

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewees: **Shirley Ruth Borden Renfrow &  
Al Renfrow, Junior**

Interview Date: 07/06/2016

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

Location: Knights of Columbus Hall in Needville, Texas

15 Pages



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*Transcript*

GOODSILL: Today we want to talk about Missouri City High School. Did you both go there?

RENFROW, AL: Yes.

GOODSILL: Please start by telling me your dates of birth.

RENFROW, A: I was born on November 4, 1934.

RENFROW, S: I was born on February 6, 1936.

GOODSILL: Have both of your families lived in Fort Bend County a long time?

RENFROW, A: Absolutely. My father, Alford Renfrow, Senior, owned a grocery store in Houston and I went to school for the first six grades in Houston. My paternal grandfather, Clyde Burns Renfrow, lived in Fresno and built a church, a cotton gin and a general store. He wanted to raise cattle but Fresno was a cotton town, so he was out there raising cattle and sugar cane.

We moved to Fresno when I was twelve years old. At that time, Missouri City and Sugar Land were rivals and we were bused to Sugar Land for the sixth grade. Because I was in high sixth grade in Houston, they asked my dad if he wanted me to be in the seventh grade or in the sixth grade. He said to put me in sixth grade. So, I started in Sugar Land in the sixth grade. The next year, they transferred Sugar Land to Missouri City and I came to Missouri City in the seventh grade.

RENFROW, S: I grew up in the Houston Heights. My dad worked for my maternal grandfather, who had a number of grocery stores and meat companies in the Houston area. His name was Claude Joseph Borden. The name was originally Bordelon but when he married my mother, too many salesmen got the name wrong so they went to court and changed the name to Borden. Bordelon is a Cajun French name. He was one of nine children.

GOODSILL: How did you get to Fort Bend County?

RENFROW, S: My grandfather, Roland Mason, had come here as a teenager with his brother, on a ship by themselves from Kidderminster, England. They settled in Texas. He liked animals including cattle, and in time, he developed the Houston Cattle Company, which was a slaughterhouse on Highway 90. It was located in the place where Tang City Mall was recently located. He lived there and my maternal grandmother lived in Houston. She had a long-term illness. He lived out there most of the time. We were in The Heights during the war. My mom and dad had a grocery store and gas station at the corner of Yale and 19th Street. At some point, my grandfather wanted my dad to come work for him. That's when we moved from The Heights to Missouri City. I was in the 5th grade at the time; 1947.

GOODSILL: Where did you go to school?

RENFROW, S: Annie Wilcox Elementary School in Missouri City. There was an elementary school, middle school-high school building and then the gym. These three buildings were on Louisiana Street. Our house was about two blocks from the school, so I had to walk to school. It wasn't that far to walk. Al was bused to school from Fresno because it was too far to walk.

GOODSILL: Tell me what the school was like.

RENFROW, S: The building where the elementary was had five classrooms – one for each grade, 1st through 5th. My first teacher was Ethel Frome'. One thing I remember about her was that we had a big metal box where we raised silkworms using mulberry leaves. They would make the cocoons and she taught us a lot about that. I remember there was a potbellied stove in the corner of the room and she would put trays on the top of the stove with some sort of jelly in it where she would make her duplication copies to hand out.

I remember the boys in the class had a fountain pen repair business. There were no ballpoint pens then. Mary True Myatt Whichard was one of the people in my class. There were nine of us in the class. Four girls; Mary True, Joanne, me and Sue Alston. We hung around together. I lived right by the Holy Family Church. They recently tore down a 3-car garage that my dad built while we were living there.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Sue Brinkman Alston interview on this website at <http://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=30520>

That was my first year at Missouri City. I think one of the most traumatic things that happened to me that year was an experience with another girl. We had recess and there were chinning bars, swings, and seesaws outside. I was hanging by my knees on this chinning bar and this one girl wanted me to get down because she wanted to get on the chinning bar. I wouldn't get down and she had a sucker that she threw at me.

