LYNN SMITH: And then you moved back to Corpus Christi?

HERMAN POLK: Right.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And at that time, your family was living in Hillcrest?

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: And then you got married, right?

HERMAN POLK: Right. Right.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And that was in?

HERMAN POLK: Sixty nine [1969].

LYNN SMITH: In 1969, okay. And then your- -your family moved out of the Northside in '69 [1969], right?

HERMAN POLK: Right.

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LYNN SMITH: And, then you said in 1972, I believe, that the longshoremen, tell me about that -
- about a break away from the West Coast, how did that work?

HERMAN POLK: Well, I know, my father knows, 'cause I was young, at the time. And I just know when there was just one. But the West Coast longshoremen, and like us over in the Gulf and Atlantic, when there was just one, it was just seem like it was better, you know. You'd have one big - - one big [International Longshoremen's Association (ILA)] union, you know. But the West Coast could survive on their own, you know, they didn't need Houston, New York, Florida, Louisiana, they could just make it, 'cause they got the Pacific Rim, you know. All the ships come to the West Coast anyway. They don't even come to the Panama Canal, or what have you, big ships.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: And they work around the clock out there, the cars, all the goods that come to America. But Houston, Houston though, Houston I got a lot of work.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, Houston is more-or-less kind of the hub of the Gulf Coast longshoremen?

HERMAN POLK: Yeah. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And then the West Coast is a separate thing now, after '72 [1972]?

HERMAN POLK: Yeah. Yeah. Houston, well see Houston's got the railways, you have to take all of that into consideration. The fees, the railways, and all that, 'cause see, Corpus is out of the way. And Corpus don't have any no big industries or nothing. Just oil, you know, petroleum.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, see Houston got Interstate 45 [I-45] they've got I-10, they've got the train, they've got all points north, you know.

LYNN SMITH: So, it's - - it's not only the Port that's needed, it's also the transportation to take goods from the Port away- -

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, they go - - they go hand in hand. They go hand in hand. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: So, the Port, you said, got kind of slow in the mid-1970s, right?

HERMAN POLK: Right. Right.

LYNN SMITH: And that's when you switched, and quit being a longshoreman, and got your - -

HERMAN POLK: Well - -

LYNN SMITH: Other job, right?

HERMAN POLK: Right. Right. Right. It slowed down too much, you know, when and I went to the base.

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LYNN SMITH: Okay. To the Army Depot?

HERMAN POLK: Right. Right.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, I know that the longshoremen hall [in Northside] was a big center for - -

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, that was the place, yeah, way back - -way back in the '40s [1940s] and and '50s [1950s], they would have dances, and all kind of. And then in the later years, after it's all done - -done and said, they made it into a, like a club like in The Main - -Main Attraction.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Okay.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: So, the - -so, The Main Attraction was the name of the club that moved in, after the hall closed, as a union hall?

HERMAN POLK: Right. Right. Right.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: And it was owned by Felix Vela.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah. But the hall - -the hall was the main big center of entertainment for, you know, back in the '40s [1940s] and '50s [1950s], you know.

LYNN SMITH: So, what all happened at the hall? There was a barber shop there wasn't there?

HERMAN POLK: Well, wait.

LYNN SMITH: You don't remember that part?

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, there was a barber shop in there, and there was a donut - -donut shop. But see, the Hall in the one building like a little drug store, lot - -lot of little things in there, you see. But it was all in the one building see.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah. And the Down Beat was built around it. It was a club called, the Down Beat.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

HERMAN POLK: That was built around it.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

Edited Transcript of Mr. Herman Polk's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Did you go to the Down Beat when you were young?

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

[Laughter]

HERMAN POLK: I was courting a young lady, her daddy owned the Down Beat.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: You know, you know, I know all that, yeah. 'Cause I was very very young, but I, you know, I had connections with them.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

HERMAN POLK: See, waterfront is connection, you know. They call it the waterfront, you know.

LYNN SMITH: So, I - -I read something about the Down Beat being, was there a basement? Or, was it at ground level?

HERMAN POLK: No, it was at ground level.

LYNN SMITH: It was ground level. That's ground level, okay. I don't know, it was confusing what I read, so.

HERMAN POLK: See that was the Crecys that was the Crecys that owned the Down Beat there.

LYNN SMITH: Elmo Crecy?

HERMAN POLK: Right, that's Phyllis - -Phyllis' daddy.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

HERMAN POLK: You - -you got the whole details then.

LYNN SMITH: Well, I - -I'm, you know, I try. Okay.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: So, you also told me a little about your perception of changes in - -in Northside, and the causes of those changes. You want to tell me a little bit about that?

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HERMAN POLK: Well, I think it was when, the shutting down Coles, that that hurt a lot of people, you know. It - it was like a you know, a force in Booker T., see, Booker T. and Coles you know.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

HERMAN POLK: They needed that, you know. It was taking them away from their surroundings, you know.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

HERMAN POLK: That - that can mess you up, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

HERMAN POLK: That can mess them up, and it messed them up too. And they're still not straight, they'll never get over that. 'Cause the kids that go to Miller and this and that, and they don't participate in it, and they don't have no pride, you know. They're just there, you know.

LYNN SMITH: So, it was the pride connected to going to Coles.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, we took pride.

LYNN SMITH: Because of the history.

HERMAN POLK: We took pride, 'cause it was our neighborhood, you know.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, we took pride, you know. You see, back in our days, you know, we was under the Prairie View League, that was the black league.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

HERMAN POLK: That was in the Prairie View League. And see, we played all-black schools.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

HERMAN POLK: And the black schools were in Houston, Galveston, Temple, Waco. These boys right here, they just played one another, right around here.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

HERMAN POLK: And they don't - they don't see nothing, they don't know nothing, you know, they don't get no good competition.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

HERMAN POLK: That's it, it happened in all the cities. It happened in all the cities.

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LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing] Yeah, I think I read that there were up to 500 schools that were in the Prairie View Interscholastic League.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: So, that's - -that's a lot of competition.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah. Good competition, guys like Bobby Smith, and all having those kinds of schools and stuff like, a lot of good guys, a lot of good competition.

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Alright, is there anything you can think of that we haven't covered, that you wanted to tell me about?

HERMAN POLK: Well, it's just that all the businesses, good restaurants and everything was on the north - -was on the Northside. They call it, they call it The Cuts. They call it The Cuts, and have some - - have some good competing restaurants, barber shops, beauty shops, all that was there. The theater, the Harlem Theater, and all - -all that was right there.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Do you remember? Do you remember any of the names of those businesses that were in The Cuts?

HERMAN POLK: Oh, the Cotton Club.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

HERMAN POLK: The Club Alabam, the Life Saver, the Cozy Corner, the Thunderbird, [Laughter]

HERMAN POLK: The Thunderbird, the Star Cab, King Cab, yeah, all them places.

LYNN SMITH: Wow. And so, your memories of Northside are good, I - - I take it?

HERMAN POLK: Oh, yeah.

Yeah, well, see I knew all - -I knew all the old longshoremen, you know. I knew all the old longshoremen, so. The old, old ones, you know, that couldn't read or write, you know.

LYNN SMITH: The ones that had been there a long time.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah. I knew one old man, when I was a youngster, he said, he worked for Howard Hughes, you know Howie Hughes, they owned-controlled most all the mules in Texas, 'cause they didn't have Caterpillars and tractors. They had them blades [mule graders] that they made the highway with to come here, in '35 [1935]. He had the lead mule, and Old Man Wild Bill used to holler, 'cause that's the way he would communicate with the - -the mules.

LYNN SMITH: With the mules, wow.

[Laughter]

HERMAN POLK: 'Cause there were some good old men though - -that they'd even dress up on the weekends. People here stopped dressing you know. Those old men, they'd put on their hats and they'd get sharp on the weekends.

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

HERMAN POLK: And one old man, Charlie Lastly [sp], he had been a cowboy in Montana, and he said, "If the right one didn't get you, the left one would," you know.

[Laughter]

HERMAN POLK: Well, we used to have so much fun with them old men, it would be something else.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Sounds like a good time.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah. And one guy came, one day we was at where the Ortiz Center is, see that used to be Cargo Dock One. The harbor master used to be upstairs. And the guys come down there looking for work, and this and that. And we told them, "We didn't have nothing right now. We was, we didn't have time to talk about it, we were busy, you know." And blew him off. And the guy went up on the bridge, and come jump right down into where we were.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, no.

HERMAN POLK: Had them big records, 78s in his hand. Emery, I knew him real well. Emery, he killed his self, right there. He didn't jump in the water, he hit on the concrete.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, that's awful.

HERMAN POLK: We was unloading trucks there. Then I know another guy, he jumped in the water, and his father worked with us. And the guys off the tug boat, Red, Red saw it, and Red dived off the tug boat, and went and saved him. And he lived - -and he lived about 15 more years. He didn't - -he just got a little broken up, but he lived a long time after that. But Red saved him. We knew all the guys on the tug boats, and everything. You know, 'cause we would be out there all the time, you know. You just know everybody.

Knew all the harbor masters, people, and their dogs, and just it, you know, 'cause everybody knowed everybody, oh, yeah. Like Solomon Ortiz, and all the young people knew us, you know.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

HERMAN POLK: 'Cause just a few of us be out there, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

Edited Transcript of Mr. Herman Polk's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: So, how many people were in the - -the union [local chapter] that your Dad was president of?

HERMAN POLK: How many, actually it was members that working back then, maybe about, at the most, maybe 100, 100. But the 1347 with the Cotton [Headers], there was about 12 of us.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: And that was, and out of that 12 of us, it never would be 12 of us. It might be six or seven of us, five or six, or seven of us. And we did all the cotton. And when it was a few like that, all them old men, there was old white men, there was Mr. Toomey, and Mr. Stit [sp], they liked us, they go buy good food for us, this and that, you know. 'Cause we're close knit, you know. We'd be in the office with them, talking to Mr. Toomey. Mr. Toomey would be asking me questions about, "Herman don't they have good schools in Texas?" I said, "yeah, they got good colleges." "Well, why does my girl want to go to California?" I said, "I don't know."
[Laughter]

HERMAN POLK: But them old guys were something else, and Charles Vanderbilt [sp], and all them. Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

HERMAN POLK: And Robert Hinman, you know, Kolinsky and Polansky, all of them, we knew all of them. They're my buddies, you know, Kocurek, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: You'll have to help me with the spellings of some of these names.

HERMAN POLK: I can't - -I can't spell their names.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: I can't - -I can't spell them.

LYNN SMITH: Well, we will do the best we can.

HERMAN POLK: Scupels, Knippas, and - -

LYNN SMITH: Wow.

HERMAN POLK: They, a lot of them come from out there by Violet. Have you ever heard of Violet? Out there by the airport, just before you get to Robstown?

LYNN SMITH: No, I'm not familiar with Violet.

HERMAN POLK: It's a little settlement with a lot of Polacks, and stuff live out there.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Alright.

HERMAN POLK: And they've got a church, old church, it's a museum. The museum, and stuff, see a lot of these work on the Port and the docks and stuff.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

HERMAN POLK: And the Dagos, you know, Italian like that, they, we was all tight, you know.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Everybody - -everybody was together.

HERMAN POLK: Everybody was, that's the way it was, everybody was together.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, everybody was together.

It was close knit, you know. It's like that one old guy, Hinman, he's younger than I am, and he already had a few strokes. He wanted me to come so bad to see him, you know. You know, he just has some strokes, but he's a good guy, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

HERMAN POLK: Got all that land up there in Goliad. 'Cause I knew when he was a young kid, you know. And his daddy done left him this stuff in Goliad.

LYNN SMITH: Well, that sounds like a pretty good place to be.

HERMAN POLK: Oh, yeah, it's nice up there. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Well, I sure do appreciate your taking the time to talk with me today.

HERMAN POLK: Oh, yeah. But you got a lot of - -you got a lot of information. Not just from me, but hearing you talk about Phyllis, and this person, and Willie. You done talked to Willie. It's just that you need to - -you need to have something about St. Matthew. I don't know why they're not cooperating, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Well, I'll try to go by again when I'm here.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, thanks again.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah.

Edited Transcript of Mr. Herman Polk's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: Oh, go ahead.

HERMAN POLK: Like you say, St. John is on the internet right?

LYNN SMITH: Yes, they've got a timeline on their history, which helped me a lot.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, their history, well that's good, you should have that, you should have that up there. And like T.C. Ayers, he was all educated, you know, you know about all that, T.C. Ayers. 'Cause they came out to Solomon Coles, see, yeah.

LYNN SMITH: Right. Yeah, C.C. Sampson.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah, Mr. Sampson, he was one, I knew Sampson real well.

LYNN SMITH: Did you?

HERMAN POLK: Oh, yeah. Yeah, he's a good man. He - -he wrote the, what is it? The Alma Mater school song?

LYNN SMITH: Oh, yes.

HERMAN POLK: Old Solomon Coles?

LYNN SMITH: Alright, he wrote the song.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah. He wrote the song.

LYNN SMITH: Great.

HERMAN POLK: Yeah. C.C. Sampson, yeah. That was it; they don't have no educators like that no more. People aren't going into education like that no more. They go work for the oilfields, you know.

LYNN SMITH: Somewhere they can make more money?

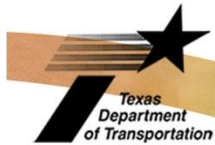
HERMAN POLK: Yeah, where they can make more money. They can make more money.

LYNN SMITH: Yup.

HERMAN POLK: Alright. Take care.

LYNN SMITH: Thank you.

[End of Audio Recording for Interview with Herman Polk 06.24.2015]



Mrs. Phyllis Crecy Ridgels's Edited Oral History Transcript

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith interviewing Phyllis Crecy Ridgels for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on November 23rd, 2014, in Corpus Christi, Texas. I'm interviewing Mrs. Ridgels in order to learn more about her knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. First, please tell me your name and when and where you were born.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: My name is Phyllis Crecy Ridgels. I was born in Corpus Christi, Texas in 1938.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Tell me a little bit about -- you were telling me in the pre-interview that your mother came to Corpus Christi even earlier than that. And so would you -- do you want to start and just tell me a little bit about your mother, Dorothy Kitchen, after her family came to Corpus Christi from Port Lavaca in 1923?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Okay. My grandmother was a homemaker, so she took care of my mother and her two sisters and three brothers. My grandfather was a shrimper. He owned, I think, two shrimp boats here in Corpus Christi and had a business going. They came upon some hard luck back then, I don't know the date, but he had to give up his shrimping business. But he remained friends with a lot of the shrimpers that were still there.

So, on occasion, when we would go down to the T-Head, he would see friends that he knew and we would always come home with goodies from the shrimp boats, namely blue crabs or shrimp or fish.

He was like my hero, my grandfather was. He lived with my mother and my stepfather and I. My grandfather passed in 1952.

I don't know too much about my great-grandfather. But my great-grandmother, which was my grandfather's mother, was a little bitty, about four feet tall little lady that wore a stocking cap. She kept everybody in line, Grandma Emma. And she had a hearing problem, so we thought, but she heard what she wanted to hear.

LYNN SMITH: I've heard that story from somebody else, too.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So your mother, was she the first person in your family to go to Holy Cross School?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: No. My Uncle Austin, was the first, then my Aunt Juanita and then my mother. Her younger siblings also attended Holy Cross, Uncle L.C., Uncle Mark, and Aunt Ella Belle.

Edited Transcript of Mrs. Phyllis Crecy Ridgels' Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: All right. And then when your mother grew up she married your dad. And -- and tell me about that. Tell me about your dad and his businesses and --

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Well, my mom and dad were married before I was born, but they divorced when I was about two years old.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: So --

LYNN SMITH: So when you were young.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: I was very young, yes. And I just know that he -- and one of his brothers had a cab company called Crecy Cab and the brother that he was in business with left Corpus. So, my dad sold his interest out to a Mr. Joe Emanuel who took over that cab company and he changed the name from Crecy's to Star Cab. And that cab company went from Mr. Joe Emanuel to his son-in-law, Roy Cage, who took over after Mr. Emanuel's death.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And so your dad went on to open up the Down Beat Club, right?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: He loved businesses, so he had this club called the Down Beat Club. It was the hot spot in Corpus Christi for anybody that wanted nightclub entertainment and good food, because he was an excellent cook. He was known for his homemade chili and his good plates of fried chicken and his salads. There was a secret recipe for the salad dressing, he never gave that to anyone. And no one has ever topped it since. But he was a superb cook, not only there at the club. He also did catering on the outside. After giving up the club he commenced to do catering. He catered big events and house parties for doctors and other influential people of Corpus Christi. For example, he went to the big hunts, the deer hunts, and cooked there; hunts such as the ones at the King Ranch and for some of the big shots of Corpus Christi.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So when he owned the Down Beat Club, that was a real hub of the community, right?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Yes, it was, [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Can you tell me about who played there?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: I was too young to go to some of the entertainment that they had. But he helped to bring a lot of the big name bands here. The club was not that large, so they would have the dances at the Skylark Club which was a larger building, right across the street from the Down Beat. And Fats Domino had been here and Ray Charles.

Several groups that would come down from San Antonio and Houston to play at the club. It was first class entertainment and the surroundings in there were like, real mellow, and it was just a nice place to go.

[Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Sounds good. So you were your mom's only child, right?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: I was my mother's only child. And my dad, after he and my mom divorced, he remarried and had four other daughters, Rita, Carolyn, Jeannie, and Wanda (the Crecy girls).

LYNN SMITH: And then you had an uncle that -- there was a street named after, right?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Yes, that was my uncle. He was born Warren Harding Crecy. We all called him Uncle Harding. He was in the Army and there is a book that they wrote about him, the "Come Out Fighting," I think it's the name of the book. And it was about his war time experiences with his battalion.

