

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **BJ Binford & Jon Pitts**

Interview Date: 06/24/2011

Interviewer: Jo Ann Hargrove

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcaba

Location: River Bend Country Club, Sugar Land, Texas

7 Pages



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Transcript

HARGROVE: Let's start with BJ, where were you born?

BJ: My maiden name is Binford, I'm BJ Binford Pitts. I was born in Navasota, in Grimes County.

HARGROVE: Where were you born, Jon?

JON: Born in Houston.

HARGROVE: What brought your families to Fort Bend County?

BJ: My dad went to work for Imperial Sugar. I was in the third grade when we moved to Sugar Land.

HARGROVE: What brought your family, Jon?

JON: My dad worked for the prison system and he was transferred to Sugar Land in 1956. He was a construction and maintenance supervisor.

HARGROVE: Has it been awhile since you lived in Sugar Land?

BJ: We moved back to Sugar Land in 1974.

JON: Then in 1976 we moved to Palestine. We moved away then we moved back and then we moved away again.

HARGROVE: What did your grandparents do?

JON: My grandparents were farmers.

HARGROVE: What about your grandparents BJ?

BJ: My grandfather was a farmer and at one time he was the sheriff of Grimes County. That was on my dad's side. My mother's father was a farmer.

HARGROVE: Where did you live in Sugar Land when you grew up?

BJ: Sixth Street, it was right down the street from the old football stadium. The football stadium was at the end of the street so we would go to see every football game that came along, whether it was for Sugar Land or M. R. Wood or (chuckles) who ever.

HARGROVE: Where did you live Jon?

JON: We lived on Central One Prison Unit from 1956 until I went into the military in 1961. Then I lived there again when I went to work for the prison system in 1974.

HARGROVE: What would you say a normal day in your childhood was, in Sugar Land?

BJ: It was always fun. (chuckles) There were 35 kids on Sixth Street and we all played together and had adventure trips. Ragus Lake was being built at one time and I can remember we all packed lunches and Mr. and Mrs. Prickle were our guides and we hiked out to Ragus Lake. We were seldom inside. We played outside doing something that entailed physical activity all the time. We walked to school and pretty much everywhere else because none of us could afford cars back then. Boys played little league baseball and us girls played softball during the summer and ran AAU track and participated in all the athletics that the school had to offer including cheer leading.



*Labeled "an early 6th St. Gang" in Sugar Land, some of the ruffians are (l-r) Red Binford, Archie Milam, and Charles Greggs plus Billy Earnest standing behind Charles. BJ Binford Pitts is in the center with her hands up.
-- <http://wateringholdclubhouse.blogspot.com>*

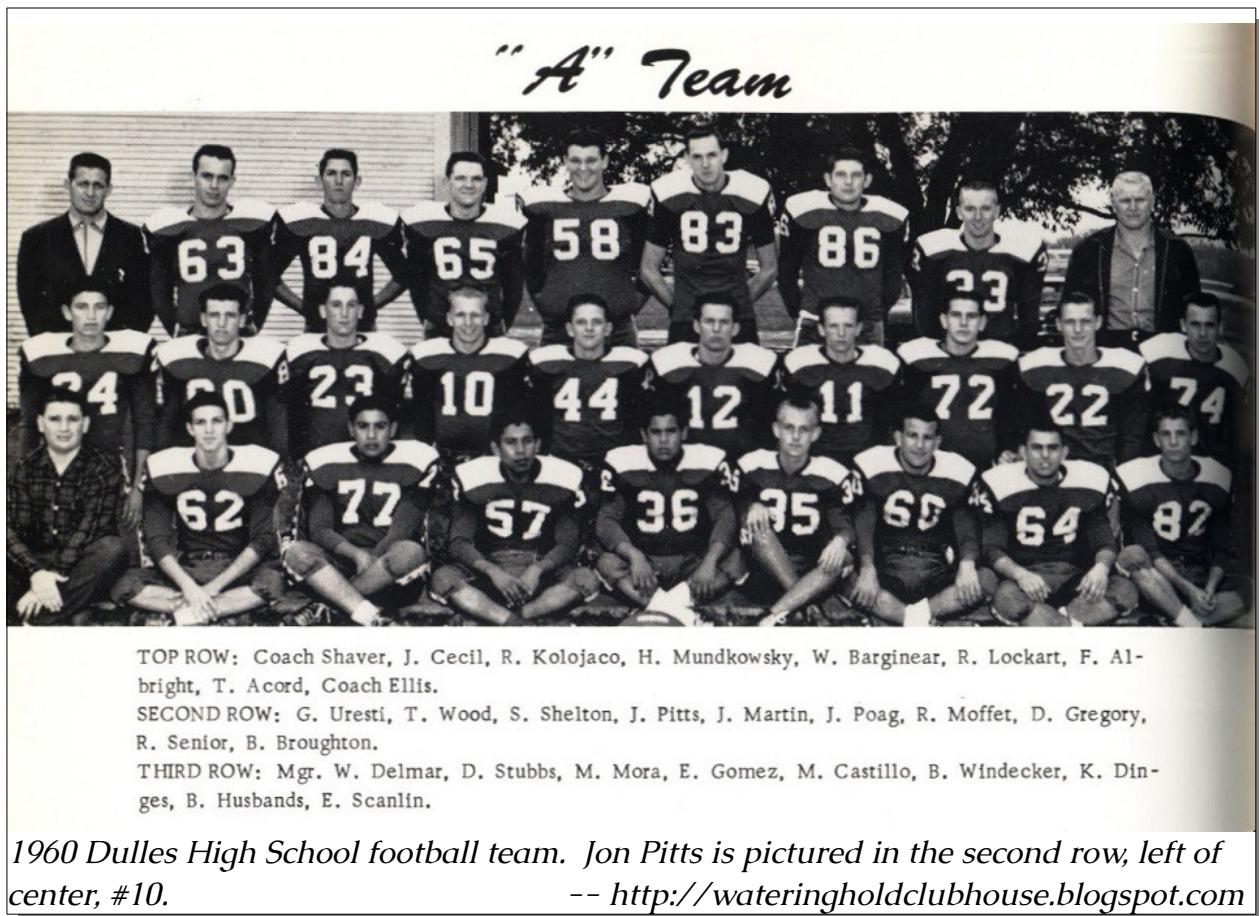
HARGROVE: Jon, did you play sports?