When she did, I grabbed at her and caught her skirt. She jerked back and it ripped her skirt off. I'm the new kid on the block! Of course, everybody sided with her. After recess, I remember I wouldn't go back into the classroom because everybody was in the restroom, taking care of Barbara and I was the bad kid! Nanette Robinson, who was the 1st grade teacher came out and comforted me. So, I eventually went back in, but that was one of the traumatic things to happen to me as the new kid.

GOODSILL: How about you, Al? What do you remember about first going to the Missouri City school?

RENFROW, A: My 7th grade homeroom teacher was Fern Stallings. She lived across the street from the school. One October, she and her husband were putting a new roof on their house and they had kegs of nails on the roof. As a Halloween prank we went over there and took the nails down and messed the place up. After we left there, we put Bill Scanlin's Model A Ford on the gym steps. There were about nine of us and we lifted that car up. It didn't weigh too much.

GOODSILL: You all must have felt SO clever!

RENFROW, A: We did! (laughter) There were five of us who were in school together all through junior and senior high: Louis Rychlik, Bobby Williams, Glenn Jochech, Alfred Jochech, and Marshall Whichard. Glenn was our quarterback. Louis Rychlik had so much memorabilia. His wife is still alive and she might still have that. He had newspaper clippings. When we were freshmen, Coach Wade came to us and said, "Look, we don't have enough members to play 11-man football, so we would like to have you freshman suit up for the senior game." So there we were with Butch Whiten, Kenneth Whiten, Bennie Jordy and Donald Jordy – all so much older and two feet taller than I am.

I'm sitting there during the game, with my helmet on the side watching, and the coach says, "Renfrow, get out there." I'm thinking, "And do what?" He said, "Go help Tony Leo off the field. He's injured." That was another embarrassing moment for me.

GOODSILL: You mean because you weren't being called to play?

RENFROW, A: Yes, because I was being called to help get him off the field! I didn't know the plays; I didn't know anything. We were just suited up.

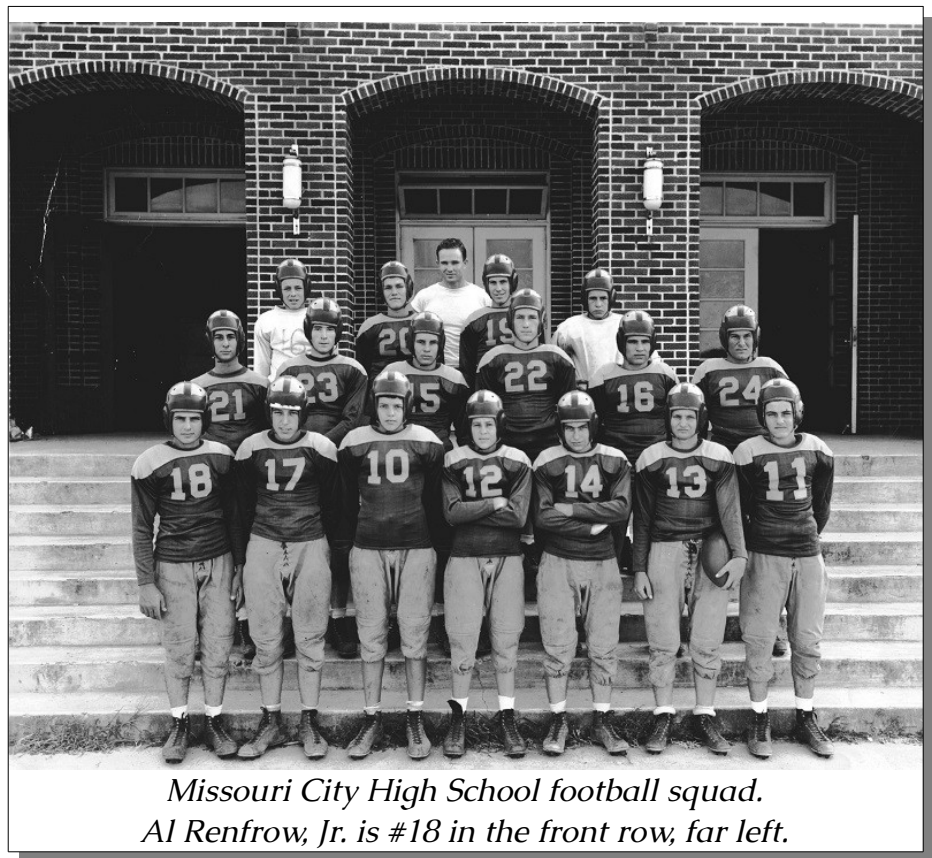
GOODSILL: Warm bodies! Well, he used you for the right thing then, didn't he?