He retired as a Major in the U.S. Army and he was highly decorated. They even named one of the streets, in fact the main street at the Corpus Christi Army Depot, now -- that's on the Naval Air Station. They named that after my -- our uncle. It was named Crecy Street.

LYNN SMITH: So when you were a child, you went to Holy Cross Catholic School and Church also.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: I attended Holy Cross School from the first to the sixth grade.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: -- and after sixth grade I attended Solomon Coles School. At that time, Solomon Coles School, was both junior and senior high school.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Well, tell me a little bit about your experiences at Solomon Coles. What were your highlights as a teenager?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: I was very active in high school. I loved sewing, so the Homemaking Department was my favorite. They had a club called New Homemakers of America and I joined that. I was also in the Baton Corps which was a drill team that marched behind the band. And we had maybe about 30 girls that, you know, participated in that. And we made the -- we marched at the football games and any parades that they had in Corpus. And one of the things, too, was like when we had our Homecoming Day, we would parade down in front of the school, all the way down Winnebago Street, and back down, I think, Port Avenue, make that loop and come back around to the school. Everybody loved the Green Hornet Band because we were good. And we participated in the Buccaneer Day Parades and we would march -- and I don't know how we did that because I can't even walk that far anymore. But we would march from Buccaneer Stadium all the way down to the Shoreline [Boulevard]. And when we marched by, the crowd went wild 'cause we were the best. Mm-hmm.

LYNN SMITH: All right. And then there was another organization that you were a member of, too. I believe you told me that Mrs. Eddie Bolden?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Okay, yes, Ms. Eddie Bolden. She was a Director of Robert L. Moore Center, back in the '50s, and her husband had the T.C. Ayers Center, Recreation Center. Well, Mrs. Bolden had a little club. She got some of the girls together that we were all friends. Not just friends because we were different ages and all, but we were compatible girls, I guess you would call it. And gave

us grooming tips and, you know, etiquette tips and how to walk and talk like a lady. And she formed this club that she called the Debs Club [later called the Ladies of the Camellia]. The organization still exists.

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And you also said that there were some weekly dances?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Oh, yes, the recreation centers. We lived for Tuesday and Friday nights. Tuesday night was dance time at T.C. Ayers. You would go there and you would just enjoy yourself. Ten o'clock came, Good Night Irene came on, and it was time to disband.

And Friday night it was at the Robert L. Moore Center out in what we called the Carver Addition. And we had to find a ride out there to the dance on Friday night. We were just happy for that little twice-a-week entertainment. Or if some of us couldn't do it twice a week it would just be once a week. But it was good, good clean fun that we had.

LYNN SMITH: Now you also told me that integration started while you were in high school. You want to tell us a little bit about that?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: When we got the word that you could go to one of the other high schools -- I think it was Miller and Ray at that time. Those were the two. A few of my close friends that lived further out, in the Carver Addition, and a couple of traitors from over in this way [laughter], they put in for their transfers and they were -- they were accepted. So they went. We didn't graduate per say together at the same school. But we're still friends.

LYNN SMITH: All right. And, also, you told me a lot about your remembrances about businesses around here. Do you want to just start, maybe, with -- I think you were talking about a Cooking-Baking school?'

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Oh, yes. Okay. Here, right down from where I was born there on the corner of Staples and Winnebago, there was a big grocery store called Garza Grocery. That was the neighborhood grocery store for our little neighborhood. On the second floor, they had a couple of apartments over the grocery store, and those were rented out.

Down at the next corner there was another two-story building and there was a hamburger stand on the first floor and apartments above.

LYNN SMITH: Mm-hmm.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: -- The hamburger place was called Bob Toots and Tellum. And Mr. Bob cooked. And his wife -- I think she made the best hamburgers. But they were known for their hamburgers. And then crossing over is my church, Holy Cross Church. Going on further down, after you pass the church and the rectory and so forth, you've got your Galan's Grocery Store that still exists.

Across from Galan's, there used to be a building that they called the Cooking-Baking School. People went there to learn the culinary arts.

After its closing, the building reopened as a nightclub called The Palace. It was a nice quiet place. Across from there was our Harlem Theater which was the only theater back in the day that the blacks could attend. And we enjoyed that.

Next to that was a little confectionary, Regale. And next to that was a grocery store. And I can just close my eyes and see all of the businesses going north that most of 'em are just vacant lots there. They're no more.

LYNN SMITH: Mm-hmm.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Then if you hop over to Sam Rankin, on that corner was a service station. Next to that was a record shop, a laundromat, and going on down north again-- we had two more grocery stores (Garza and Red and White), a black owned and operated drug store, Leathers. We had the dentist office, Dr. Branch. And we had Dr. Williams' office and Dr. Brownlow's office.

It just takes you away when you see these places that you can remember and remember good times and -- that no longer exist.

LYNN SMITH : Right. And you were also talking about where the shopping was at

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Downtown was the place to go. On the weekend or whenever you had to shop, you went downtown. You had all of those nice stores down there starting with the Lichtenstein's. You had your Woolworth, the Five and Dime, you had Kress Five and Dime.

You had jewelry stores. Montgomery Ward was there. JC Penney's was there. Richardson Shoe Store. Pro Optical was down there, too. Then they had a little shop called Lad and Lassie that just had children's wear. And there was a furniture company. Smart Shop was there. Mangels. Everybody shopped at Mangels after you got to be teenager. Zale's Jewelers was there also.

So, it's just good memories on what used to be. But change comes and we have to go with the changes.

LYNN SMITH: So your first job -- tell me about your first job.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Oh, my first job I took as a dare. My husband -- I told him I wanted to work, and he said nobody's gonna give you a job. I said, okay, we'll see. So I went and applied at Lichtenstein's, and I was hired there as a salesperson. I was in the Art Needlework Department and in Piece Goods. And I worked there for maybe five years. I then applied to be a teacher aide and was hired at Washington Elementary School. I enjoyed working as an aide for the first grade class, but during that time my mother passed away.

LYNN SMITH: Sorry.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: I was a little bit depressed and all. I had put an application in for a job at the Army Depot. I hadn't heard anything from them. I was going to work 'cause I had to work. I put my application in at the Army Depot, but forgot all about it. One Friday I got a phone call from the Army Depot saying they had my application. Was I still interested? And, of course. So they said okay. Be here Tuesday morning for an interview. And I went there that Tuesday morning. And that was in 1973. And I was there for 24-1/2 years. I retired in 1997.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And when you were married you had some children.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Oh, yes. I had five lovely children. I had four boys and one girl. I had -- my oldest one was Lawrence Greenwood. And I had Sherri Greenwood, and then I had three more boys: Mark, Chris, and Jamie Greenwood. [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And two of those children are still here in the Corpus Christi area, right?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Yes. Chris and Jamie are here still in Corpus Christi.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Mark is in Fort Worth, and Sherri is in Atlanta, Georgia. And my son, Larry [Lawrence] is deceased. -- Sherri attended Texas Southern University in Houston. She graduated with a Degree in Telecommunications. And Mark enlisted in the Navy after graduation. And he stayed in and after 20 years he retired from the Navy. I'm proud of all of 'em, really. But especially proud of him. And then there was Chris who graduated from high school and he went into the Army. He did his tour there and now he works at the Army Depot as an aircraft Inspector. And then Jamie, after his graduation, he joined the Air Force and he stayed in for the four years. And now he works at Spohn South in the Nutrition Department.

LYNN SMITH: All right. Is there anything else that you want to tell us about Northside? Any remembrances that we missed?

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Well, all I know, on Northside I have good memories, really. Good memories. Things have changed. As I say, change is inevitable. Things have changed. People move on. And things could change for the better. Sometimes it changes for the worse. And in some areas it seems like it was worse rather than better. And I don't know the reason. But I'm not ashamed that I'm from the Northside. These are my roots here. My church is here. My ground where I was born is here. And there's nothing I would -- if I could change it would just be maybe for it to come back alive. But you can't do that, so.

LYNN SMITH: But you had fond memories as a child.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Fond memories as a child and growing up. And I think my kids have the same thing -- feel the same way.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And I really want to thank you for your interview today. And is there anything else you want to add? That's fine.

PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: No, Lynn.

LYNN SMITH: You told me a lot and I really appreciate it.

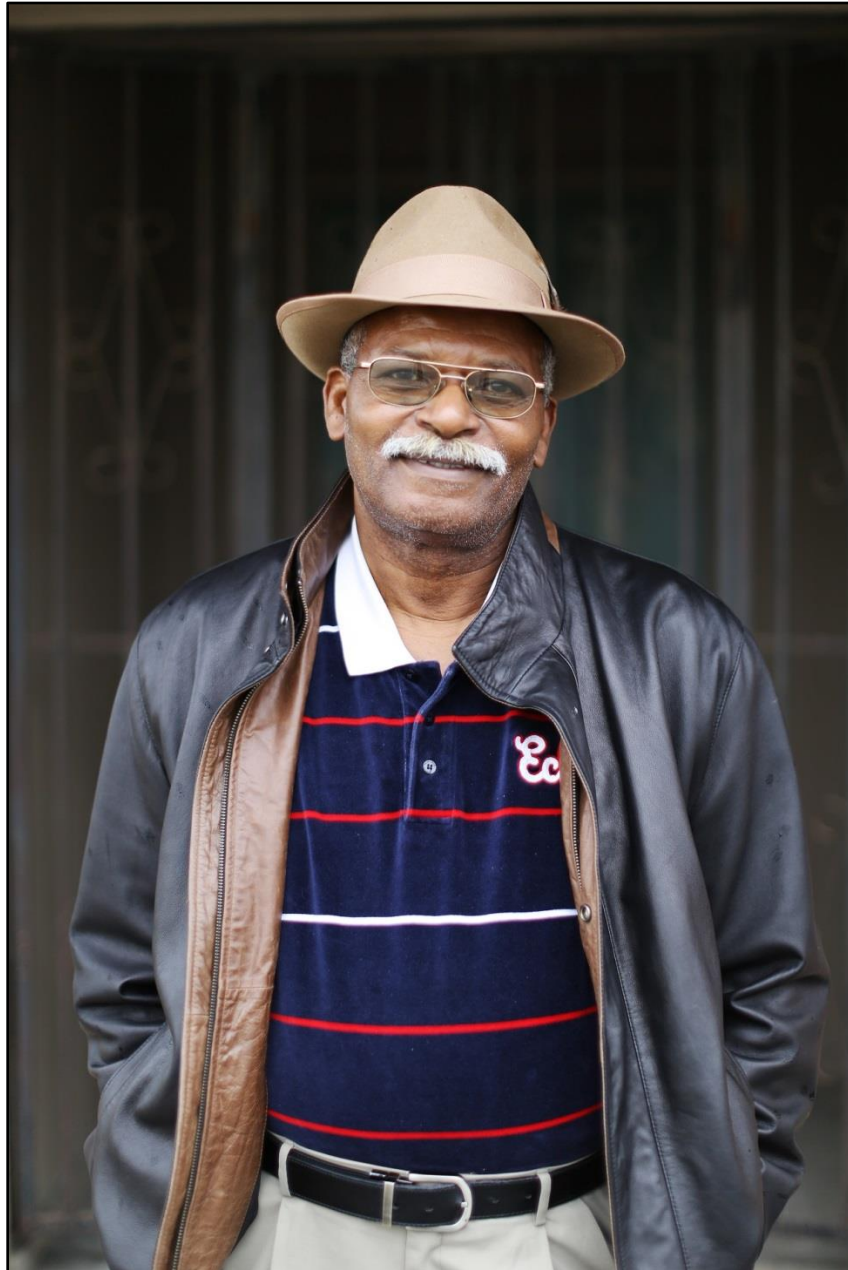
PHYLLIS CRECY RIDGELS: Thank you.

LYNN SMITH: Thank you.

[End of Audio Recording for Lynn Smith - Phyllis Crecy Ridgels - 11.23.2014]

Mr. Billy Ray Sayles' Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 18: Mr. Billy Ray Sayles in 2014 standing front of the former ILA Hall in Northside



Photographer: Anna Christy, HNTB

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I'm interviewing Mr. Billy Ray Sayles for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on January, the 28th, 2015 in Corpus Christi, Texas. I'm interviewing him, in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. Thank you for being here.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Yeah. Thank you. You're welcome.

LYNN SMITH: First of all, if you just want to state your full name.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: I'm Billy Ray Sayles.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So I got that part right?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: You're right.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: And your birth date and where you were born?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Okay. My birthday is July, the 6th, 1947, here in Corpus Christi, Texas.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Let's start with your childhood since you've been here your entire life. You want to just tell us about – about your childhood. Your friends, events, schools?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Yeah, my childhood it begin on a street called 1719 Morris Street. And after mother and dad divorced we – we lived with my grandparents. And – and that was a – a beautiful experience living with them, because my uncles and my aunt, they became like a sister and brothers. And that house at 1719 Morris Street, I always go there, and just stand there and look at that house, because it was a shotgun house, three-bedroom, and just a straight shotgun house. And my grandpa raised his eight kids there, plus my sisters and brother, and my mother. And out of that house became doctors, lawyers, and, educators, administrators. And it's amazing when I just go look at that house. And, one thing I remember about that house is my grandmother and my grandfather, and how they took life. They were both civil servants. My grandmother quit working. And what I recalled about that, the separation of labor, how they worked, my grandmother really loved cooking food, and washing the clothes, and taking care of us. It would seem that was her calling that she cherished. Grandfather worked and took care of the family, and that's a difference now, women are professional and grandmother was proud of being a homemaker. And I was her favorite being the first grandchild. I was her favorite. And she was a member of the Holiness Church. They were very Old Testament type people, and the first child was supposed to be dedicated to God and a minister. My grandmother passed at the early age of 49 and if she would have lived, my life would have been totally different. My grandparents enrolled me at Holy Cross Catholic School for my elementary years, a Christian education. That was an integrated school and ran by the Catholic Church over on the Northside. I hated going to that school, because we had the black and white Saddle Oxfords and the white shirts, and blue pants, and I would look across the street and see the kids over at Booker T. Washington School, raising cane and cutting up, and I wanted to go to school there. My uncles would say, "Well, Marie", they called mamma "Marie," "You got to let him be a man, and be

tough." So, in the second grade I started going to Booker T. Washington Elementary School. And from there I – that's where I met my best friend, Arnold Scott, we called him Pete. And me and Pete went from the second grade all the way to finishing high school. We was like brothers.

And momma loved Pete just like she loved me. I never forget when she would buy me a shirt, she would buy him one, and we dressed alike. So, that was a good experience. And what I recall about that, we had some very good educators. And the black school was separate, and, our teachers were very dedicated professionals. They often remind me of pastors, and elders and preachers, because they was educators from all parts of the country, and it was like they were called to different communities to educate black kids. Not only did they teach us from the academia perspective, they taught us about life. Sometimes you have to give and take in life. My early experience of life was in a segregated society and that's the way we lived. The premise of segregation was "separate but equal" and at the time, I did not realize that in reality it was separate but not equal because of the family love and the social bond of the community. What comes to mind is the saying, "it takes a village to raise a child." And that is the way we lived because it was like a village.

And when I was starting to go to college, one of my electives was Sociology. My Sociology professor and I would argue all the time, because she painted the whole black society as being underprivileged. And I didn't get it, because when we were growing up we didn't feel that we was underprivileged, and denied anything. Maybe we didn't have a big yacht in the back yard, but we was happy, with plenty of love.

And everybody in the neighborhood took care of their children. And that's one thing I recall, most of the ladies in the neighborhood, they didn't have husbands, but they were strong ladies. And I think everything that I've accomplished in life I owe it to my mother, because my mother was a strong lady. And the most important thing momma did for us was kept us as a family, and taught us about our family, who we were, who our uncles were, who our grandparents were. So, I came from a rich family, not money but academically rich, and education was very important to the family. And some of my great Aunts were school teachers, and my uncles they all excelled and became prominent individuals in our society. And in school, it was expected for me to do well. And – and I almost blew that rich heritage away. My mother was a very independent lady and when mother moved from my grandparent's house on Morris Street (in an integrated neighborhood), to the projects in Northside when I was about 7 years' old, things changed. Life in my grandparent's home was about family. And it was a different culture in my grandparent's home, because my grandparents had raised me a certain way, and when I came over to the Northside, it was a real tough environment – that I had to deal with. And education to the guys in the Northside neighborhood wasn't a priority. You was considered weak if you were smart. So, really I had to dumb down to fit in, and I did things that I regretted, and cut up, and just to fit in with the crowd. To me, the more I cut up, the more I fit in. It is sad that I had to do that to be a part of the group.

LYNN SMITH: Let me just ask you –just to get it kind of on the record, the names of your grandparents and your mother because those were key figures in your life.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Okay. My grandparent's name was Irving, Joseph and Louise Irving. And my mother's name was Rose Marie, and she was Rose Marie Irving, and when she married my dad, we became the Sayles family.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Great. So, before we started the recording we were talking a little bit, and you said that there were some issues – regarding integration and desegregation that you might want to share with us.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Okay. Well, one of the things that – that I recall, was when mother moved over by herself, she worked as a maid, cleaning the houses, and – and she worked for some good people. She worked for the president of Del Mar College, E. L. Harvin, and she worked for Joan Vanderfort [sp] an English professor at Del Mar. But they was good people, but the deal was, when I would go to Mr. Harvin's house they would call my mother Rose, and I had to call their mother "Mrs. "And I thought that was kind of strange and disrespectful, but they were very nice people, and Fred Hutsell, Fred T. Hutsell, he was an insurance agent. My mom was a companion for granny, Mr. Hutsell's mom, and everybody loved granny. And they were very upstanding people, and they liked mom, so, they would recommend mom to different people and she had a large clientele. But, I guess, Mr. Harvin was such a fine man. When I go to Del Mar College, now on the second floor, they have a great big old picture of him, and his big bald head. And, I never forget that they would let me go out to their house, and rake the leaves to make an extra \$4.00. And, golly, I – I remember recalling there were so many leaves. We were just like trying to dip hay with a cup. The more leaves I would rake it seemed like there were more and more leaves.