JON: Yes, it seems like everything I did revolved around athletics. During the school year it was with school teams and during the summer we ran Junior Olympic track and the neighborhood kids always had a game of something going.

HARGROVE: Tell me about attending school in Sugar Land?

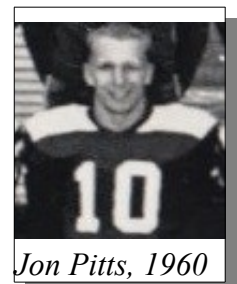
JON: Probably the greatest experience that a person could have in school, it was a family atmosphere, because you knew everybody in school from elementary up. You knew every teacher from elementary up and the teachers and administrators at the school were involved in the community.

BJ: They say it takes a village to raise a child. Well, Sugar Land was our village and they raised all of us.



JON: At Sugar Land high school, football was king. I am going to say 80-85% of the boys that attended school played football and the girls were either involved in band or cheer leading or the pep squad. I would also say that girls' basketball was one of the big things in town.

BJ: Joyce Binford, Georgia Binford and Melba Kelton and that group were All Staters and South All Stars. My sister Joyce is All American in AAU track. You may not know Wilma Rudolph, the Olympian. We ran against her in track meets in Ohio. Like Jonny said, everything was oriented around athletics; if you weren't actually playing you were supporting the players.



JON: I saw a film the other day of an old Sugar Land football game that I had played in. The band was marching at half time and I realized that's the first time I had seen the band march at half, because the team was always in the dressing room at half time.

HARGROVE: Tell me about any of your class mates that got married? Were there any couples in the class that got married?

BJ: We were one of them.

BJ: Ah-ha, the ones that got married in the class: Byron Boyce and Carolyn Boyce, they lived out in the Alief area. A lot of our class married people from Sugar Land but they weren't necessarily in the same class as us. We are having our 50th year class reunion next month. All of our group is coming back together for that. It's amazing how many of those married right after high school are still together. There have been some divorces but a lot of us are still married to the same person that we started with.

HARGROVE: Do you know how many of your classmates went to work for Imperial?

BJ: Well, I know Joe Cardenas...

JON: John Duran?

BJ: I have been doing a little book for our fiftieth year reunion and those are the only ones that come to mind that went to work for Imperial. Many of our classmates are entrepreneurs and went into business for themselves.

JON: The rest are teachers.

BJ: (laughing) We do have a lot of teachers. We've got five Ph.D.s out of our class of 82. That's not bad.

HARGROVE: That's wonderful, would you say quite a few of your classmates went to college?

BJ: Most of them went to college for some period of time. Not everybody was graduated from college but...

JON: I would say the majority went to college.

HARGROVE: Did some go to the service?

BJ: Yes, we have a lot of vets.

BJ: We have a number of Vietnam vets.

HARGROVE: Do you have children?

BJ: Yes, we have three. Our youngest son died in 2003 with lymphoma.

HARGROVE: Ah, I'm sorry.

BJ: Our oldest son is a policeman in Tyler. Our daughter works for the Chickasaw Indian Nation in Oklahoma. Our youngest son was working as a plant manager for a small plant in Frankston, Texas when he died.

HARGROVE: Do you have grandchildren?

BJ: Yes, we have five granddaughters and one grandson. We've got four great-granddaughters and three great-grandsons.

HARGROVE: Wonderful. Do you have any old documents, marriage license or anything that we could copy?

BJ: We don't have them with us, but we certainly have them.

JON: We can bring you our marriage license, you can't read it, it's in German.

HARGROVE: It's in German?

JON: We were married in Germany.

BJ: He was in the military at the time.

HARGROVE: You were in the military? What branch were you in.

JON: I was a military policeman in the Army.

HARGROVE: Are you a policeman now?

JON: No, I am retired from the prison system.

HARGROVE: Is there anything else you'd like add about your hometown, Sugar Land?

BJ: I am amazed at the small town atmosphere that they have been able keep with it growing the way that it has. We actually live in a small community called Holly Springs outside of Nacogdoches and we don't see this many cars (laughing) very frequently, until we come down here. It's still a nice place and we still feel like Sugar Land is still home to us.

HARGROVE: That's great.

BJ: We appreciate what your doing, that's really nice of you to do that.

HARGROVE: Thank you very much.

JON: Sure, happy to do it.

Interview ends