RENFROW, A: I guess so! (laughter) Another football experience I had was when I was a sophomore. Coach Steinman, who was the coach at that time, came to the team and said, "Y'all are looking SO bad, I'm going to sit in the stadium and let Lawrence Elkins coach y'all." We said, "Okay." The Chronicle had said Sweeney was going to beat us to death. We beat Sweeney 66 – 0! Bobby Williams scored 5 touchdowns. That's one of my most memorable memories.

GOODSILL: Tell me about Coach Lawrence Elkins.

RENFROW, A: He was my basketball coach. They named Elkins High School after him. I'm in that picture – I'm No. 18. Bobby Davis is there, Bobby Williams is there.

GOODSILL: This picture belongs to Lee Elkins. She gave me a lot of pictures and I'm going to send this one to you so you can tell me who all the people are.



*Missouri City High School football squad.  
Al Renfrow, Jr. is #18 in the front row, far left.*



RENFROW, A: We had a ceremony for Coach Elkins at the school and in the foyer of the gym is a copy of this picture. So many memories.



*Missouri City High School champion basketball team. Coach Lawrence Elkins at left, #19 Andrew George, #16 Bobby Rychlik, #12 Donald Jordy, #14 Donald Cothern, #15 Eugene Dinges, #17, Glenn Jochech, #21 Bobby Williams, #20, Bobby Davis, #18, Al Renfrow, Jr. #13, Charles Court. –courtesy <http://wateringholdclubhouse.blogspot.com/>*

I was an Ag student, so I was in the FFA (Future Farmers of America). But I was also the FHA beau that year. There were only 32 people in my graduating class and Bobby Williams got most of the votes for everything – Most Handsome, Most Athletic!

GOODSILL: Shirley, were you involved with sports or academics?

RENFROW, S: I played volleyball and I was in FHA (Future Homemakers of America). I was on the Yearbook staff.

GOODSILL: Are you good at crafts and sewing because of your FHA experience?

RENFROW, S: Yes. I used to make all of my clothes, but my hands don't work so well any more.

GOODSILL: Were there any academic competitions? Any spelling competitions or math or things like that, involving other schools?

RENFROW, S: We had National Honor Society. I don't remember any academic competitions. It was mostly sports competitions.

RENFROW, A: Except for the band. We did have band competitions. I played clarinet in band. In fact, my mother insisted I play the clarinet. So, my dad went out and bought my brother and me a clarinet. We were in Leon Scarcella's class. I could play *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* and something else, but that was about it. When we had a contest, he'd tell me to mouth it. But I did make the All-District football team in my sophomore year.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Lee Elkins LeGrand interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytx.gov/home/showdocument?id=4251>

RENFROW, S: My musical talents were terrible. My best friend, Sally, and I both took piano lessons from Leonard's father, Leon. I would make Sally play first because I couldn't read the music, but I could play by ear.