[Laughter]

BILLY RAY SAYLES: And momma would come out and say, "Well, Billy Ray, Mr. Harvin would like everybody to come in and eat at the table." And I said, "Oh, Momma I don't want to eat with them white folks.

[Laughter]

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Just tell them to put my stuff on the back porch. And I never forget him standing at the door, just him with a big bald head, "Young man, come here. Come here. Don't you ever come to my house here, and not grace my table. And you come in here, and sit at the table, and eat like a man." And I never forget that, what he told me. Like a man. You know what I mean? So, we were blessed that momma worked for him, in that respect, because they always looked out for us during holidays and made sure we had nice school clothes, and we felt like their extended family.

I recall it was a very good experience. And, matter fact, Mr. Harvin told momma one time, "I'm tired of you working for me." And momma thought she was getting fired. But he helped her get a grant to go to nursing school. So, momma worked for him, didn't do much work for him, but he still paid her while she went to nursing school. And she became a nurse. So, my older sister and I, we had it kind of hard, but my younger brother, and my younger sister, they had it good, because momma was a licensed nurse, and she was able to take care of them. She was a very strong lady.

And, as far as the discrimination, when we got up into high school, then we started noticing, because we were competing against other schools. You know in elementary it was no big thing, but once we got into junior high, and high school we recognized that we didn't have good band uniforms. The uniforms we had were not as nice as the uniforms as the other school and see all of the nice things the other schools had. The hand-me-down books, the pages torn out of them,

you start noticing things like that. And I got kind of radical in those days, and I wasn't too much into the Martin Luther King Movement. I was more into the Malcom X and Muhammad Ali. Ali was kind of like a hero to me, and what he said made so much sense to me. And, I saw it like the Founding Fathers saw it. The Founding Fathers didn't turn the other cheek. Give us liberty or give us death. So, that was my perspective during the Civil Rights Movement.

I've always been about the individual that can take care of themselves. And I think the family – my family raised me that way, to think well of myself. I recall my grandpa was a good man, but in a sense, an ignorant man. He was a black Archie Bunker.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: He respected people that thought well of themselves, that did not see themselves as victims. He saw nothing wrong with racist people. He said people should respect themselves, because he found that black folks were superior. He was that way. And I never forget how funny it was, because some of the most racist people in the neighborhood (black and white), came over to the porch at grandpa's house on Morris Street, to dip snuff with grandpa. They were good friends – thought well of each other. Talking and dipping snuff. They just got along. They respected grandpa, because he respected who he was, and they respected who they were. So, there was no issue? They just got along just fine.

And my uncles, if they had stayed here in Corpus, they would have been running Corpus. They were great, great men, but the opportunities weren't here for them, because the only opportunities for professions were to become a teacher or preacher, and there weren't very many of even those opportunities because the people in those jobs might stay in those jobs for 30 or 40 years. They had to leave here to reach their potential. I know my Uncle Lee Andrew, he was called to preach at 12 years old, at the church that I attend now, at St. Paul United Methodist Church. And he was a genius and the family tried to talk him out of the ministry, but God pulled him to preach, and St. Paul's sent him to college. And then after that he went off on his own, and earned a doctorate degree and he also received an honorary doctorate degree. He was a very intelligent man. He had a master's degree back, back in the '50s [1950s] and having a master's degree back then for a black man was like having a doctorate. And they came back to Corpus, and the best job that was offered to him was a maitre d', to be a maitre d'. So, he had to leave here to find opportunities.

So, it's those type of desegregation and integration things that I experienced that had an effect on me. And I guess my family, they were all proud people, and – and believed in education, and believed in people bettering themselves all the time, and I still read all of the time. And I'm always trying to better myself, I'm almost 70-years old, but I'm always trying learn more to be a better person.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Well, you mentioned that you went to Holy Cross, and you went to Booker T. Washington. But where did you go to junior high or middle school?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Okay. The junior high, the Solomon M. Coles was a junior and senior high. So, my education after I left Holy Cross was spent at only two schools. And after the sixth grade we went into junior high, it was a junior high back then, from the seventh to the ninth. And

from there you went into high school. So, the junior high and the high school was combined. We stayed at one school, Solomon Coles.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Now, while you were there, you played baseball, didn't you?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Yeah, I played baseball. I started playing baseball, I guess, in my sophomore year. And we were pretty good. I was good in baseball, but me and my friend, Pete, we started out playing baseball, sand lot, played baseball, and together. So, we were going to be like Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris. They were the M&M boys. We were going to be the S&S boys. I can't think of a man better with a glove than Pete. Pete could catch. He had the best glove on the team. And Pete was a third baseman, and I was just center field. But Coach Clay didn't like the way he caught the ball at third base, because coach wanted him to scoop it, and Pete would always catch it with one hand. So, when he sent Pete up to center field I said, "Oh no."

[Laughter]

BILLY RAY SAYLES: So, when Pete came to center field, I stayed on the team and practiced with them. And we won the state champion, but I didn't get to play that much. But that's okay. Coach, he respected me because of that, because he said that even though that I knew I might not be able to go out of town with the team, and I knew that my chances of getting to play in a game was nil. He said that I still, contributed and practiced hard, just like I was going to play. And he always had a lot of respect for me. And I guess after I finished school and college, and became a man, we became friends because we were in the same social circles. We were very close, very close. After we won the state championship, when they came to take the team picture, the day before the picture I had an epileptic seizure, the first one in my life. I have had three in my life, but the first was the day before the picture. And the next day I didn't get to go to school to be in the picture with the team. After the epileptic seizure, my mother became very protective of me and my life changed because she was so afraid I would get hurt.

Many years later, the city recognized all of the state baseball championship teams, and Coach Clay wanted to make sure I'd be there. And I never forget he would call me every day, "You're sure you're going to have a ride? You sure you're going to have a ride?" Cause he wanted me to be recognized with the team and take a picture with the team. So, he – he was a very good man, and he had a lot of influence in my life. I guess all of the men – men and the women that taught us at Coles, they had a lot of influence on all of us.

And there's a lady that go to church with me, her name is Ms. Green, and she was Miss Bruton, back then, when we were in school and she was the daughter of Pastor Bruton of St. Pauls United Methodist Church. She was a very pretty lady. And all of the little boys had their crush on Miss Bruton.

[Laughter]:

BILLY RAY SAYLES: And Mrs. Carline – she was the librarian and a member of St. Paul's, and her husband was the dentist, and at her funeral I got to speak. I was saying, "We did not have to look for role models because our teachers were our role models. We loved our teachers and how they were. They were mentors to us. I never forget Ms. Green told me that Sunday, "You know what it was, Billy? Not only did y'all love us, but we loved y'all." And that's the way it was, they

loved us. Because they knew what we had to deal with in life, and it was going to be a little better for us than it had been for them, because they had it harder than us coming up. So, that's why I think they loved us so much. I just think about my uncles, back then, there was no Pell grants and financial aid and stuff like that to help kids go to college. But for them to excel the way they did – and Uncle Charles Irving, he was a mentor, doctor of law. He had worked at Herman Hospital as an orderly. He worked his way through Texas Southern University.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: And I think he's probably about the first. To me he's about the first African American from a Corpus Christi high school to achieve a degree in law. So, that's a historical thing right there.

LYNN SMITH: Very good. So, after you got out of high school, what was your first job?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: My first job was working as a bus boy at the old Surf Club. It was Sandy Shores Hotel across the bridge. And they had a private club, and – and the bottom part was the private no, the top part, on the top part was a private club, and it was called the Surf Club. And that's all of the big shots, the monsignors, and all of them come there, and – and drink and did their thing.

And I never forget at night it closed down, and we locked the doors up, and we stayed out till two or three in the morning, and gambling with the guys.

[Laughter]

Then the boss was right there with us and everything, so, it was one of those type of things. That was the day of the private clubs, where professional people could come, and just do their thing, and dance, and drink, and get drunk. And keep their business private. And, as table waiters, we had a lot of influence, because we knew all of the lawyers, and all of the judges, and all of that stuff. They liked us, because we took care of them. We kept their business private. So, if any kind of little thing we got into, they all knew us and they took care of us because they had the influence and knew all the people. When Christmas came around, Mr. Massey would tell us to come out to the store. He was the owner of the Warehouse Liquor Store, [he said] just come out for Christmas and get what you need. And Jack English who owned S&Q Clothiers in essence clothed us and, there's so many people who took care of us during Christmas, and we just go out and get nice suits and stuff. So, it was that type of relationship. And in a way, when you think about the people – I think in Corpus people were separate because it was the law, but back then we was all family.

Like, now Corpus has spread out, and you have a lot of different individuals coming out, but back then everybody knew each other. And if the police stopped me, and said, you are Mr. Irving's grandboy. You better get home, you are out too late. So, everybody knew each other. The policeman knew everybody, we were all one big happy family. That's the way it was.

LYNN SMITH: That's great.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, after you waited tables at the private club, then what did you do next?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: That's when I met my wife, Anna. And when I met Anna, when I saw Anna she was the prettiest girl I've ever seen. And, we got together. And I needed a more steady job, because table waiters did not have a consistent income. So, a friend of mine got me a job at Rainbo Bakery, and I started out dumping flour bags. Back then they didn't have the automatic deal where they sucked the flour in. They have big tanks now where they suck the flour in. Back then we had to dump 100 pound bags of flour in a big – big bin, and that's what I did. I started out dumping flour. Dumping flour all day. Dumping flour in the big bin, so they can make the bread. And from there I worked my way up to running the whole stale returned department. And the stale returned department is a very interesting thing, because they didn't sell all of the bread. They sell a lot, but a lot would come back, and I was in charge of that, keeping – keeping that separated and sorted. They had a little convenience store, and we kept that stocked up. Sold day old bread in the convenience store. And I worked under old man named Booker T. Webb, and when he retired they – they let me have the job. That was a very good job, keeping it up and –that dealt with a lot of bookkeeping and accounting and stuff, because we had to maintain the store. The farmers would come in, and buy 500 pounds of bread for their hogs, and livestock. Then we had to give so much to charity. So, that was a very, very good job. We unloaded the truck in the morning and had a whole warehouse of stale bread that we sold during the day. It all had to be accounted for. And I – I worked for a man named Mr. G. M. Akinson. He was the president of bakery. He told me he wanted to give me a better opportunity to – to move myself up. And I started working in their production part of it as a machine operator. So, I learned how to operate all of those machines in the bakery, and I tell my wife all the time, "Well, I have a trade. I'm a baker." You know?

[Laughter]

BILLY RAY SAYLES: And, but from there, I think Nixon, Richard Nixon during his tenure as president, was the best president of our time. And he – the old man was good. He knew about business, he was qualified to be president and was smart. Under Nixon, if you were willing to work, you were going to do good under Nixon.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Did – did you know him personally or just --at a distance?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: -- yeah, at a distance. If –if you work, you were going to do good. And I guess we – I made more money under Nixon than anybody. And that's when I got to the docks, because he opened up China and we sold a lot of cotton to China, and grain to Russia. The grain, and the wheat to Russia, and so that's how I got my start working in the Port of Corpus Christi. And from there, I went to working in the export grain elevators. I worked at the grain elevators about six years, in loading grain ships and stuff, and that was an interesting job, because I got to meet so many fine people and foreigners – I was blessed. From the Corpus Christi Public Grain Elevator [a coop], I moved to the Producers Grain Corporation that was a for-profit export business. When I put the application in to Producers Grain Corporation, and I interviewed with Bill Francis, he was the superintendent, he said, "Well, let me give you a job. Make sure to be here tomorrow." And the next day I went there with my big steel toed shoes, and hard hat, and I went into the office and I said, "Well, I'm ready Mr.

Francis, to go to work." And he said, "There's your desk." Whoa, the desk was right next to his. And the – the shock, man, and I was all nervous because I thought I was going to work on the docks and I never expected an office job. Well momma was saying, "Well, you know, you – you always talking about these equal opportunities and all that stuff, and everything like this. So, you – you got – got your chance there. You just do a good job." And I was the elevator clerk. And, so, that was a lot of, accounting and stuff too. They would unload the cars, the hopper cars with the grain, and they weighed it, and what it was supposed to weigh as opposed to what was in there. We elevator clerks had to keep up with what was over or short and we had big ledgers we had to keep. And those were the days when they didn't have the computers. Everything was hand printed. And those papers had to be very perfect. And – and I learned to print real good. But that was a good opportunity too. And I got involved with the union out there, and once I got involved with the union, then I started working with the Longshoremens, and that was a good thing.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. When you were working for the Producers Grain Corporation; would you tell me a little bit more about your job responsibilities?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Okay. Being the elevator clerk, making sure the paperwork was okay. We had to prepare the mate receipt too, that had to be signed by the captain and the mate and it had to be perfect. The mate receipt was the accounting of the ship's cargo and was used to transfer funds from the banks to the shippers.

And I got involved with the union, and – and now that I think about it – the union was good for me in one sense, but it was bad for me in another sense. And unions is – unions is good, it's kind of like communism, socialism, where everybody get paid the same, and everybody move up the same. And – but I don't think unions is good for an individual that has a lot of get up and go for himself. You know what I mean? Because in a way unions help you, but they can hinder you too. You know what I mean? Because, you – you have a – how would you say you have a schemata for what you're going to do, and what you're going to be, and stuff like that. You know, so – in other words the sky is not the limit. So, if an individual be on his own – he can achieve – can achieve better on his own. And I'll never forget what the superintendent told me one time. So, why did – did I get involved in all of that, and he say that I had the qualifications to be an assistant superintendent, and I promise you that you would be an assistant superintendent. And, but I didn't listen to that, and – and stuck with the union. And – and a union – a union official is more like a caregiver. Looking out for people, and people don't know to talk for their rights, and you have to go and – and talk for their rights, and make sure they getting what they're supposed to get, and stuff like that. So, really it was – it was good, and it was bad – bad for me, and knowing what I know now, I would look out for – I don't know if I'd look out for myself. I – I say I'd look out for myself, but I guess being raised by a nurse, you know, and I'm just a – a caring person. Most of the guys that worked at Producers Grain Elevator were from the little rural cities like Robstown, Popalote, Edroy, and all of the little towns, and wasn't fluent with the English language, and educated. So, I took it upon myself as a union official [Union #1920, an affiliate of the International Longshoremens Association] to fight for their rights, because, when I was working for the public elevator, guys doing the same jobs were making a lot of money. So, these guys were just making a little over minimum wage, doing the same thing. So, I took that responsibility to make the union strong, and negotiate on their behalf to get them good rights. And – and when I needed them, they didn't back me up. They – they sold me out and I eventually lost my job at Producers Grain Corporation because I became known as a trouble maker for the company. But that was a good educational experience. During those negotiations, the CEO of Producers Grain Corporation, Frank Farris from Amarillo, I'll never forget him, he came to Corpus Christi and

negotiated with me. He was a big mean looking man, dressed immaculate in his suit and his attorney, Jerome Johnson, a real fine man. I never forget. Last time I heard of Jerome Johnson they were trying to get the Super Collider in Amarillo, and they were trying to get that for their community and he was the head negotiator on that. But they were real – real fine people. And Mr. Farris, he know I was young and everything, and – and I'll never forget he – he looked at our proposals, and he, "What the blank, blank is this?" And he'd throw it at me. Golly.

[Laughter]

BILLY RAY SAYLES: You know I was so nervous and scared, but we made it. We made it through there. And – and, in the end, he gave us a very good contract, and I never forget when he shook my hand, and how he looked at me in the eye, and like smiled, you know, like – like he was proud of – of what I had did. I was able to successfully negotiate just about all the proposals that we presented.

LYNN SMITH: So, was that when you were president of the union?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: No – I was vice president of that local union –

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: When I was still at Producers Grain Corporation, I started out as recording secretary, then the steward of the local union [affiliated with the Longshoremen]. And I was glad to get rid of the steward position because the steward was the one that had to go in there and argue with management all of the time. But when I became vice president, the president would always have me write the letters for him and read important documents. So, you might as well say I was the president, and just wasn't – didn't have the title. And everybody knew that I was the one putting all of these ideas in these people's heads, so, it was obvious – I was going to be the one that the management would go after – go after to get rid of, and that's what happened. But in that process I met a Longshoremen union negotiator, Raymond Juriset [sp]. I'll never forget him. He came down, and -- don't ask me how to spell Juriset.

[Laughter]

BILLY RAY SAYLES: But he came down and he was the one that led the negotiations with us. And he became very impressed with me, and – and he suggested that the Longshoremen on the docks, try to get me to come to the docks. And after they had run me off [from Producers Grain Corporation], I didn't have nowhere to go, but I had made a lot of friends with the Longshoremen, because the Longshoremen worked down loading the ships, and we were the ones up there operating the spouts. So, that's how I got the relationship with the Longshoremen. So, when I left there, I went to work on the docks with the Longshoremen.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, you worked on the docks, and you worked your way up, more or less with them?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And then at – at – at one point you were injured; right?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Yes. I was – I was injured in the 80's. We had a – a ship that we loaded with some stuff called bulgar wheat. And that wheat is – is a real fine ground wheat, and it's the type of wheat that they make cereal flakes out of. And I think we were shipping it overseas. After we had loaded the ships, and – and loading the ship was a process, because you have surveyors, you have inspectors, and they inspected the ship and they found a rat on the ship. So, we had to go unload the ship that we had loaded, so they can fumigate it. And when you load it you got to go down in the – go straight down, and then you had the walls of sacks all around. And, when we were down, I believe I was at the bottom, and the ship lists, and the whole wall of sacks fell on me.