RENFROW, A: In my junior year, I went to Colorado to a football camp to work out in preparation for my senior year. We went mountain climbing and I fatigued myself. There was a girls' camp there, so we partied all night and hiked all day. When I came home, I contracted polio. I had three schools in Texas offer football scholarships to me but when I came down with polio, the doctor told me I could never play football again. I lost my deltoid muscle. I talked to Coach Wade and said, "Coach, I'm going to play football. I'm going to beat this thing." I had to go to Methodist Hospital and have treatments on my arm. I went to Gateway swimming pool in Houston every day from September to October to build up my arm so I could play football. I then contracted pneumonia and that put me in the hospital and I lost everything I had gained. So, the doctor said I would NOT play football.

RENFROW, S: You went to the coach and said, "I'm ready to play."

RENFROW, A: He said, "Bring me a letter from your doctor."

GOODSILL: That must have broken your heart!

RENFROW, A: It did. Football was my life. I excelled in it. I had two brothers who went to Missouri City and they both excelled in football, too. I wanted the doctor to put a pulley in my hospital room so I could exercise my arm. He said, "No way I can do that! At this stage in your life, you are so depressed that if I put a rope in your room, you'll hang yourself." I said, "No way I would do that." The doctor wouldn't give me permission to play and Coach Wade said no. But he made me an honorary captain of the football team.

GOODSILL: At least you were part of the team.

RENFROW, A: Yes. We played Deer Park one night. Marshall Whichard was on the team and they had a guy on their team called Russell Moak. He was about the same size as Marshall and they both played fullback. They beat us 34-3 or something like that. Have you heard about the donkey basketball game they played in the gym?

GOODSILL: I don't even know what that is!

RENFROW, S: They ride donkeys in the gym.

GOODSILL: On that hardwood floor?

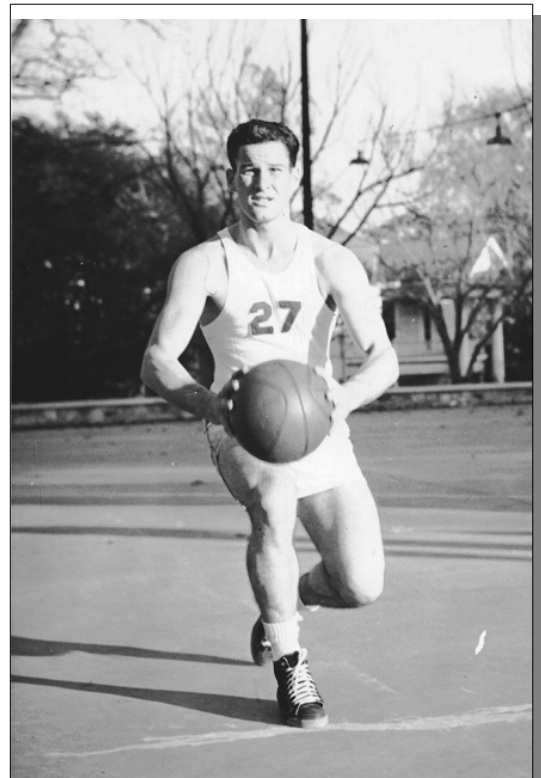
RENFROW, A: They had special shoes on the donkeys.

GOODSILL: Was it fun?

RENFROW, A: We didn't play; we watched it. It was fun. Lawrence Elkins played in it. It was Jim Jones and Coach Elkins. Missouri City people played somebody like the Harlem Globetrotters play a team.

GOODSILL: So you are riding donkeys up and down the court, shooting at the basket from the donkey?

RENFROW, A: Yes. Lawrence Elkins was one of the participants. He was quite an athlete and a good coach. He played basketball for Sam Houston, I think.



*L. E. Elkins, Jr. played basketball as a point guard at Sam Houston State before and after World War II.*



GOODSILL: They lived right near you, Shirley?

RENFROW, S: Yes, cross the street.

GOODSILL: That's why you babysat Lee LeGrand, Mr. Elkins' daughter.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Lee Elkins LeGrand interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytx.gov/home/showdocument?id=4251>

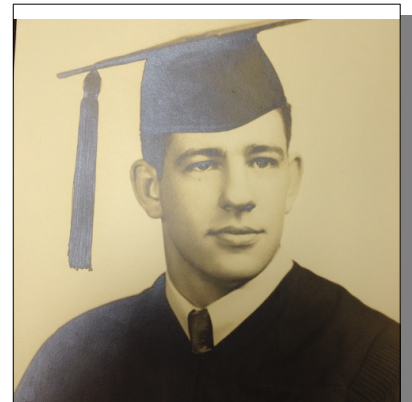
RENFROW, S: No, they lived in South Main Gardens off Highway 90. Later, when she was a little bit older, before her brother, Larry, was born, they built a house right across the street here. I was showing Al the big tallow tree sitting right there at the edge of the highway. Lee would sit underneath that tree waiting for my dad to come home from his Farm and Ranch Supply up here on Highway 90. He would stop, with his dog, Jewels, at the edge of the driveway and Lee would ride into our garage with Daddy every day at 6:00.

GOODSILL: Sweet. You never did tell me how you two met.

RENFROW, S: We went to school together.

RENFROW, A: Well, in 1959, I got married and had a daughter and a son. She went off to the University of Texas and I went to the University of Houston. John Ferro said, "We're getting a reunion together." Not a class reunion because there were only 32 in my class and 24 in her class, but a whole school reunion. There must have been 100 people in that gym. My son got killed in 1982 and I was in another depressed state, but I decided I needed to get out. So, I said I would come. That was 1983. I came, and Shirley came, and we got together. She hasn't left me alone since! (laughter)

RENFROW, S: Let's back up just a little bit. We really met when I was in 6th grade and he was in 7th grade. We went through junior high and high school together. Al graduated a year ahead of me. I went to my senior prom with him. But, we both went off to college and met and married other people. Then we renewed our acquaintance after all these years. We dated for 18 years before he decided to ask me to marry him.



*Al Renfrow, Jr. graduated a year ahead of Shirley.*

RENFROW, A: But that's another thing. I had my own business. I went to college and to stimulate my muscles, I majored in Physical Education. The coach I had at the University of Houston was an All-American from the University of Texas. He worked us out.

I was so ambitious and enthusiastic that the coach asked me to demonstrate a four-point stance. So, I got down and all of a sudden my arm went out from under me. He said, "What in the heck is wrong with you?" One of the guys said, "Coach, he had polio in his right shoulder." He passed me in life saving even though he knew I had had polio. I've had excellent experiences everywhere.

When I was 18 years old, I signed up for the draft. They passed me to go into the service. I didn't tell them I had had polio because I wanted to serve my country. After I got married and had a daughter, I was called up for the draft.

They said, "Get dressed, go home and pack your clothes. We're shipping you off to Fort Hood tomorrow morning. Meet us down on Austin Street in Houston." My wife packed us up and we got in the car. We drove down to Austin Street and we're standing there in line, and he said, "Is there anybody here who thinks they might not be qualified to serve?"

I said, "Well, I had polio in my right shoulder, and I don't have a deltoid muscle." He said, "WHAT? You are 4-F." He sent me home right then. My wife breathed a sigh of relief. But I had been absolutely determined!

GOODSILL: Wow! I have never been inside of the gym, so I would like you to describe to me what it looked like from the inside.

RENFROW, A: There is a stage area. We had our senior play on the stage. One of the Laperouse brothers had a pharmacy in Missouri City. They sent the film from the play to him to develop, and the store burned that night so there is no record of our senior play. The floor was a good-sized floor. We had a nickelodeon on the floor. The stands for people to watch the ball games were on the sides. There were transom windows at the top of the walls. Transom windows opened out, and had glass panes, to let air in. That's why we didn't need air conditioning in the gym. We had folding chairs for seating. We had our plays in there and our basketball games. There was a dance there after every home football game. The girls area was over here and the boys area was over there. There were showers and everything in there. So, we would come in from the football field, shower, get dressed and then go to the dance. We looked forward to that.