LYNN SMITH: Oh.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: A wall of 110-pound sacks fell on me. But I was blessed because it just hit my knee, and popped my knee. And, so, I had to have an operation on my knee, and I was off for a year. And from there I said, "Well, let me start, taking a hiatus." And then one thing led to another.

LYNN SMITH: So, that began your college experience?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: That had began my college experience. You know, I–I'm not ashamed to say that I – I haven't had a drink in 37 years. And back then, you know, I – I – I would drink. So I went to AA, and then in AA we have –we have sponsors that help people out. And we are supposed to be always on call if somebody needs us. And I never forget, one of these little run down hotels on Leopard, there was a guy that called me one night, I don't remember his name. The guy at the motel called the inner group [AA 24 hour Inner Group Hotline], and they told me to go out– and talk to the guy. And I went out there and talked to this guy. This guy was drunk, and – and he – and he had a gun in his mouth. He wanted to kill himself. And, golly, I talked him out of that, and got him to the hospital. But as I left the emergency room a chill went up with me, and I said, "Golly, what if I had said the wrong thing?" And I said the AA – the AA book is not good enough for, for dealing in this type of situation. I – I need more – if I'm going to be dealing with people like this I need more. And I never forget looking at a bulletin I got in the mail, and, and I had no interest in going to college. My – my life was all set. I'm going to work these many years, and get my gold watch, and that's it. You know what I mean? And get my retirement. And I saw this class in the summer abnormal psychology. I said, "That'll be good. I'll just take that class."

You know, it was at Del Mar, you know, cheap to go to Del Mar, and that's coming out of my pocket, and – and it interested to me. And I just got to studying and studying, and – and the workman's comp insurance company, and got with management, and they asked if I wanted to change my profession, and start to go to college. Why not? You know what I mean? So, that's what happened, and that's how I – I was able to leave the Longshoremen, and it was a – it was a mixed feeling, because the Longshoremen Union is a brotherhood. And all of the guys, white, Hispanics, we all like family. When I see those guys it's like seeing my own blood. And it's goes, it's like it was with my grandpa and his racist friends. They like it for you to love yourself, to be proud of who you are. They love themselves and are proud of who they are. And we all respected ourselves and one another. And that was one of the things that affected me real good, because it made being black very important. The Longshoremen Union would send me to different towns, and meetings. I saw blacks from all over the United States, and – and saw blacks that were powerful. And, that's another thing with the – the desegregation, our union was the only one -- in the south our union was the only organization in the United States that was still

practicing Plessy vs. Ferguson. And we wanted it, you know, the whites [Longshoremen Union] didn't care, if we merged.

LYNN SMITH: Just to clarify –

BILLY RAY SAYLES: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- so, you're saying that you preferred the – the doctrine of separate but equal?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Yeah. We – on the docks, we – we did. We loved it. As a matter of fact, we – were the ones fighting for it because we had our own union hall. We had our own president. We had our own board of directors, and it– it was good. So the blacks in the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast District, they were fighting mergers with the white union. – every president, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Carter had sympathized with us.

LYNN SMITH: And allowed you to stay separate?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Yeah. Yeah. And we – in Longshoremen – we were very political, the Longshoremen is a very political organization. And, as a matter of fact, a guy sent me a message, something like Facebook, yesterday, and tell me about this is how a bill passed, and – and, you know, it's too much money in politics. And I sent him a message back, "So true. I was a Longshoremen."

[Laughter]

BILLY RAY SAYLES: I – I know about that, don't stop that money in politics. You know what I mean? And every president had sympathized with the black Longshoremen and kept kicking the can down the road. And we all thought, hey, we'll all be dead when they merge [the black and white Longshoremen Unions in in the South]. And we ain't gonna have to have no merger, and then President Reagan came in. And when President Reagan came in, he told us as far as he was concerned we were breaking the law.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: And he made the black and white Longshoremen's Unions merge?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Yeah. He said, "As far as I'm concerned y'all are already merged." The policy of the separate but equal is – is illegal, and –

LYNN SMITH: So – didn't you tell me you were the last black president at the black Longshoremen Association Chapter [Local 1281] here in Corpus Christi?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Yeah. We – we had two black locals – we had the Deep Sea Local and the Warehouse Local. And Melvin John Polk, he was president of the – the Deep Sea Local [Local 1224], the larger local [Longshoremen Union]. And I was president of the Warehouse Local [Local 1281]. That's the smaller black local. But – we all worked together, and that was a blessing for me, because we would unload the ships, and then we would unload the cargo and we would make sure it's all in the warehouse, and then when the ships come we would load the ship. So, we got paid twice. It was a – it was a good thing. And under that system, the separate

but equal, it was – it was kind of like I was an heir apparent [to become president] for the larger black local.

And, Melvin John Polk, he was a very powerful man – in the black community. He was kind of like a boss of all of us. And that was what I was being prompted for, and getting prepared for. So, when he retired, I would move up, and be over the – the whole thing. And I traveled everywhere with him. He was a very powerful man. I didn't even have to have a lot of money with me when I went out of town, because he would tell me, "Well, the governor – we are going to eat breakfast with the governor. I want you to come with me." You know, he said the senator's going to invite us to a cocktail party there tonight, and I want you come on with me, you know. I never had to have money, because Melvin always made sure I ate and drank, and have a good time and travel with him.

[Laughter]

BILLY RAY SAYLES: And from the white local [Longshoremen Union] there was a guy named Joe Galan [later became a Port Commissioner] and Lee Nobles, they would travel, so we traveled. I was just a young kid traveling with them learning the ropes. And – I was in charge of the Warehouse Local [Longshoremen Union] and made sure that all of the cargo came through.

I didn't realize how significant that was until after I left, and I look back at it, that was a very significant job, being in charge of all of that tonnage coming in, and making sure it's put in the warehouse right. So, getting ready for when the ship would leave out was a very important job.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And you also told me a little bit about the Longshoremen Hall that's in Northside. You want to tell me who built that, and what it was used for?

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Yeah. The Longshoremen Hall was built, I guess, way back. The old timers – it was like three generations of old timers. The ones that were old timers that I worked with when I was there, they were young men when they built the hall. Some of them I can name. I think are Mack Young, and – you know, it was just a bunch of them. And they built that hall that housed the two black locals. And the Anglos didn't even have a hall. They [the Anglos] was outside, you know, hiring outside on the docks and stuff, and they [the black Longshoremen] built that hall, brick for brick for themselves. And that hall was very important. A lot of social functions was held there. My momma said – my momma is 88 now, she said that they had their senior prom at that hall upstairs. As a matter of fact, after we got out of that [merged the black and white locals] – someone tried to make it a joint, and a club upstairs, and everything, but after the Longshoremen left there, there wasn't nobody to cater to that type of stuff anymore. But – it was a very important part of that community. Everybody has their own theory, and hypothesis about the Northside, and – but that's me, what I think, that the Longshoremen Hall was the pillar, the power that sustained the Northside. And regrettably though, not only did it sustain the positive businesses, but it sustained the illegal activity too. So, after I talked to you before I got to thinking about it. Well, it was good, but it kept illegal activity going too, because there was so much money there, and you had a lot of wise guys that didn't want to work, and sold drugs, and stuff like that. Well, they were making money too off of all of the money that was generated in the neighborhood. But, it was – I guess, when I left, we was making \$18.00 an hour, and that was – that was way back in '80. That was a lot of money. And that was – that was a time when we had two or 300 men working on the docks all up and down. Yes, 200 or 300 men. And each one of those men is making \$18.00 an hour. And – and all of those guys didn't belong to the union. The

union was just a small group, and when we need extra men we just get those men out of the neighborhood, and those little [housing] projects, North Side Manor. And those guys made their money. As a matter of fact, they wouldn't even work. They just would wait until we needed them, because they would make \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year just working part-time with us. You see? And, so, that – that hall was very important. And it's funny, you know, everybody was talking about how the freeway blocked us off, and now that they listening to me, and they say, "Yeah, you know, you're right."

[Laughter]

BILLY RAY SAYLES: When that hall left that's when everything decayed, and it's all gone bad, because the hall made sure that it was businesses needed there. Because Longshoremen, they just stayed over there, you know. Even though they lived on the south side they wasn't no fun running back to the south side and driving way back over here to the Port. They just stayed over there– they eat over there, spend their money there. It was money – there was big money in that neighborhood. And that Longshoremen Hall was just like the center of the – the Northside. Everybody gathered around that hall, to be around Longshoremen. Longshoremen – when I think about the Longshoremen I think about the song with the Duke of Hazards, just the good ol' boys. And that's the way they were, they were – they were rascally fellows, but they were just nice kind-hearted fellows. And, all of the preachers loved the Longshoremen, and they had Longshoremen in their church, they was happy. And the guys, even when they worked on Sunday, they would drive by the church and honk their horn, and leave their money. And – and even if the guys that didn't go to church, didn't believe in the church, send money to the church. So Longshoremen is a very good organization. I see just things on –my Facebook deal and I – I like the Longshoremen, and men see all the work they do in Civil Rights and things. And all of the leaders, you don't see all of the leaders on Politic Nation, and MSNBC, this and that. It's a very low-keyed organization, but it – to me is the most powerful labor organization in the United States.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. I want to thank you so much for coming and speaking with me today.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Okay. Thank you. You're welcome.

[Second part of interview because Mr. Sayles decided he wanted to make further comments. Second part of the interview was held on the same day, at the same location.]

LYNN SMITH: I know you've been involved in the meetings about the Harbor Bridge Project.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And I believe you said you wanted to just give us a little bit of your perspective of what you think the project – the Harbor Bridge Project will mean to the neighborhood, and to the future, maybe, of Corpus Christi.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: Yeah. It – it goes back to my theory on what destroyed the black neighborhood, is when the Longshoremen Hall closed. Now, not everybody believes that. Some folks believed that when they built the freeway, it killed the black neighborhood. So, and it's just like with the bridge. I – I believe the bridge is going to be a very important part of the Northside. I can see the plan side of the new parks, they're going to be building with the walkways from Hillcrest Park, by Oveal Williams Senior

Center, and then tearing down the old Booker T. Washington School, and building a – state-of-the-art beautiful park right there. And my experience tells me where there is a beautiful park, beautiful homes comes up around them. So, I see that the bridge is going to be a – good thing for the whole – neighborhood. And – it is good that we have – always have two opinions about everything. So, at one time I heard a preacher tell a young man with the NAACP, the young man got up and was praising himself, because the function that he engineered to put together came out good. But he was very critical of the people that was against him. And I never forget what the preacher told him. The preacher told him, “Young man, always remember, you have 100 percent. You have those against you, and you have those with you, and you add that together, and you have 100 percent support.” And, that's me. I believe that the bridge is going to be good for the neighborhood. It's going to be more lighted. It's going to be more business, and it's going to be more development. You know, they got the HUD coming in, and when HUD come in, that's just about development. And, so, I – I believe it's good. And, I was raised to – I guess–my family believes in pride in self. And, I guess, not to be separate from anyone, but to love who I am as a person, and my heritage, is very important to me. And it just seems funny to me, you know, that the same people, that's for the Northside now, they was for integration in the past. So, a lot of them didn't even want to go to their own schools in the neighborhood. They went to the other schools, and they shunned us, because we went to Coles. But these are the people that are so in love with the Northside now and don't want any outside influences. They just want to keep it the way it is. So, I just think that's, paradoxical, and it's baffling to me. But in the state of love, we all have to love each other's opinions about things, and I guess God has blessed me to be in the business environment, and,– matter of fact, and when I was union president over there, I was known as the tax man, cause I did everybody on the Northside taxes.

[Laughter]

BILLY RAY SAYLES: That was my extra money. So, I have always been in the business part of it, and I – and I might be a little biased, because in my relationship with the Port, I loved the Port of Corpus Christi. But, I just think the bridge is going to be a – a good thing for – not just the Northside, but for the whole city. And that's the way I look at it. I look at it for my grandkids. You know, my grandkids are going to come up, and there's a beautiful university out there, and there's going to be more opportunities. And it goes back to what I was saying before, how my uncles had to leave here, because there wasn't opportunities here. And we have a lot of young blacks now that I go to church with, go up and get good educations, and don't come back here. You know, Bolden, you know, I - - I go to church with Emile Bolden, his son, Steve Bolden one of the finest attorneys in Dallas. How come he couldn't be one of the finest attorneys here in Corpus Christi? So, that's what I see, no opportunities. I see it every time I go in the black neighborhood, but if there'd be more opportunities, blacks would come here and stay. So, that's just my perspective of the whole thing.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Thank you so much.

BILLY RAY SAYLES: [Agreeing]

[End of Edited Transcript of Billy Ray Sayles' Oral History Interview.]

Mr. James Smith's Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 19: Mr. James Smith in 2015



Photographer: Sean Wray, HNTB

Figure 20: James Smith and his mother Beulah M. Smith at his graduation from Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi in 1976



Courtesy of James Smith

Figure 21: James Smith's mother, Beulah Carolyn McCrane Smith (c. 1975), who taught English and was the Choral Director at Solomon M. Coles Junior-Senior High School



Courtesy of James Smith

Figure 22: Detail of Roy Miller High School 1971 Graduating Class Photo with James Smith and Barbara Campbell noted



Courtesy of James Smith. Photographer: E. L. Goldbeck Co., San Antonio, Texas. Annotations by HNTB, 2015

Edited Transcript of Mr. James Smith's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith, and I am interviewing James Smith for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on January 22, 2015, in Round Rock, Texas. I am interviewing James Smith, in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhood in Corpus Christi, Texas. First, please tell me your full name.

JAMES SMITH: My name is James Roy McCrane Smith.

LYNN SMITH: All righty, and also when and where you were born? Your birthday?

JAMES SMITH: My birthday is November 25, 1952. I was born in Cuero, Texas.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So you were not born in Corpus Christi, but you got there pretty quick. You want to tell me about that?

JAMES SMITH: I am an adopted child. I was adopted at the age of, I believe 15 or 16 months. My parents were the late Reverend Sidney R Smith and Beulah Carolyn McCrane Smith.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and what did your dad do for a living?

JAMES SMITH: My father was an ordained Minister for First Congregational Church.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and your mom?

JAMES SMITH: My mother was a school teacher. She worked for the Corpus Christi Independent School District, at Solomon Melvin Coles [School] the majority of her years, and several other junior and elementary schools in the Corpus Christi area.

LYNN SMITH: And what did she teach?

JAMES SMITH: My mother was an English teacher and a music teacher.

LYNN SMITH: All right. And, where did you all live when you first got to Corpus Christi?

JAMES SMITH: My earliest recognition was I lived in the-what they called the parsonage on Waco Street, right next to the church, First Congregational Church.

LYNN SMITH: Now, where did you first go to school?

JAMES SMITH: The first school that I attended was Holy Cross Elementary. After that I attended Booker T. Washington Elementary School.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And, your mom had something to say about that, didn't she?

JAMES SMITH: Yes, she did. Basically, because of my age. Because I was not seven years old, in order to attend public school, she placed me in Holy Cross Catholic Church [School]. After I finished the first grade, she wanted to make sure that I learned and was proficient, I should say, and she had me placed back in the first grade in one of her friend's class, who was-I considered like my other mother, Miss Viola Johnson, to get me through the basics, and make sure that I learned what I needed to, in first grade.

LYNN SMITH: All right. So, you had a good foundation.

JAMES SMITH: Yes. Very good.

Edited Transcript of Mr. James Smith's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: And, so, what were your favorite things to do when you were in elementary school?

JAMES SMITH: Basically, playing, being a kid, and I had a knack for- - for drawing. Had a talent for drawing.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and-so, did you like your teachers?

JAMES SMITH: Oh, yes, I loved them. They- - they were the world to me. I mean, they were my extended family. They were my mothers.

LYNN SMITH: All right. So, you went to Booker T. Washington, and then for junior high, tell me about that.

JAMES SMITH: I went to Solomon Melvin Coles, which was the only black high school-junior high school in the area, where my mother taught, even though I was supposed to have gone to the schools in my district, Crossley Elementary School, and Robert Driscoll Junior High. I didn't go to those, due to the fact, like I said, my mother taught at the school, at Solomon Melvin Coles which was right up the street from Booker T. [Washington Elementary School]. So, she could drop me off in the morning at the elementary school, go to work and come back in the evening from her school, and pick me up from mine.

LYNN SMITH: And at that point, she was raising you by herself, because your father passed away, right?

JAMES SMITH: My father-right. My father had-passed away, I think I was at the age of, around about, what maybe eight or nine when he passed. So, she raised me from there along with the community, my- - my hood.

LYNN SMITH: All right. Okay. And then you were- - you were at Solomon Coles, and then you went to North Side Junior High, right?

JAMES SMITH: Correct. I finished the ninth grade at North Side [Junior High], due to the fact that Coles was in its last year. After I finished the eighth grade, Coles was closing down, as a high school, and was to re-open the next year, or year after that, as a junior high.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And that's when it had the architectural renovation, right?

JAMES SMITH: Correct.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. And then, then your mom taught at North Side Junior High also, right?

JAMES SMITH: Right.

LYNN SMITH: And then where did you go after ninth grade?

JAMES SMITH: After ninth grade, I finally went to the school in my district. Roy Miller High School where I met up with all my friends, and everybody else I knew from the neighborhood, and from the other neighborhoods. So, I finally got to go to Miller.

LYNN SMITH: All right. And tell me a little bit about your high school experiences? What did you do when you-were you in sports, were you, what were your interests?

Edited Transcript of Mr. James Smith's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

JAMES SMITH: When I got to Miller, it was like;-well you were the new kid on the block, being a sophomore quite naturally. But I had all my friends, all my partners from North Side [Junior High], Coles, Driscoll, and some from other junior highs, because we, -in that area were all conjugated, and got together, and finally we were all at the one high school together, so, it was like one big party. It was fun. Got a chance to play football with the same guys and run track. Got into various activities and various things that were going on. So, you could kind of pick and choose what you wanted. It was wide open.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and your class was a pretty big class. Wasn't it?

JAMES SMITH: Yes. It was one of the largest classes for that time period for the '70s. In 1970 – '71.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

JAMES SMITH: One of the largest.

LYNN SMITH: So, you were in Northside. At first, you were in the parsonage, and then you all moved.

JAMES SMITH: Moved to Hillcrest. I think I was about, maybe in the second or third grade, by the time we had moved.

LYNN SMITH: So, pretty young.

JAMES SMITH: Our parents decided that they wanted to buy a house. Hillcrest was starting to open up, and the black families, Hispanics or whoever were starting to move out that way. To venture out.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. Now you saw a lot of changes, over time that you lived there, right?

JAMES SMITH: Right.

LYNN SMITH: You want just kind of tell me about changes that you saw that affected the neighborhood.

JAMES SMITH: Well, in some ways you saw changes structurally. We started to get various things in there, like; I think, it was round about the 10th or the 11th grade; we finally got a community pool down there. Around T.C. Ayers Center at one time, there used to be a real bad drainage problem when I was in the elementary school. It was like a little river that ran through a certain section going down by the projects. They had runoffs down there, and you would have problems, because of a stagnation in the water and everything. And that was a problem. But they finally came, and they did something about it. They concreted over the water (drainage ditch). Made improvements there. You would see various little improvements around that area. The highway system coming in 37 [Interstate Highway 37 (I-37)], kind of split the community in a way, in half. It kind of divided the town from the neighborhood. You saw various businesses. We had a lot of businesses. It's funny people call it 'The Cuts'. The Cuts was basically Corpus Christi's little Harlem. People don't realize that you had black businesses. You had doctors, dentists, pharmacists, a pharmacy, insurance, cafes, a hotel, and taxi services. With the growth in everything else, that was going on, eventually it kind of changed. People were starting to have, I guess, more opportunities or more choices, and all, to venture out of that area, to go and see different things. Things happen, they weren't all of a sudden or fast, but there were a lot of changes and they happened gradually. You would see changes. That's about all I can think of, right now.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. The refineries. How did those affect, y'all?

JAMES SMITH: Well, you knew the refineries were there. That was just something that, if you moved there, that was something that you knew was going to happen. We didn't think of it, as being as dangerous as it was. I think later on, because of the explosions, and people getting killed, and all. Back then, you didn't think of it, the pollution that it was causing. In the ground, and everything like that. When I was there growing up, I think there might have been, maybe one or two explosions but they were further back, and they did not really have that much of an impact at that time, but as time went on; it started to have an impact. It was just something that you just took for granted. It's like, if I'm going to move here, I know the refineries- - refineries are there. If they are going to explode, well I knew that when- - when I moved there. I think the only thing that we did not count on was it polluting the water and the grounds, saturating the grounds and everything like that. As time went on, I know of older friends that have had health problems/issues from that, because of that, but at the time, you being that young, you don't really think of that and all.

LYNN SMITH: Right. But, you've kept in touch with the folks in Corpus Christi, haven't you?

JAMES SMITH: Right- - right, that's my second home.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, tell me. Just, I guess, in general, about growing up there. Just kind of your feelings about it. What- - what your impressions were?

JAMES SMITH: I think it is like being any other kid; you just can't wait to get the hell out. You know. It's like, why am I here? You're looking at the news. You're reading stuff, and you start to think, hey, everywhere else is more exciting than damn Corpus Christi, right. There ain't nothing down here. We were almost down to the valley. Ask somebody, go somewhere. Where are you from, Corpus Christi? What? They can't even pronounce it right. And you keep going, it's Corpus Christi. Not copper, Christ. You know, everywhere you go, you have to reaffirm that, hey, it's like this, and nobody knows about you. You're trying to explain. They go like, yeah, yeah, yeah. It's not until they actually go there, and they see it. I think I had more of an appreciation for Corpus, after I got older, and all, and as I saw the people, the teachers and the parents of a lot of my class mates, and other people. I saw them pass, and I just had to stop, and reflect, and I thought, when I was young I couldn't wait till I got the hell out of Corpus, because there was nobody exciting there. No Michael Jordan. No movie stars. No basketball players. No so and so, but yet, then when I got older and looked at it, I'm going like, you know, we've got people here that, they're known around the world, because of what they've done. Teaching and so on. We've got football players. We've got stars. We've got some - - you've got everything here. You just didn't appreciate it. Now you're old, and you see this, and you wish you had that youth that you had, that you could do this life over again. Corpus was a great place to grow up. We had fun, you know. It was pretty much a safe environment and all. It is just a routine you fell into, and what you expected to do. To do this and that, until you got out of high school, and then it was like, Okay, you're on your own. Now you've been talking all this smack about, what you're going to do. What this, that and the other. You have the opportunity to do it. But Corpus was a great place. It was a good place to raise kids. It wasn't as much crime, drugs. Maybe, every now and then somebody, you know, but it is nothing like what you have now. Weed was like something you heard about. You might see somebody with it, and you're curious, you go like, wow. Okay. You see it every now and then. Once in - - once in a blue moon, that was it. You know, but it was a pretty decent place to raise kids, and the community looked out after its own. Corpus was great. I loved it.

LYNN SMITH: Well, I've really appreciated your time today. Is there anything else you can think of; you want to add?

JAMES SMITH: No. I think I would probably go back to Corpus, but the only reason why I would be hesitant is, because right now most of my friends are either dead okay, because of age, health reasons or moved. It would be a lot of catching up, and, you know, the people that I would want to associate with are a lot older and everything and, you know, you really want to talk about the good old days and this, that and the other, and reminisce, and all. And when you don't have all your friends around, it's different-I have shown you the picture [photo of 1971 Roy Miller High School Graduating Class on James Smith's office wall]. Got so many people there. Then they are gone. It becomes kind of difficult. I don't mind going visiting. I love visiting. My friends there, we have a good time, and like I said, we go back through old areas. See how they've changed, and everything, and talk about this, that and the other. I don't know. I might change my mind and retire there, but only-the good Lord knows for right now.

LYNN SMITH: Thank you again.

JAMES SMITH: You're quite welcome.

LYNN SMITH: Alright, we're- - we're doing a part two here on January 22, 2015, with James Smith and Lynn Smith. And one of the things that I forgot to ask him on the first go round, was a little bit about how the teachers around him, influenced him? And one of those teachers, I know was Robert Campbell, and I just wanted you to tell me a little bit about that.

JAMES SMITH Mr. Campbell had an influence, not only on me, but on, basically all the black kids around-black and white. It is not fair to just say, black. Mr. Campbell and Mrs. Campbell cared about kids. The teachers there, they instilled in you to be proud, to work, to strive, for this that and the other. He was one of the ones that, if he saw a need - I can actually and honestly tell you that a lot of those teachers, Mr. Campbell and others fed a lot of kids. They clothed kids too. They gave out of their own pockets. They didn't have to, but that's just how strong that community was. It was-we were a generation, Barbara, myself and a lot of the kids,

LYNN SMITH: Barbara Campbell?

JAMES SMITH Barbara Campbell with a lot of other kids and their parents. There was never a doubt, if we were going to go to college. Now a lot of kids wondered-I wondered [about details]. It was like from elementary school. I can actually, God honestly tell you I'm going to college. Now, what college I was going to, I don't know, but I'm going to college, because that was already in our mentality. We're going to college somewhere. What we're going to major in, I don't know, but we already knew that from elementary school [we were going to college]. They instilled that in us. They took us up under their wings, and did this that and the other. Not only them, but other blacks, within the community. Like I said, you've heard the old saying, it takes a community to raise a child. Well, the Lord knows that community raised a whole, hell of a lot of kids. You've got kids that went to everything from the Ivy Leagues to private, and public schools. Any major schools you want to name. If it hadn't been for Campbell, and the rest of, a lot of black teachers, professionals that were in that community and around there, we would not have made it. Thank God for Campbell, the Pitts, the Williams, Thomas, so many other people I can name, Greenwood, Johnson. Lord, it would take me all day, and I probably would miss some people, but it was a very large circle of people.

LYNN SMITH: That supported you.

JAMES SMITH That supported-not only me, supported other people, whether you be black, white, green, yellow-I don't care. If you lived in that neighborhood, that community, you received help. If they could not help you, they would damn sure find somebody who would help you. That was one thing about-it was a

Edited Transcript of Mr. James Smith's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

strong community. That's why you see that picture up there with-that graduating class. I can guarantee you; a lot of those black kids were helped, by these people in the neighborhood.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, thank you so much. I have definitely appreciated both part one and part two.

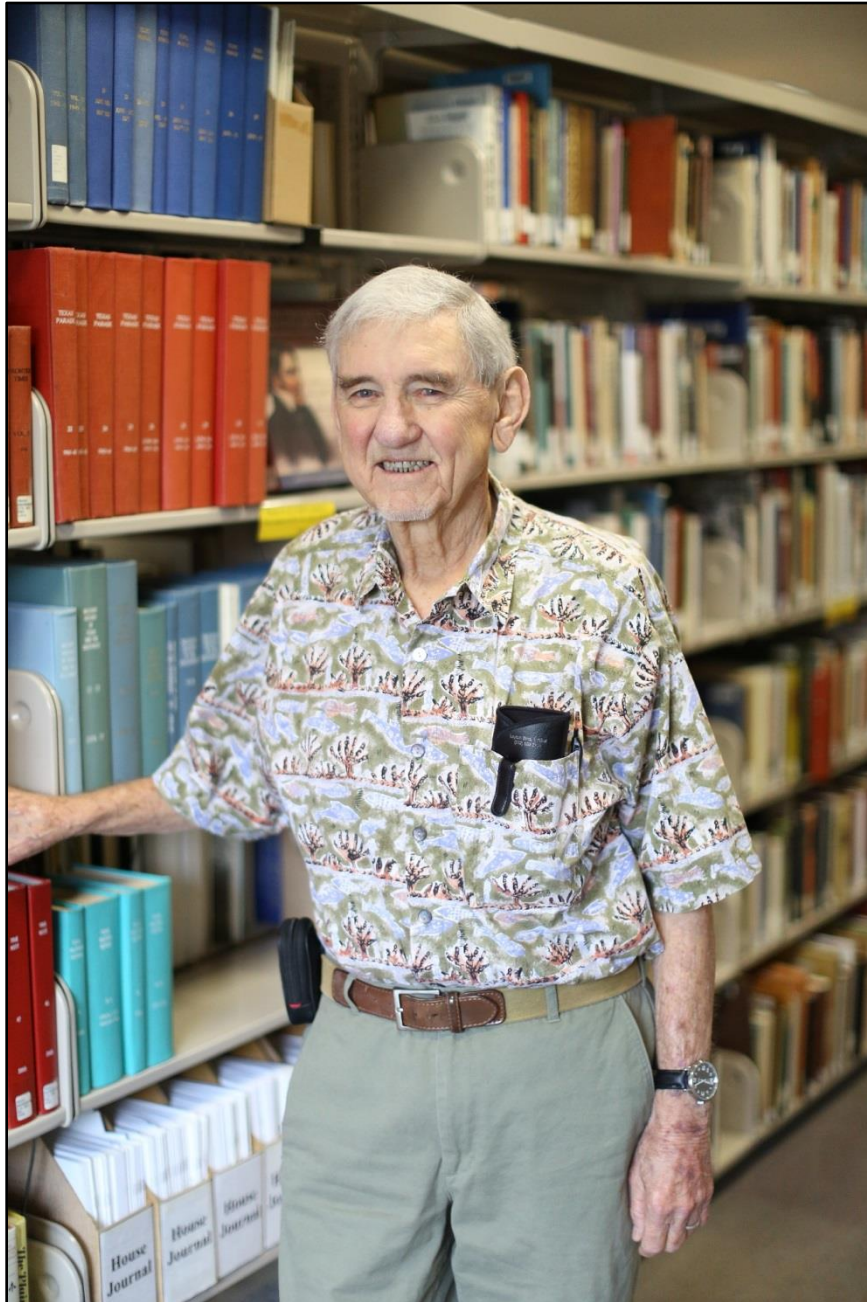
JAMES SMITH You're quite welcome.

LYNN SMITH: Thank you.

[End of Part Two Recording for James Smith]

Mr. Dick Swantner's Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 23: Mr. Dick Swantner in 2014



Photographer: Anna Christy, HNTB

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith interviewing Mr. Dick Swantner for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on December 18th, 2014 in Corpus Christi, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Swantner, in order to learn more about his knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. Thank you for being here.

DICK SWANTNER: You're welcome.

LYNN SMITH: Please first just tell me your name, and when, and where you were born.

DICK SWANTNER: Okay. My name is John Richard "Dick" Swantner. I was born in Omaha, Nebraska.

LYNN SMITH: Okay, and what – you just had a recent birthday. What's your birthday?

DICK SWANTNER: Yesterday was my eighty-sixth birthday.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, that would have been December 17th?

DICK SWANTNER: That's right. I was born on December 17, 1928.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, I think you were – wanted to start first with how your family came to Corpus Christi?

DICK SWANTNER: Yes. My dad and mother went to Florida, and my dad was a – kind of a promoter, and he got in the land boom in Florida in the late 20's, and that boom busted like a lot of them do. And, they came away with nothing, after working with – on a pier of their own, for a while, a fishing pier. And he sent my mother back to Nebraska to live with her parents, because they had no money, and then he came back to Nebraska, and got a job with an automobile dealership, as their insurance agent to sell insurance on the automobiles they were selling. And, that got – that was disturbed by the depression, and he had no job, and somebody from Corpus Christi, Texas, the City National Bank, which is no longer in existence, called him, and asked him if he would come to Corpus Christi, and take care of their insurance department, and he kind of, he told them, "Yes, I'll come. Do you want me to be there yesterday, or today, or when?"

[Laughter]

DICK SWANTNER: I asked him personally one day, "Why did we move to Corpus Christi?" And he gave me this information, and he also said in Nebraska we had nine months of winter and three months of bad weather, and he was glad to get to Corpus Christi. My mother was born in Omaha of German parents that came over from Germany, and my father was born in – in Freemont, Nebraska. My mother's parents were born – my mother – in Germany, and came here each separately to visit the United States when the First World War broke out, and they both stayed, and so, they – they ended up here in Omaha, Nebraska, my grandfather and his wife, were named Gansle, G-A-N-S-L-E, which means little goose in German.

And he was a brew master for a big brewery in Germany, and did the same thing when he came over here, until prohibition started, and he was out of a job.

So, anyway, that's how she got there, and then my father's parents came from Czechoslovakia, where they had gone from Austria to get out of the draft, the military draft, and then Czechoslovakia had a military draft, and they came to the United States to get away from that, and then all of them ended up serving in the – in the service in the United States.

And then he got the call to come to Corpus Christi from the City National Bank, and came here, and he was a very aggressive businessman, and wanted a place to live. Well, the first place I can remember, at about a year old, that we lived was behind – across the street from the local Y.M.C.A. on Carancahua Street, and that place is still there. It was a little bitty apartment that had a place to park your car between that and the next apartment, then a roof over all of it, like a – like the old places that you used to stop on the road to stay in.

LYNN SMITH: Motor courts?

DICK SWANTNER: Motor court. And the reason I can remember is, because my mother used to take me up on top of it, on the roof, because that's where you hung out the clothes, and the things that they had on the roof are still there, and I have a picture of that, because I'm doing the history for my family too, trying to.

And that was just a rental apartment, and then as soon as he could, got established with the bank, he bought a house in Hillcrest, and borrowed, I don't know, \$2,500 or something, because the house was maybe worth \$2,800. And it was a two bedroom, one bath house. And, my two brothers and I lived in one bedroom, and my mother and dad lived in the other bedroom. And, as we lived out there, with the depression getting deeper and deeper, the mayor of Corpus Christi, McCaughan, who actually built that subdivision, came around to everybody in the neighborhood, because he financed it all, and told them to keep – keep em painted, keep em clean, keep the lawns in good shape, and pay him when they could. And he ended up not losing any money, because everybody eventually paid him – he didn't foreclose on them or anything. So, they got to stay there on that basis, and then my father tried to figure out, "Now how am I going to get out to another part of town?", and that's another story.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. So, you were going to tell me a little bit about the families that lived around you in Hillcrest.

DICK SWANTNER: Okay. We lived at 6406 Peabody, which was one house from the corner of Peabody, and I can't remember the cross street, and on the other side of that cross street was Crossley School, an elementary school, which I think is still there. And to our – to our north, on our side of the street, were the Berman's, a Jewish family, who brought us bits of Jewish food that they fixed, because they were that kind of people. They loved – they loved the people around them, and we were glad to get it. And then on the other side of them was a family called the Peaster's. I'm not sure what they did – but one of the daughters babysat my brother and I. And then my younger brother was born two years after me in Corpus Christi. He's – was the only native born in Corpus Christi. And then on the other side of the Peaster's were the Barnes' and Mr. Barnes worked for the Port [of Corpus Christi], and eventually his son, when he grew up, was the county judge for years and years here, Bob Barnes, and he also had the County build a juvenile justice center, and they named it after him; the first one that they've had, because

they had one juvenile officer in Corpus Christi for years, and that was a total of how they handled juvenile problems. And I was handled by him a couple of times, and I thought he did it right.