RENFROW, S: Every day after lunch, boys and girls danced to the jukebox.

GOODSILL: Was it also a community gathering place?

RENFROW, A: Yes, when they had a school board meeting, they would meet in the gym. I had two uncles, Hiram Burford and C. B. Renfrow, Jr., who were on the board. Every time I got in trouble, E. A. Jones, who was the principal, said, "I'm calling your uncle."

GOODSILL: [Laughing] How was the school funded? Where did the money come from to operate the school?

RENFROW, A: My dad was on the Equalization Board; I'm sure taxes funded 90% of the school. Now do you want to get to the rivalries?

GOODSILL: Sure. Let's get to the rivalries!

RENFROW, A: Missouri City and Sugar Land were die-hard rivals. In fact, I only reconciled myself to the fact that people in Sugar Land were okay because of Kenneth Hall, who was the star in Sugar Land. Bobby Williams was the star athlete in Missouri City and Kenneth convinced his coach to invite Bobby to go with them to a track tournament. Kenneth gave the eulogy at Bobby's funeral.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Kenneth Hall interview on this website at <http://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=40325>

GOODSILL: So you got over the rivalry because Kenneth Hall was a stand-up guy.

RENFROW, A: Yes, but Sugar Land never beat us in football. Not even when Kenneth was playing. Eugene Dinges, who was Sue Dinges' husband, Gerald Rivette, and I decided we were going to stop Kenneth Hall. They ran a single-wing formation and we had designed a play where all three of us would tackle him. He ended up having to have a steel plate put in his head because of the trauma he suffered.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Sue Reese Dinges interview on this website at <http://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=42788>

When we were kids we used to go to the Palms Theater in Sugar Land. We got to be good friends with D. P. Morton who was the manager of the theater. I remember when I went to the Sugar Land School, in 6th grade; I went to the restroom after lunch and washed my hands. The high school girls were playing volleyball so I sat out there under the tree and watched them. Some kid told on me, and they took me in and I got my first whipping in school. It was a teacher named Glasscock. She had a paddle and she paddled me good because I wasn't supposed to be out there!

GOODSILL: Shirley, what do you remember about the inside of the gym?

RENFROW, S: When you went up the stairs there were three main doors. To the right were the boys' and girls' restrooms. To the left in the entryway was our school cafeteria.

GOODSILL: Did you bring your lunch or did they serve you lunch?

RENFROW, S: They served lunch, and you could bring your lunch. I think I bought lunch. We had some pretty good cooks, those ladies in the cafeteria. Then you go through the three main doors. To the right of each of those were stairs that went up. At the top of the stairs, you turned and walked on the upper level above the bleachers, by the windows that went out. Then they had all the bleachers that went down the full side of the gym.

We always went through the double doors in the middle when we did the grand march for all our dances. You would go into the main floor. There were wooden stairs from the gym floor so you could climb into the bleachers. Other than that, there were arm rails that went straight to the stage. There were big brick walls. The stage had steps on either side and then the stage itself. Behind the stage were stairs that went down, underneath the stage, to the band hall.

GOODSILL: What a multi-functional building!

RENFROW, S: I remember when we were rehearsing for our senior play; we took a Coke bottle and some black thread or something similar, and put it at the top of the stairs. We got on the other side of the gym and pulled the thread so the Coke bottle would go down the stairs and make a bunch of racket.

GOODSILL: Did you have your graduation in the gym?

RENFROW, S: Yes, ma'am.

GOODSILL: How was it decorated?

RENFROW, S: Not that much for the graduation, *per se*. We marched in and I don't think we sat on the stage. I think we sat on the floor of the gym. But the valedictorian and salutatorian were up on the stage. We went across the stage to get our diplomas. It was a neat place. We had community Christmas trees, huge trees all the way to the ceiling.