[Laughter]

DICK SWANTNER: So, if I skipped school, he took me back to school. He didn't put me in jail; okay? And, then on the other side of the Barnes family, I can't – there's one family I cannot remember the name of in there. On the other side of the Barnes, and the people I don't know, were the Robert Wells.' He worked in a mortuary, and I remember them well, because his son – I don't know what kind of disease he had or what, but he had a club foot, and had a shoe with a very tall heel all the way across it, but we were great friends, and he got to – he did just about everything we did. And then on the south side of us, the one house that was on the corner – okay – were the Abernathy's, Mr. Abernathy was a barber, and had the "favorite" barber shop in The Nueces Hotel downtown. And, his daughters, he had two daughters, and they babysat us from time to time. My mother and dad liked to dance, and they'd go out on the weekend, and go to a dance somewhere.

And then across the street, directly on the corner, across from Mr. Abernathy's were the Gregory's, and Mr. Gregory – worked at Perkins Brothers clothing store, which was on the corner of Leopard and Carancahua – across from where the American Bank is now. He was in charge of the shoe department, and once a year we went down, and my mother bought us shoes, usually at Easter time. My mother, Emma Lou Swantner bought us shoes one Easter, and we went over to play football, took our shoes off, over at the Crossley School, and walked off and left them, because we never wore shoes unless we were told to. And they got stolen. That was a big problem in our family when they got stolen.

[Laughter]

DICK SWANTNER: We weren't too well liked when we got home without em. There was a vacant lot next to the Gregory's, and all of the kids in the neighborhood, including us, we dug pits to have forts and stuff, and used rubber guns, which I don't know if you know what they were, they're shaped like a gun, they got a clothespin on the back of em, and you make rubber bands out of inner tubes of tires, and you hook em to the front with a –a little notch in, it would go in there, and then you hook em to the clothespin, and then when you shoot somebody you push the bottom of the clothespin, it would release it. And that's the kind of fights we had.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: That sounds like fun.

DICK SWANTNER: Yeah, it was fun.

[Laughter]

DICK SWANTNER: It was fun. The – the whole neighborhood had a lot of fun. And the – the streets out there were oyster shell. They were not paved. And they dug the oyster shell out of the Nueces Bay, and the Heldenfels Brothers group that built a lot of things for the Army, and – the Navy primarily, they dredged the shell out, and furnished it to the city to– do a lot of the streets in Corpus Christi. And what they did was, and nobody knew about things like that then,

they ruined the oyster production, because the oyster beds were gone, so, they stopped that later. And, Ocean Drive at that time stopped at Louisiana, and it was oyster shells from that point out.

And, we had a local bus company. My two brothers and I went to Incarnate Word Academy, a Catholic school on the corner of Tanchua and Leopard, where the American Bank is now, and the bus company, Nueces Transportation, the – the two men that owned it, the Ekstroms, Bob and Ed Ekstrom, they were from Minnesota, and came down here, because of the – the cold. They actually started the Greyhound Bus Company, and they sold it to get out of the cold up there, and they started the Nueces Transportation Company here in Corpus Christi.

And in the meantime, while this is all going on, the bank my dad was working for shut down – along with thousands of other banks, during the depression, and he no longer had a job, and the bank owed the insurance companies a lot of money, and my dad went to them, and said, “If you will let me have the business –”, the bank had an insurance department, “—I will pay all of the money they owe.” That's what he did, and that's how he started his own insurance agency, and that was in 1930. And he – I have a – a policy wallet at home that has his phone number on it, which was “nine,” that's his phone number, number nine; okay?

[Laughter]

DICK SWANTNER: And Swantner & Gordon grew from that point into –one of the top 100 independent agencies in the country. So, Corpus Christi has been very good to our family, and our family was trained to work even in the summers, we had to have summer jobs, etc., and as a result of that, we were able to do some things to help the city too at the same time.

LYNN SMITH: Now I believe you wanted to tell me about the diversity within Hillcrest?

DICK SWANTNER: Yes. I guess one of the biggest diversities was the best friends that my brother and I had. Behind us was a cemetery, behind our house, and across the cemetery were the White's, and the White's were black; okay? And they were– J. B. and John Howard White, and they were older than we were, and they were, you know, sweet, good kids, and they came over, and we used to play football in the cemetery, and they – at their house they had no electricity, because that part – that one area had no electricity yet, and everything was coal oil. And they raised pigs, and so, they had a wagon, and a – a horse, and– they'd go down to the old courthouse, and get what was left over from what they fed the prisoners, and bring it home, and feed their pigs, and we got to go with them, which was a great adventure. And that old courthouse is right down by the – near the Port. And then when we weren't doing that with em, we'd go down to the Port in the – in the wagon, and go fishing in the Port turning basin. And – and then the Second World War started, they joined the Navy, and stayed in the Navy for twenty-five years, and came out very well, and started a barbeque place in Corpus Christi, and retired from that later. So, that's one – one of the families that represented diversity, and we got to eat with them. Their mom cooked really good food on a kerosene stove, and we ate with them a good bit, and then they'd come to our house, and eat with us German food that my mother cooked, and they were mentors for my brothers and I.

And then on the other side of the -- the Peaster's, I believe, – I'm – now I'm talking about religious diversity, because we had the – the Berman's next to us, and I'm pretty sure that the Berman

family had a daughter or a granddaughter named Berman, and she changed her name, and became an actor – an actress in Hollywood, and acted in many, many movies, Barbara Berman, and she changed it to –[Barrie].

LYNN SMITH: Okay, so, a little bit more about the religious diversity.

DICK SWANTNER: Okay. The religious diversity was Catholic, Protestant, and in the Protestant was all of the different Protestant churches, and some that didn't believe in God at all, and the people got along well. And, as a matter of fact, I – I check how that area got along, by knowing that there was really not, hardly – there was very little confusion caused by what color you were or whatever, at that time, in that particular place, and that only started when you got to school.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, what happened when you got to school?

DICK SWANTNER: The public school. When you get to public school, you hear a whole lot of those guys are not worth anything, that color is not good, etc., etc. That's where it started.

LYNN SMITH: That's where you started hearing about it?

DICK SWANTNER: Yeah, and that's when I started going to public school. Now when we went to Catholic school, they already had integration in the Catholic school, yeah. So, I – I started in the Catholic schools in kindergarten, and I started – kindergarten was located right down the street, on upper Broadway, across from the cathedral, the Catholic cathedral -- there was a beautiful old home that belonged to the Kenedy's, who owned the Kenedy Ranch, which was 250,000 acres. And the – they finally gave that to the Catholic Church, and that's where I went to kindergarten to start with. And I went with the – one of my young ladies there that I thought was beautiful, her name was Alice Kleberg, and the Kleberg 's were the King Ranch people. And she went to school all the way through – all the way through the elementary school, and then she went to school in Kingsville, because that's where the ranch headquarters are. And a – a lot of other people that – that came from, I'd say, well to-do families here went to school over there.

And then I went from there to the Corpus Christi College Academy for junior high school, and that was run by the Benedictine priests, and they were tough. They were good teachers, and I got a wonderful education at both junior high and elementary school.

And, they finally told me about – when I was getting ready to go to high school out there, they said, "We think you've gone long enough here. You go somewhere else." I gave them a little trouble, I skipped school a few times, see – to go downtown and see a movie or something, and they didn't like that. So, I went to this public high school, Corpus Christi High School, which is now Miller, and I graduated from Corpus Christi High School in 1946. And from there I went to Schreiner Institute in Kerrville, Texas, to junior college, that's all they had then, and they had high school and junior college, and eventually I graduated from there. It was a military school, and my dad and mom got a divorce, and that's where I ended up. And that was kind of – where problem [kids] went to school.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DICK SWANTNER: People that had family problems.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DICK SWANTNER: A lot of them, okay.

LYNN SMITH: Can I bring you back to one thing, and –

DICK SWANTNER: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: And just ask you a little bit more about it? You were talking about the Nueces Transportation Company,

DICK SWANTNER: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- the bus company –

DICK SWANTNER: Right.

LYNN SMITH: So, so how did those buses work? Where – did they do a loop around the neighborhood, or –?

DICK SWANTNER: Yes. We lived in Hillcrest, and then the Catholic school was right downtown that I went to, the Incarnate Word, and Tom Bowlby was the driver of our bus, and he would go and drop us off right in front of our house in Hillcrest. There were no bus stops. He just knew where everybody lived, and dropped them off there. Although it wasn't a school bus, okay?

LYNN SMITH: Oh, okay.

DICK SWANTNER: And then by the time I got to high school, all I had to do was hitchhike to school. They didn't have any busses to take you to high school.

LYNN SMITH: Oh, okay.

DICK SWANTNER: So, if you didn't have a car it was safe then just to thumb a ride.

LYNN SMITH: Alright.

DICK SWANTNER: And the two people – the Ekstrom's were great people, and we were involved with them for years, until they died really, you know, my dad -- insured their bus system, and the whole thing, so, that's a way we got to know a lot of people.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well we've had a really good interview this morning. Is there anything else you want to add, or you think we're – we're pretty good?

DICK SWANTNER: Well, I don't know how far you want to get into how the – my family, how – how they ended up being a big part of Corpus Christi, like, this is just for instance, that's my younger brother –

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

DICK SWANTNER: -- and he was Mayor Pro Tem when this picture was taken.

LYNN SMITH: Well I think we can briefly go into that. I think –

DICK SWANTNER: You think?

LYNN SMITH: -- it's important to know where – where that began in Hillcrest, and then – where it led to.

DICK SWANTNER: Okay. And – so, anyway, my family had three children, my – my youngest brother, Tom, he had three children, and, they were all young ladies, and the – and that particular time in the '50s [1950s], young ladies didn't go to work at their daddy's business, you know, they just didn't do that. They were housewives, okay?

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

DICK SWANTNER: And so, he decided – he was working for the family insurance and mortgage business, and I was working for the family insurance business, and my brothers were working for the mortgage business when my dad started it. Mr. Gordon came into the insurance business in 1936. He really was my mentor. And Mr. Gordon chose who he wanted out of the family– out of my dad's children to work with him, and he chose me, so, I knew him, and was taught by him, and he was really a closer dad to me than my own father. And, anyway, my brother, Tom, decided, "Well, my girls aren't coming into it, so, I'm going to get in some other business, and I'm going to run for office, and I'm going to do things that I want to do that don't really have anything to do with our business." So, that's what he did. He ran for office, and – became Mayor Pro Tem , and – then he got into a shipping business, Coastwise Oil, and eventually he—one of his captains put one of the boats on the rocks, and bankrupted him, so --.

LYNN SMITH: Uh oh.

DICK SWANTNER: Yeah, so, that's where he ended up, and his three children grew up to be really good kids, and well – and well educated to do things for themselves. And, then my older brother Bob, who is Junior, G.R. Swantner, Junior, he worked in the mortgage company, and my dad retired at 55. That's how fast he – he worked, and how hard he worked to grow his business, and we moved from Hillcrest to Del Mar Boulevard, which was a big move for us, for anybody really.

LYNN SMITH: So, what – about what year was that; do you remember?

DICK SWANTNER: I'm going to say it was about 1939.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DICK SWANTNER: -- 1939. So, we left Hillcrest about 1939. And my mother was pregnant with my sister, who was nine years younger than any of us, and my – my dad wanted to move, and my mother wanted to move, before my sister was born, because they had no room for

us, no room for a girl in the Hillcrest house, you know. It was called a shotgun house. You could open the front door and shoot through the back door, you know, that's the way it was built.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

DICK SWANTNER: And we moved over there – he bought lots from the bank that foreclosed on em in Del Mar Addition, which had been foreclosed during the depression, and he sold enough to end up with one lot paid for. And that -- he got that, and that's where we built the house, and he paid \$12,000 for the house, which was about 3,000 to 4,000 square feet, three bedrooms, and 2 ½ baths, it was fantastic for at the time.

No air conditioning. Nobody had air conditioning then. And that house is still being lived in. In fact, it's worth 15 times as much as it was then, because it's close to town, and people – they pay a premium for those homes that are close to town, because everything went out south from there.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

DICK SWANTNER: I don't know – what to tell you, except my dad went – was one of the first people – the first person in town to go hunt in Africa. That's what he decided he was going to do, because he was divorced, single, and he had a good friend in South Dakota that went with him, and they went in 1949 to Africa, and I've still got his elephant tusk, which weighed 80 pounds each back then, and a rhino that you couldn't kill now, and you'd be in jail if you killed one now, and that sort of thing. But back then they were begging people to come over there to do that. And, he went all – he and his friend, Mr. Hatterscheidt, a good German name, went all over the world hunting and fishing, and that's what – he did, until he couldn't do it anymore.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

DICK SWANTNER: Yeah, and he – he didn't take any of us. He said, "You stay home and work, and I'll do the – take care of this, and you can go later when you can afford it." I said, "Okay." And we did, my wife and I went in 1990, and went on a picture safari, and went everywhere he went, and stayed in tents, did all of that. We just didn't shoot anything.

LYNN SMITH: Just – just photographs?

DICK SWANTNER: Yup, just photographs.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And you were involved with the tourists –?

DICK SWANTNER: Tourist Bureau?

LYNN SMITH: Yes.

DICK SWANTNER: Yes. I was president of the Tourist Bureau for two – two-year terms, which is four years, and spent a lot of time with it, as well as, you know, in my business, and, Bob Conwell– Bob Conwell was the executive director of the Tourist Bureau, and we went all over the country selling Corpus Christi, as a tourist destination, and usually took big, enormous shrimp with us, and had a shrimp boil, and served it to all of the hotel people, and all that would come, and see what was going on down here. And since that time, the Tourist Bureau, my two

brothers and I, gave them a piece of land on Shoreline [Blvd.] to build a Tourist Bureau headquarters, which they had for years, and Mrs. Sam Wilson – paid for the building.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So, there – there was a woman who paid for the building?

DICK SWANTNER: A woman [Mrs. Sam Wilson] paid for the building. And her husband was in the oil and gas business, and she owned the biggest ruby in the world, and she was a real character. In fact, my youngest son – I have 5 sons, and I have one daughter. Two of my sons went with me to some kind of a reception for her, and she knew my dad well, and I went by there, and I shook her hand, and she said, "Give me a hug," and I gave her a hug, and she said, "I know your daddy well. I know your daddy well. That 'ol reprobate," she said.

[Laughter]

DICK SWANTNER: You know, she was that kind of person. That's the way she spoke.

LYNN SMITH: Pretty, pretty frank.

DICK SWANTNER: Yeah, pretty frank. Pretty –frank, yup.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. Well, I'm – I – I'm thinking that we're about done.

DICK SWANTNER: Okay.

LYNN SMITH: Are you thinking the same thing?

DICK SWANTNER: Yeah, I guess, except for pictures.

LYNN SMITH: Okay. We're going to scan some pictures. Thank you so much for coming today.

DICK SWANTNER: You're welcome.

End of Audio Recording for Lynn Smith – Dick Swantner – 12.18.2014

See additional information on the following page.

Additional Information about Hillcrest contributed by Dick Swantner:

1. There was a 600 sq. ft. little neighborhood grocery store across from Crossley School yard owned by the Parks family.
2. West of our home – in the next block were the Padillas. The father was from Nicaragua, I think, and was a doctor. Their house was large and Dr. Padilla had a barn behind his home with a stable and a horse names “Bluebell.” He rode that horse around the neighborhood daily, dressed in his jodhpurs and boots, etc. His sons, Art and Juannie, were our good friends also.
3. Also, the “Herreos” lived in the neighborhood, and the “Brannens” and the “Cargills” and the “Lovelaces” who played tennis in high school and college.
4. At the corner of Leopard and Peabody (prior to construction of I-37) was the Chrysler showroom for new cars.
5. Around the corner - just off Leopard was the “Pig Stand” which was built in the shape of a sitting pig and was a “drive in” for pork sandwiches, etc.
6. Not far from there was the “Toot and Tellum” and the “Honk and Holler” where you could drive up to the front of them and someone would come running out and ask you what you wanted – come back with your order of groceries – eggs, milk, bread, etc. – collect the money and go back in.
7. Next to the Chrysler Showroom was a “Piggly Wiggly” food market.

Mr. Lamont Taylor's Edited Oral History Transcript

Figure 24: Mr. Lamont Taylor



Photograph: Courtesy of the Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority.

Edited Transcript of Mr. Lamont Taylor's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: This is Lynn Smith interviewing Mr. Lamont Taylor for the Northside History Project, a component of the Harbor Bridge mitigation being prepared on behalf of the Texas Department of Transportation. The interview is taking place on November 18th, 2014 in Corpus Christi, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Taylor in order to learn more about his/her knowledge and personal experiences related to the Northside neighborhoods in Corpus Christi, Texas. First, please tell me your name and when and where you were born.

LAMONT TAYLOR: My name is Lamont Taylor. I was born in 1952 in Vicksburg, Mississippi.

LYNN SMITH: Alright. And then tell me about your arrival in Corpus Christi, Texas.

LAMONT TAYLOR: I came to Corpus Christi on a Greyhound bus in 1956. I came to the – I guess to the sovereign state of Texas, and it was memorable, because I remember I lost my marbles on the bus.

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: And they was rolling all over the Greyhound bus –

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- yes, and my brother and I were trying to pick up my marbles, you know, so, yes, I remember that, and they would tease me about that today, so that's one of those, you know, milestones that you have about Texas or coming to Texas, and that's how I got into Texas. I got here because my little brother was born, and my mom had remarried, and she sent for us from Mississippi down here in Corpus Christi. My uncle was in the Navy here, and so she came down here for – and she found work, and so – and also she found another husband, and, hey, he took us in, you know, so here we are.

LYNN SMITH: So you had been living with your grandmother?

LAMONT TAYLOR: My – my grandmother and grandfather in Mississippi, yes.

LYNN SMITH: So who all came on the bus with you?

LAMONT TAYLOR: My brothers, Arnold, Henry, and Olivia, my sister, Olivia. We all came, and Miss Inez brought us down, was my mom's friend, and my mom usually worked at the movie theater, and Miss Inez was her – one of her good friends, and she brought us down to Texas, and so for the joyous meeting of my little brother.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: Okay. So you went to school here. Tell us about the schools you went to.

LAMONT TAYLOR: Yes, I went to – well first I'll tell you about the kindergarten. At the kindergarten I – I was over at D.N. Leathers, D.N. Leathers is – you will see that is right across from T C Ayers now, same place, same off of Winnebago Street, and at D.N. Leathers they had a little kindergarten over there where they would drop my brother – my mother would drop my – myself and my brother, Arnold, off at the kindergarten, and I met a lot of people at the kindergarten, known those individuals for a while. It went from kindergarten at D.N. Leathers, to Washington – Booker T. Washington [Elementary] School, over up

the street on Sam Rankin, and it was first grade. I remember the teachers already, from Miss Greene, Miss Parchmond, Miss Branch, Miss Greene again, and Miss Robinson. They were my teachers at Washington from the first to the fourth grade, and I remember them in Washington where it had a huge playground, and across this playground was Holy Cross Catholic School, was right across the playground, so you had the good Catholic kids going over to Holy Cross while us pagans went to Booker T. Alright, so we – we always had fun with the Catholic school, because we would talk about them, and they would talk across the fence about us –

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- you know, so, it was a real good lively, a neighborhood, as a matter of fact, because it was all a neighborhood. That area was self-sustained from the doctors' offices, to the lawyers, to the dentists, to the grocery stores, and, you know, you had a whole community there. And the high school which was Coles was up the street, and in the mornings we would order our lunches, and they would come, they were fixing our lunches from Coles down to Washington to feed the kiddos from – from Washington, from Coles to Washington, so Coles had the junior high at that particular time, and – and Washington was the elementary, and so we would order our lunches, and then let's see I think in my second grade we built a cafeteria, which it still existed there over at – at Washington. We built a cafeteria over at Washington, and so we had our own cafeteria, so we made our own food over at – at Washington. So I remember those imprints, and next to us, the school, was the bus station; the city bus station city, transit was right next to – right next to the school, you know, so – and St. Paul Church was right across the street. And up the street was St. Matthew and St. John, you know, so – there, so you had the good Methodist, you had the Baptist, and you had the Catholics, you know, all in the – in – in the same area, and also you had A.M.E Church was up on Port [Avenue], you know – and so, you had – your variety of religious organizations and fraternal groups that were in the – in the – in the – in the cities, so that was elementary.

And then when I was in the fifth grade I finally moved from the projects, which is D.N. Leathers. We moved from D.N. Leathers to what they call the new projects. We moved over into Hillcrest, and so my fifth grade year and my sixth to eight grade year I went to Charles W. Crossley where I met a principal by the name of Mr. Gene Bryant. And my principal over at Washington was Homer Johnson, and the – the odd thing about that in – in – in Washington and Coles, as you know, all of those was all black, and when I was in fifth and sixth grade I was introduced to Hispanic culture as well as the Anglo culture at that particular time, so, hmm-mm, this is kind of new.

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: This – this is different, you know, I would – you know it. You – you've seen the Hispanic individuals next door to you, not next door, but all around your neighborhood in Hillcrest, so and that's a – we – it's not like it were – we were on an island, you know, but they were not in the projects, but when you moved to Hillcrest you had a mixture of cultures when you were moved right across Port, you had a mixture of cultures. And – and everybody asked if we get along, everybody got along, and no problems, you know, none what so ever. Unbeknownst to us, you know, we're kids, you know, playing, and you know, doing the kids thing from getting the peach trees to the Chinese palm trees to the Kumquat trees, you know, you had a whole variety of – of fruit out here that are on the trees, you know. Now you don't have that too much because of, I'm thinking, a whole lot of things, refineries, and a whole lot of other things that have – you don't have those things anymore. You don't have as many – you had oranges and tangerines 'cause in my backyard. We had oranges and tangerine trees that grew in abundance, you know, hey, you were outside and get some fresh orange juice if you want to, just

squeeze an orange, and we had lime trees, you know, so all of this was in Hillcrest. All – all of this was in the Hillcrest area, and – and not like you had the only tree. There were trees all around, you know, so there were trees all around, so everyone had some type of fruit tree in their – in their yard, you know, from banana trees, you know, they had a whole lot of fruit trees in – in -- in the area.

So there we went to Crossley, and that's when I learned, I guess in one of those milestones in life happen is when Kennedy was killed when I was over at – at Crossley, I remember that on the playground, remembering Kennedy was killed, and, you know, everyone, you know – I think – one of the girls would go – went – went home for lunch and she found out – this Hispanic girl went home for lunch and found out, and just came back and we all were on the playground, and people were crying, people were upset, you know, cause the president was –was assassinated. Here in Texas as a matter of --. Anyway, so that was one of those tragic – tragic deals that I remember in Crossley, but also the best part about that is that, hey, my introduction to music, was when the Crossley Minstrels were together. Mr. Bryant had a – had a – a group of individuals that played the ukulele, and we played – they had a bass drum, which was on a wash tub with a stick, and – and – it – and it made the base noise coming out of there, so that's when we learned to play bass, and also drums, and -- you know, the cymbals, the – what they call that with the brush, the drum, for the brush, the snare drum for – with the little brush on it, so that –

LYNN SMITH: Right

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- real neat, you know, so appreciation for music took off at that particular time, so I learned to play the ukulele, and I learned to play the drums at that particular time.

And from there we went to Crossley. I mean, we went to Driscoll Junior High, so seventh grade. So another introduction – it had more Hispanics and more Anglos over at – over at Driscoll as we went further up – up River Road, and it was a real –it was real interesting in – in a sense that a– but every summer, from, I'd say 1958, '59, '60, '61, all the way up to– the year of the Hemisfair.

LYNN SMITH: 1968

LAMONT TAYLOR: We would go to Mississippi. Every summer we would go to Mississippi to visit my grandparents.

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

LAMONT TAYLOR: We would go to Mississippi to visit my grandparents. Or, if we – would wonder – they were here in Texas at the time, during that time we would go to Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland. We were blessed that we could go and visit relatives. We were blessed. We would go to see them, that was a blessing, so I got a chance to see a lot of the United States that, I'd say, most people might hadn't the foggiest of, you know, I remember going to St. Louis, remember going to Chicago, remember going to Cleveland. As a matter of fact I was in Cleveland doing the Hough Riots. I was in Chicago doing the riot at the 1968 convention. I was – because we left the Hemisfair, we went to Chicago. I was in the Detroit Riot, you know, so I was coming back from Pablo Island in Detroit, and Pablo Park in Detroit. My aunt was working for Chrysler, and they had their picnic, and we'd come back from a nice day at the picnic, and, shoot, downtown was – it was going up in flames. These individuals were going crazy at that particular time. And also during that time, 1967, '68, there was some crazy times going on because of Martin was assassinated at the time also at the – in Memphis, so –

LYNN SMITH: Martin Luther King, Jr.?

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- yeah. Martin, yeah, was assassinated at that particular time, and also earlier there was some – they said – you had Huey P. Newton, and everybody wanting rights, and things in that nature, you – you know –

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- being at – a teenager you're trying to figure out, okay, what in the Sam Hill really is going on, so you had to reflect back on – okay, when I was in Mississippi during the summers, they had killed the three boys in Philadelphia, in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were – were slain in Mississippi at the time. Medgar was killed the – that's – the next summer. Medgar was killed, Medgar Evers was killed when I was in Mississippi during that particular time, you know, so several riots was – what's really going on, you know? What is really going on? So, and – and I alluded to as we talked earlier about being able to go to Woolworth, downtown Corpus Christi, and sit at the counter. In Mississippi, no way you could do that. As a matter of fact the oddest thing about this whole thing in Mississippi, for me, was that I was a kid, and we were going to the paper place, and we were in one line facing the door, and the other Anglo, white kids, were over in the other line, and the paper would come out the same door.

LYNN SMITH: So the newspaper?

LAMONT TAYLOR: The newspaper.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

LAMONT TAYLOR: The newspaper. We all were paperboys; alright?

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

LAMONT TAYLOR: Taking the paper, and, you know, throwing it up in the city of Vicksburg but, it's like, the paper would come out the same door, it's not one line, it was two lines. It was our line for us, and their line for them, and we were kids, and we were having rubber band wars, you know, we was playing –

LYNN SMITH: Yeah.

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- waiting on the paper. We was waiting on the paper to come out, you know, we didn't care about any of that stuff, but when I looked back retrospectively I see, oh, they were dividing us at that particular time when the newspaper would come out the door, you know, it was all black and white, and we read it. Everybody read the – the newspaper say, golly . But when you think about it, like I couldn't – you couldn't go downtown Vicksburg, or – or go any – to where my grandfather would catch a cab. He would go down here, go and get groceries, and then come back, you know, but nine times out of ten we were self-sustained because we had gardens and, you know, things -- and chickens, and things in that nature over in Mississippi, versus here in Corpus where you know you had indoor plumbing, and all of that good stuff for the – you guys had it made. And in the summers I had - - and one of my favorite jobs in the summer in Mississippi, I was – I guess cause I was the fourth kid, I was designated to empty the slop jars, and the slop jars is going out, taking the urine and whatever, and dumping it over into the – to the outhouse. So that was my job, collect them, and then go –.

LYNN SMITH: And those – are they the ones that were –

LAMONT TAYLOR: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: -- used during –

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- in the – in the evening –

LYNN SMITH: -- the evening?

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- yeah, at night.

LYNN SMITH: Yeah.

LAMONT TAYLOR: the night bags. Yeah, going to empty the night bags, so someone see you take that down to the – to the privy- - I guess cause I was the youngest they picked on me. No, but I was happy- - in Corpus we had an indoor toilet, right, but in Mississippi it was something different, you know, so – yeah, it's those type of deal, but then I learned, you know, people – people in Victoria, they had them too. No.

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: You know, they had them also, but hey, I'm thinking, since I was – rural was rural, and I – I learned since then that, you know, that was just a way of life, but the distinction – you know, they had indoor toilets here in Corpus Christi, versus in Mississippi that you didn't, and things that I could do in Texas that I couldn't do overtly in – in – in Mississippi, that I – I could do and I couldn't do, there was some things you could do and you – things you couldn't.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

LAMONT TAYLOR: So in high school, at Miller, I went the summer of sixty-eight, September, '68, I was in Roy Miller High School. Yeah. That was some fun times. I had to spend the summer in Detroit, and Cleveland, and Niagara Falls. We went all over the East and West Coast – well East Coast, and – so I seen a whole lot of the country, and the country was changing. Seen a whole lot of the country, and the country was changing, and I come back to Corpus, and low and behold, they having – when I go to homeroom, I think we went to homeroom every day, and we had to fill out the same dumb papers about race, sex, and how many people in your household and the whole nine yards - this wasn't even a census, you know, but they're trying to figure out—basically they were fighting the lawsuit, and they're using the statistics that we had in order to find out whether or not we're going to get busing, and eventually they open up Foy Moody, a new school. They opened up Moody High School while I was over at Miller. So I think in 1972 – not '72, probably '70, I'm thinking they opened up Moody. I'm thinking they opened up Moody in '70, and that was Corpus Christi, so knew that the Garcia [Hector P. Garza– Repeal of the poll tax] case was going on, and I found out about LULAC [League of United Latin American Citizens] and the, [American] G.I. Forum, you know. So then I went to – went to the Huston-Tillotson college then when I tried to get into the Air Force, didn't make it there, so –.

While I was at Miller, I forgot this counselor's name, but she told me that I – I should not think about going to college. I should go to a vocational school, and school was easy, you know, for me it was – cause, like I said, my grandmother was in Mississippi, and she was a professor at Alcorn State University, Go

Braves!, and we had awesome times in – in Mississippi. I would – we had swimming pools. I mean, you all didn't have that here in Corpus Christi. We had Olympic-size swimming pools, alright, and we had three level diving boards, and the whole nine yards, so it was, ooh wee, Olympic-size swimming pool. I mean they spent some money, down there. That was our pool right - for black folk. A nice pool, it was a nice pool. I – I look at it today and it rivals T. C. Ayers pool that we have over here at T. C. Ayers, with much – because we have three level diving boards, you had a sun deck, you had the whole nine yards that you could do over there. They spent some money down there. I don't know what separate but equal, but I – I hate to see theirs, if ours was that good, I – I hated to see theirs, but it was a nice pool, and – and that's where I learned to swim, so every summer I would go swimming, you know, in – in Mississippi, you know, we'd go and do a whole lot of spelunking, as you know, Vicksburg was where the Civil War from March 23rd until July 4th. That's when the siege of Vicksburg lasted that long, you know, so hey. It was one of those major turning points, that was the major turning point of the South when Vicksburg fell, but I had found a cannon ball. I had found arrowheads. I would find a whole lot of Civil War artifacts over in Mississippi, while I was a kid in Mississippi. We would be out in the fields playing, and, you know, finding things out in the woods, and they'd – I remember Miss Love today, she would say, "Y'all come on back here. They found those three boys [Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner], so you y'all come back and get close to the house." You know, so - - what three boys, and then you'd seen them on the news where, golly, look like the FBI – everybody was out there looking in the swamp area for these – for these men, and they found that old station wagon– that they were in. I remember coming out in the television. I remember all of this stuff, you know, gee.

So in – indelible print in my life, going into civil – civil rights, alright, so I kept all of that. I remember talking to a guy in Mississippi during the summer. I was with my brothers and sister could always – could go to the cotton field to chop cotton. We were never there long enough to pick cotton, so I wanted to go. I was a kid, and I wanted to go, and – anyway, they let me go for a week, and actually, not for me.

LYNN SMITH: It cured your curiosity about that I'm sure.

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: Yeah, I didn't want to go. I didn't want to go, no, but anyway I had some good conversation with – with the older guys, because they were getting ready to go to college, or they were talking about the freedom ride, they were talking about a whole lot of things, you know, that – you know, just peeked my curiosity, and that – and I was in my grandmother's house, and she had oodles and oodles of books, so I – am curious enough to read, so I read a lot at that particular time, and found out a lot about a lot of things then. They wouldn't teach me over here in Corpus Christi, you know, they didn't teach me in the sovereign state of Texas, and – and that was part of the history as a matter of fact, but you know you learn about a whole lot of this stuff by simply getting out of – of the state. And didn't – didn't know I had it so good in both worlds. I didn't know I had it so good in both worlds, and eventually when Brown v. Board [of Education] and all of that stuff, and – and they say Civil Rights Act was 1963, '64, all of that stuff was going on, you know, I'm in Mississippi or in Texas going to school, you know, and - - ignorance is bliss.

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: Not – not knowing any of this until you look retrospectively, and oh golly, all of this stuff is taking place, and why are these individuals doing this, and why are they burning Detroit, why are they fighting over in Cleveland, why are they doing this, you know, and when I get to college I read about Sweatt versus Painter, I read about, you know – wait a minute, this is, you know, I – I read about

Emmett Till, I read about a whole lot of this stuff, and – and – a good thing about Huston-Tillotson College. And that's when I got to –

LYNN SMITH: So –

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- eighteen –

LYNN SMITH: -- so that's where –

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- and from Miller –

LYNN SMITH: -- you went from Miller –

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- to Huston –

LYNN SMITH: -- to Huston-Tillotson?

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- Tillotson. Right, exactly.

LYNN SMITH: In – in Austin, Texas?

LAMONT TAYLOR: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And – but that was after you were a lifeguard; right?

LAMONT TAYLOR: Oh yeah, the lifeguard at T. C. Ayers Pool, in – the T. C. Ayers swimming pool in 1968. When I didn't – after – after I came back in 1969 the summer of '69, I didn't go anywhere. Summer of 1970, I didn't go anywhere for the summer. I stayed here. We opened up the pool, and I had to stay here in '69, and '70, and the summer of '71 I tried getting into the Air Force, alright, but the two years we opened up that pool, or they opened up that pool for us at T. C. Ayers, alright - - as a matter of fact on our side, because we always as a kid we would go down to H.E.B. Pool because we could always swim in the H.E.B. Pool, they would let us in the H.E.B. Pool and swim, so, in essence swimming, water sports, that's always been a part of my background. I was on the swim team in Miller as a matter of fact. You can look in the manual and you'll see myself and Verlum Fry [sp] and Raymond Cox, Judge Cox' son - - we're on the – we're on the on the swim team as a matter of fact, the three of us over at Miller. We were over at Miller swimming so I had an opportunity to – to open up the pool. My brother, Arnold, was the manager of that pool, and as a matter of fact my brother, Arnold, was the first neighborhood relations guy here in the city for the police department as a matter of fact, so we tried to heal wounds and things in that nature. When – when the – when the Northside got – got hot, you know, so I tried to heal the wounds.

LYNN SMITH: So let me go back just a little bit.

LAMONT TAYLOR: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: When – when your guidance counselor tried to steer you towards vocational education versus college education –

LAMONT TAYLOR: [Agreeing]

Edited Transcript of Mr. Lamont Taylor's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LYNN SMITH: -- I'd -- I think that you explained to me earlier that if that guidance counselor looked at your transcript, there would be nothing in your transcript that indicated that you had any interest in vocational --?