RENFROW, A: John Ferro and Pooch White got in a pickup truck and went out and cut a tree down to bring to the gym. It went all the way to the top of the gym. Then we decorated it.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Frank John Ferro interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=47556>

RENFROW, S: We had formal dances, Christmas and the spring dance. The juniors always gave the seniors a dinner and a dance. We had some wonderful times. There were Halloween carnivals and spaghetti suppers.

GOODSILL: Everybody gathered there. Was it mainly a rural community at that time?

RENFROW, S: Oh, yes. During the year I graduated, 1954, there was a sign at FM 2234 and Highway 90 right where it crosses the railroad tracks that said: "Missouri City population 99." It was not incorporated at that time, but that's what it said.

RENFROW, A: You asked how the school was funded? It had to be county taxes.

GOODSILL: Were there no oil revenues at that time? Hadn't they discovered oil at Blue Ridge by then?

RENFROW, S: Yes, they had. There were the Blue Ridge salt mines.

GOODSILL: What memories do you have of the consolidation with Sugar Land and becoming Fort Bend Independent School District?

RENFROW, A: We had both graduated before then. My little brother was in the first graduating class of John Foster Dulles. My son went to John Foster Dulles. I couldn't get over the Vikings. The Mustangs were the one!

GOODSILL: Were there some pictures you wanted to show me?



*Journalism students surround the editor, Paul Guidry. Shown leaning at the desk, Mary Sue Bogard. Around the desk, L-R, Mary Hyatt, Milton Meduc, Lena Ruth Miles, Zan Hackley, Peter Hackley Shirley Borden, Gayle Roe, Sally Stewart.*



RENFROW, S: This is the elementary school building. I was going to say, the first year of the consolidation, (1959-1960) was my first year of teaching in Missouri City schools. I taught for 34 years in the district.

Now I'm going to toot my own horn. These are my accomplishments in high school: FFA, 4 years, FFA President 1953, Vice President 1952, Parliamentarian 1951; Football, 3 years; All-District in basketball; FHA Beau, 1953; Junior Class president; Dramatics Club; Senior Class Favorite; Student Council 3 years, Student Council president 1953; Reporter, 1952; Senior Play; Sports Editor – Annual.

GOODSILL: I can tell this was one of the best times in your life.

RENFROW, A: THE best time in my life!



*Missouri City High School students, except as noted. Front row, L-R – Inez Praytor, teacher and class sponsor, Betty Louise Burford, Marietta Cash, Doris Haisler, Margaret Magana, Geraldine Franklin, JoAnn Bledsoe, Lena Ruth Miles, L. P. Rogers, principal/superintendent. Second Row, L-R – Paul Guidry, Zan Hackley, Lindsay Carter, Marion Hanley, Vence Petrenella, Milton Medve, Bobby Ray Davis, Vergil George, Mr. Praytor (class sponsor's husband) c. 1953-54.*

GOODSILL: Some of the worst things happened, too.

RENFROW, A: Yes.

GOODSILL: Shirley, do you have your yearbook? Do you want to read your accolades?

RENFROW, S: Annual Staff, Assistant Features editor, copy editor; FHA Reporter, 1953; Treasurer, 1954; Volleyball – 3 letters; Pep Squad 3 years; Corporal 1954; Junior Class business manager; Senior Class business manager; Quill and Scroll Dramatics Club; Corps Club and Senior Play.

RENFROW, A: This is what her teacher wrote.

GOODSILL: (reading) “Dear Shirley, I have enjoyed having you in my class and being your sponsor. You are a dear girl. Love, Inez Praytor.”

RENFROW, A: I was in my senior year and held out of school for six weeks. Inez Praytor was my Physics teacher and I missed the first six weeks! She gave me an A for the first six weeks because of my illness. I took Anatomy and Physiology in college and flunked out because I took them in the summer.

GOODSILL: Thank you so much for sharing your memories.

Interview Ends



*Jo Ann Mayhall (left), Quail Valley Garden Club Membership chair, and Shirley Renfrow, Yearbook Chair, greeted members at the September 2012 meeting.*