LAMONT TAYLOR: Yeah, right. If -- if -- if they had been -- if they had been doing their job, alright, you know, and not -- and -- and, you know, I'm not going to go on a -- on a prove it pole, but I should, if -- If my friend Barbara and Phyllis -- if they were seventeen and eighteen in the class of 600. And, they telling her that she needs to go -- shouldn't be going -- they should go to Del Mar, alright. Something wrong with that picture, you know, and I -- and -- and I know another friend of mine, her name was Sissy, she was number five in the class -- wait a minute, time out, so what -- what's really going on, you know, but I'm not going to jump to any conclusion, but I'm going to let you all figure that it's just a coincidence, that's -- I thought it's a coincidence. [Whispers] I being facetious.
[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: An -- an -- an interesting point --

LAMONT TAYLOR: Yeah.

LYNN SMITH: -- that we shall consider.

LAMONT TAYLOR: I am being facetious.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

LAMONT TAYLOR: Okay. So -- so that -- that was, you know, I knew she would -- she had to be crazy, because I had to go back and deal with Olivia Smith, who was the -- who was - - instructor at the college university, and -- and low and -- low and behold, I knew the four chambers of the heart before -- at age ten and eleven, I knew the left and right ventricle of the arteries, and come from the heart, the chambers of the heart, and where the blood flow, and blood returning, and dealing with the chambers of the heart at age ten, and you can't tell me that an understanding and can write this stuff out, that I can't go to college? I had to say oh, mama, I -- I think Miss told me I couldn't go to college, so I -- I -- I -- I guess I'll just go and try to learn how to -- learn how to be an auto mechanic.
[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: I hadn't touched a wrench in my life, you know?

LYNN SMITH: And what did your mother say to that?

LAMONT TAYLOR: No, I -- I -- no, I wasn't going to --

LYNN SMITH: You didn't --

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- I wasn't going to --

LYNN SMITH: - - you didn't --?

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- take that home --

LYNN SMITH: Oh, I see.

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- to her. Hey, I – I – I was making B's, so ain't no use me –

LYNN SMITH: I see.

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- worrying about telling her I can't go to college -- you know.

LYNN SMITH: So there was no confusion in your mind about that?

LAMONT TAYLOR: No.

LYNN SMITH: You just knew that that was --?

LAMONT TAYLOR: That man was – that lady was absolutely crazy –

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- you know, no and or buts about it. And then, low and behold, I get a what, I get a scholarship to go to Tulane?

LYNN SMITH: Right.

LAMONT TAYLOR: Come on, and I turned it down, alright, give me a break.

LYNN SMITH: So you – so you ended up at Huston-Tillotson [University]?

LAMONT TAYLOR: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: And your major?

LAMONT TAYLOR: Was political science and history, yes political science and history. I had a double major, political science and history, and I had minor in English literature. Oh, The Odes to a Lark.

[Laughter]

LYNN SMITH: And then you went – and you got your master's at Trinity University in San Antonio?

LAMONT TAYLOR: That's correct, and studying - - Urban Studies, how to build cities I say Banfield, *The Unheavenly City* and *The Unheavenly City Revisited*, yes.

LYNN SMITH: And, then your master's thesis?

LAMONT TAYLOR: It was about affirmative action, a case study in Corpus Christi, Texas. And so I came back and studied the history of affirmative action in the city of Corpus Christi where it went back to the first Hispanic that was in our government here in Corpus Christi, and the first African American, and that was Ernest Briones and Maurice Colvin, and they were the first higher level employees for the city of Corpus Christi were Ernest Briones and Maurice Colvin. And, Ernest became Deputy City Manager, and Maurice would – became the Director of Human Relations in the city of Corpus Christi, before that when

they terminated their employment here in the city of Corpus Christi, so – but after then obviously, I came about, and I was a planner with the transit system when I came back from grad school. But I had to do the work to find out who laid the – who laid the course of work for us here in Corpus Christi, and got a chance to revisit my roots cause I never did leave out of this – I never did leave out of this particular area. I stayed there from 1956 until I left in – in 1971, and then when I came back here in 1975 – '76. I stayed until – I moved back to Hillcrest, and so I've been there since '76, so I've been there a long time, alright? I've been in Hillcrest for like – even though I had an opportunity to go from Chicago Transit to Philadelphia, and on the West Coast. My life still stayed in Corpus Christi, because, hey, it's a great place to raise a family. You can leave your doors unlocked, alright? You could do a whole lot of things here in Corpus Christi. I'd much rather be here and enjoying the ambiance of Corpus Christi. Here it's going to be 70 degrees this week, and they're freezing up North, yeah, so hey, I enjoy it. I enjoy Corpus Christi, and enjoy the citizenry of Corpus Christi, and a nice place, a really nice place. As – as all places I learned in urban studies you have some – it – it's – you have good people and you have bad people, alright, and then you have individuals who have objectives that are not for the betterment of all of the citizenry in Corpus Christi as you do in all places, but someone has to tell the king that he has on no clothes.

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: Alright? And thus that's where we are today, alright? To tell the king that he doesn't have on any clothes in the sense that it's ok. This is my theory, and it's been urban studies, this is my theory, as you know in fact the – the highway system in America came in Corpus Christi, and we got 37 [Interstate Highway 37]. And in 37 it took a lot of old Corpus Christi where African Americans resided, and thus, here we go from when they built the Harbor Bridge over, and where they is now. Down in that particular area my history tells me that, not only Zachery Taylor ships came here, but the Buffalo soldiers came here a noted African American group, and they came here, and they bivouacked here right down where the Harbor Bridge, and with Sea District and all of that stuff is right about now, you know, that's where they were, and the black community was there, they called it the Old Line, alright, before the bridge came out and wiped all of that out, it tore neighborhoods together, the present Harbor Bridge came in, and – and separated the neighborhoods from Leopard Street. If you look at going to Leopard Street from Winnebago Street you'll see a big freeway.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

LAMONT TAYLOR: It's - - but those neighborhoods that were there where that by that freeway came in. And, here we go, some fifty years later we get another bridge project.

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: And – and this bridge is going to impact this particular city it'll cut it off again, the neighborhood again, and it's important to know that, hey, Kilroy was here in – in essence. The African American community have been here for a while, alright, and so my hope in this particular project is to make sure that there's some note being that – that they were in there, is – there was a thriving African American community in census tracks four and five from I'd say, oh - - 1945, up until '71, '72, and I'd say the last 600 individuals – you know you – if you have 600 in a graduating class at Roy Miller High School, not necessarily the other high school, that means there's a lot of people over here, and fortunately – unfortunately when they took away the projects, and -- the new projects, they took away the new projects, and then they start encroaching from the refinery, from the – from the west, and on the east they shut down Washington School, and --.

LYNN SMITH: Booker T. Washington?

LAMONT TAYLOR: Booker T. Washington School. They shut down Coles. They had to fight to get that reopened. They shut down Crossley Elementary, so in essence you – you kill the schools and the parks from an urban studies from a planners' aspect, you've killing the neighborhood. You are killing a neighborhood, and that's something that need to be addressed, some type of area where you need to – and I'm for development. I'm for progress. Don't get me wrong, because we need to remember the past in need—at the wall of Auschwitz, Auschwitz says those who fail to remember the past are doomed to repeat it, and that's – hey, so start wiping out a whole lot of things and see what happened, you're going to run across a whole different scenario than it was in Auschwitz, Germany. So you remember those individuals, those Jews that were killed over – over in Auschwitz, those factories, and they were trying to get rid of the path, they got rid of a whole lot of German towns that we don't even know about. We don't even know about it if you go to the Holocaust Museum you will see a whole lot of towns that just got wiped off of the map.

LYNN SMITH: Right.

LAMONT TAYLOR: It wiped off the map. And so we coming back to Corpus Christi, and I do not want this neighborhood to be wiped off of the map, alright, some type of – this project is – oral history project is excellent for that – an excellent start, so in essence – and with the help of TxDOT, the see that, hey, you – you do revitalize, rejuvenate uh huh - they say - hmm - reconcile communities back together, because right now what's going to happen is going to be a 200-foot high bridge, a height barrier, that comes between the neighborhood, alright, from the Northside of what Hillcrest and going over to Washington and Coles, it's going to – the height is going to be, and people don't realize, that's a very high bridge. Now it's a 135-foot, and you're going to have 240-foot coming across -- directly across T. C. Ayers Park. Yeah, that's going to be an eye opening experience, so certain things have to go.

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- I – the humor that -- I got to have humor in – when you're dealing with –

LYNN SMITH: Right.

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- this.

LYNN SMITH: So – so you've been to the meetings? You understand what the project is about–

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- and – and what the process – and how the process is –

LYNN SMITH: Right.

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- going to go. Exactly. And – and I understand this is, like I said, an excellent start on—on TxDOT part, but more has to be done, you know, this is – I hope they don't think that this is going to be suffice, and this is going to be it, and – see ya, thank you very much – no, nah.

[Laughter]

Edited Transcript of Mr. Lamont Taylor's Oral History Interview conducted by C. Lynn Smith

LAMONT TAYLOR: I – I hope they know that -- I hope they know there is more work to be done, alright, so –

LYNN SMITH: [Inaudible].

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- hope to be working with you more in the future on – on this project, because after we do this, what's the implementation of this? Where are you going to put it? Okay. Who's going to know about it? Yeah, okay, we have it in archives over here, and we have an archive room, but – hey, wait a minute, it's just like a plan for a planner, and you put it on the shelf. We have to bring this stuff to life, alright? If you're going to the Holocaust Museum in D.C., they bring that to life. So I want this in a museum somewhere in Corpus Christi on the Northside that bring this to life, and hey, the central library is cool, but I don't think it's going to be that cool, alright, so over there where the action take place, and I think you've taken photos of every – and -- there – there were four doctors – I was telling you that there were Dr. Branch, Dr. Brownlow, Dr. Williams, you had Dr.- – a Dr. Carline in and you had -- like - they had a lot of nurses that – that had been through NAACP just the other night I had a program -- no, Black Chamber had a – had a program that recognize a lot of the nurses that were here, that were instrumental in this particular neighborhood, so in essence there's a lot of work that has been done – going on, and I think if you can get with some of them -

LYNN SMITH: Uh-huh.

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- regarding the – the stuff that Miss Bowman -- had

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

LAMONT TAYLOR: But Ms. Bowman had – she had a lot of artifacts –

LYNN SMITH: Yes.

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- Miss Pleasant had a lot of artifacts regarding Corpus Christi. My in-laws had a – a lot of artifacts that – that the city was – was – a guy came in – they were born in 1910 and 1909, and they came here in the 1930s, and they've been here -- when I married their daughter. I – I they – they were here then, so they had several pressing and laundry, various other businesses that they had over on the old line, and so in essence brought the '50s through this particular area, and the '60s through this area. So it's a lot of history here, and I think, what you need to know, is that you keep pressing, and you'll -- alright, if I could help you in any other way let me know.

LYNN SMITH: Thank you so much. But, one more thing, so that we – we realized that we needed to ask you about –

LAMONT TAYLOR: [Agreeing]

LYNN SMITH: -- was to -- for you to tell us a little bit about your high school days, what was here, what do you remember, what do you remember doing, where you do you remember going.

LAMONT TAYLOR: Yes. High school, great – great – great times. Okay. I remember in Corpus Christi high school – if I wasn't playing football I was doing concessions, alright? Concessions in Corpus Christi, that Ice Capades, and all of that stuff would come to the city, but what we would do during football season, after football season or during football season we'd go to Bill's Barbecue Pit. Hey man, you –

you couldn't do anything but going after a football game, going to Bill's and there'd be lines of individuals, and then we'd go down to T. C. Ayers, and that was sock hops, and then it was over to New Addition. We would go to New Addition, and you would have sock – sock hops, you know, so those were the individuals – another individuals, a group of – where the Black Chamber [of Commerce] started, was a New Addition and kitchen in that area in Corpus Christi, and Mr. Bolden, Mr. Charles Bolden and Mrs. Bolden – Mr. Bolden ran the T. C. Ayers Center here down – down on Winnebago, and his wife ran the New Addition Center for African Americans over in that area that's over by west so – so - New Addition, it's call a New Addition, and – Molina area, and so – and the West Haven – West Haven area over in there - - you had in essence you'd have pockets of African Americans, because African Americans went to Moody also because when they split us up at Greenwood Park, there was a lot of African Americans over in the Greenwood Park area versus – and we would go across town, across town we'd come up Port [Avenue] and go up Greenwood [Drive], alright? Come up Port and –

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- go up Greenwood. The businesses that we had – you had over on The Cut you would have what they called The Cut, you would have the Regale, Down Beat, Juardines, you would have the pool hall, you would have the Cotton Club, you would have - - Harlem Theater, you would have Big Brother Garza, and – and Little Brother Garza, little meat stores and what have – where you get some food and what have you, so and that's, like I said, Hispanic community was always inside the black community, and we were doing business, and it was real, you had a good time, cause –

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: --You know, you would walk through the projects, and people galore, you know, you had people. And - - got 600 individuals, one graduating class, you know, that was class after class after class - - Miller and Coles were all – were state champions the same year. That's how many athletes that were here. We had Roy Hicks, you had Bobby Smith, you had Olympic caliber individuals here in this city.

LYNN SMITH: How did that –

LAMONT TAYLOR: They're doing a whole lot.

LYNN SMITH: -- work that they were a state championships in the in the same year?

LAMONT TAYLOR: Because of the black school, and there was a – a mixed school, alright?

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

LAMONT TAYLOR: That's how.

LYNN SMITH: Okay.

LAMONT TAYLOR: There was a black school –.

LYNN SMITH: There was a separate category?

LAMONT TAYLOR: Thank you very much. Thank you very much. And W. B. Ray was the white school, alright, over there at - - whites and Hispanics went over to W. B. Ray, but whites, Hispanics, and black went to Miller, okay. That was the Perez brothers are Inez Perez he was a quarterback at Miller during the 1960s with Bobby Smith and Johnny Rolland, and those guys, alright. Alright, when I was in high school we would go up to Victoria, we played Victoria-Stroman, Victoria High, so, in essence, the competition, it was here in Corpus Christi in this south surrounding area, you had a lot of great athletes, you know, you had a lot of great – individuals went to college, went to pro from this little Corpus Christi, you know, we had all – little state track meet that would come down and Roy Hicks, again, he won the hurdles, you had Lewis Marshall, he was a baseball player, you had – golly, the Hines brothers, you had a lot of – Levi Johnson, Ernest Price, you had a lot of these individuals coming out of here playing football, basketball, baseball, you know, running track, you know. I think – they say that Roy Hicks was two tenths of a second from being the fastest man in the world at that particular – two tenths of a second, right here in Corpus Christi, yeah, so hey, you had a lot of great - -I'll tell you another individual if you want to get the sports, there's a – a guy who worked with San Antonio, went to Miller, his name is Flores, and he was a sports guy here, but he worked at San Antonio Express, and he went to Miller with us, and he kept all of those stats that you can get, and he knew everybody in the neighborhood, because he was from the neighborhood –

LYNN SMITH: uh-huh.

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- and there was a lot of individuals – like you had grocery stores Callahan's, you had several stuff, like I said, we were self-contained, alright, we was self-contained, you know. The special stuff you go downtown, and go to the Lichtenstein's, and I think – my wife said it was -- golly, not Casual Corner but it was something similar to Casual Corner downtown, that they had downtown next to Lichtenstein's, and - - the dress stop shops or –

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- what have you, so –

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- but she – she – she knew all of that – that stuff, and they would tell me the history of that, so that – that's – and when you – and I get excited about that, because yeah, we had fun in Corpus Christi. It was a fun place to be, and - - as I said, a nice place to raise your family, you know oh wee - - from – from – in the neighborhood to the surrounding community, you know, from the churches, and you could do a lot of things through St. John, St. Matthew, Holy Cross you could do a whole lot of things with those groups coming together, St. Paul, and they would have picnics, and everybody would come in and – and put their stuff together, and you know, you have a whole – it was a community, you know, it's a community from the Knights of Saint Peter Claver [ladies auxiliary at Holy Cross Catholic Church] to, you know, people from San Antonio that – that came to Coles, because they couldn't – or Victoria, they would come to Coles High School because there wasn't another black high school around. They would come to Coles. That's how Coles came, they got people from Robstown, even as far as San Antonio, Victoria, they would come - - even though Victoria had some high schools over there, but nine times out of ten a lot of people would come to Coles High School. As a matter of fact, Solomon Coles

LYNN SMITH: Solomon M. Coles.

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- Solomon Coles was the -- formed the TEA, Texas Education Association, look it up, alright, things that you guys don't know that happen from -- from -- he came, he was a congregational minister, alright, came from Yale degree, you know --

LYNN SMITH: Right.

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- come from back East, and he started the TEA, and we all don't understand how -- we just had a -- a plethora of individual's talent that was here in this community. There's a lot of individuals that had Harvard, and Howard, and Columbia educations that came to Corpus Christi to teach in the African American community. There's a lot of those individuals there, and that's why I would say we had -- we had a pretty good class, the 1970-71, and you know, I don't know about other individuals, but other than that --

[Laughter]

LAMONT TAYLOR: But -- but we had pretty good classes I -- I would say, and you had the Catholic school, my wife went to Incarnate Word when it was an all girls' school back in -- in the 1950s -- in the -- in this place, but she's ten years older than me, so she was in the 1960s, she graduated in 1962 I believe from Incarnate Word. So, it was like, hey, just think about all of the education that these individuals had at this particular area, and Del Mar College was a good school --

LYNN SMITH: [Agreeing]

LAMONT TAYLOR: -- real good -- a good school, a good school.

LAMONT TAYLOR: Yes.

LYNN SMITH: And so thank you again.

LAMONT TAYLOR: Thank you. Thank you for -- for the opportunity. Thank you for the opportunity.

[End of Audio Recording for Lynn Smith -- Lamont Taylor -- 11-18-2014]

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