FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Carlos Bennett Tarver**

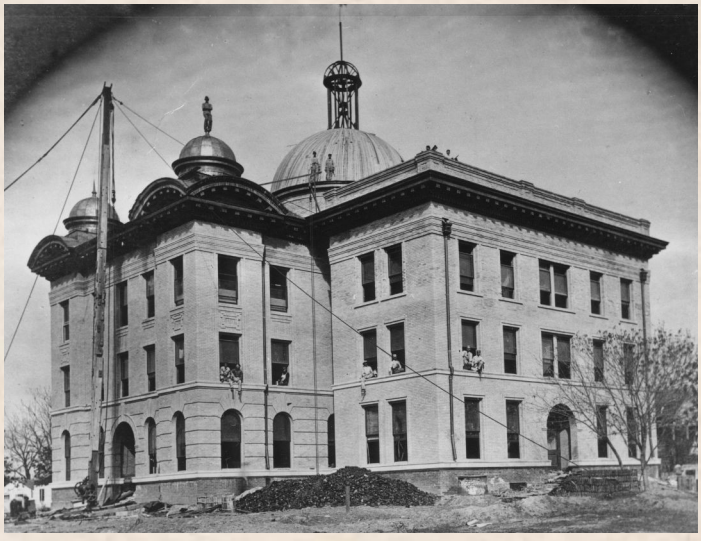
Interview Date: 09/30/2007

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill, Bruce Kelly

Transcriber: Katie Eherenkranz

Location: Sugar Land, Texas

Comments: Also present was Mrs. Carolyn Tarver (spouse) 26 Pages



Transcript

GOODSILL: The purpose of the Fort Bend Historical Commission Oral History project is to gather and preserve historical evidence about ways of life, events, politics, neighborhoods, and historic preservation in the county of Fort Bend by means of tape recorded interview. Tape recordings and transcripts resulting from such interviews become part of the archives of the Fort Bend County Historical County Commission, Richmond, Texas. This material will be made available for historical and other academic research and publication by interested parties, including members of the interviewee's family. Upon receiving a complete written transcript of the interview, the interviewee will have thirty days to make changes, additions, and or corrections to the interview. If the interviewee does not notify the interviewer of any changes within thirty days, the Fort Bend Historical Commission assumes the interviewee approves of the transcript.

Okay, Carlos, let's start with your telling us your full name and your date of birth.

TARVER: Carlos Bennett Tarver; September the sixth, 1935.

GOODSILL: Would you tell me how your family got to Sugar Land?

TARVER: We were kind of in the middle of the depression. My uncles had been working for the prison system, and the youngest brother, Cleo, started working for the Industries back in '33 or '34. My dad and my Uncle Benji were down at Angleton; the prison farm down there, I forget the name of it.

KELLY: Rosharon.

TARVER: Rosharon, right. The Tarver side – they started working for the Industries. On my mother's side, John Pauswang, Charlie Pauswang and Walter Pauswang all worked for the Industries between '33 and '38 somewhere, I don't know. Walter went to join the service in the early '40s. But Uncle John, they went up to the Blakely farm for several years before he came back and was foreman of the blacksmith shop at Grand Central. Everybody know what Grand Central is?

GOODSILL: Tell us. Tell us what Grand Central was.

TARVER: Well, right now on Highway 59 as you're going south, and you look to the left as you go over the Oyster Creek, there's a little indentation. There used to be a bunch of mules in a lot there. I think it was, like, 150 mules and they could outfit 75 wagons.

And then across the street was a series of buildings, warehouses, blacksmiths shops, some sheds, and the time office was down there. Miss Lou Eva Brooks took care of that.

KELLY: That would be Don and Ellis's mother?

TARVER: That's right. No, uh, sister!

KELLY: Oh, sister.

TARVER: Yeah. A cousin, Pearce Pauswang, was a third fellow that worked down there. At this point in time I guess it was about '48 – well, let me go back: I was born in Angleton, but, shortly, my dad moved up here and we stayed with the Halls, Curtis and Kenneth, for several years.

KELLY: Is that right?

TARVER: Yeah. And another thing, it's kind of hard to get straightened out, but my dad was staying with my uncle Cleo, and they lived on Main Street between the Catholic and the Methodist church across the street. I have a picture here of him back then. But shortly thereafter, Uncle Benji came to work for the Industries and he was responsible for what we call Sweetwater right now. (chuckles) The land was divided up into about 140 acres with a house and they had a sharecropper. You could either go halves or three-fourths or a quarter, whichever one they wanted to, and the Industries gave then credit until they got the crop in, and they would square up everything. But the area from Highway 6, or a little bit of above 6, actually, started right where the blacksmith shop started and it came up to what we call Oyster Creek Drive and --

KELLY: Close to where the Kroger's on Sweetwater currently is?

TARVER: Yes. That area was, in certain periods of time, used to furnish fresh vegetables for the canning company, and it went all the way down to a Spanish cemetery back there. We raised sweet corn and then three or four crops a year.

KELLY: Where Sugar Wood is now.

TARVER: Yeah, right, yeah. But then, Uncle Otto, he had --

GOODSILL: Whose side was he on, mother's or father's?

TARVER: Tarver.

GOODSILL: He's your father's brother?

TARVER: Yes, uh-huh, and he had a big nice house, what we call Highway 6 and Dulles now. He had a big corral with a lot of mules in it and his area went all the way to Murphy Road and all the way back up. The Frost ranch was all part of the Industries, so was across from his property there. And so, Uncle Benji's part went all the way down to the levy -- back all the way up in there. In '48 my dad had gone into – Mack Parker had taught him how to run a drag line, and he started working for a contractor called the McGuiness brothers. And they did contracting in Shreveport, Texas City, and they built those levies around those different cities. Actually, he helped build Addicks Dam over here. That was quite an experience. But, he kept moving around, I started to --

GOODSILL: What was your father's name?

TARVER: Marcus. I started the first grade in Shreveport and it was almost immediately I went to another school, and then I went to Oats Prairie, which is on the east side of Houston over there, the Beaumont Highway. But in the second grade they moved over here and he started working for the American Canal Company, this canal goes to Texas City and furnishes the water for Galveston County. He worked for them from the time I was in the second grade to the fifth grade, and then he moved back over to the other side of town. I spent a year or so again at Oats Prairie, but in between the last half of the seventh, the decision was made I needed to stay at one place. (laughs)

So my grandparents, who had a farm at Clodine, sold it and moved to down here in an area under my Uncle Benji, and they had 13 acres. They were semi-retired, but they worked hard! (Laughs) They had cows and a pair of mules and about 13 acres. Chickens. A pig. We butchered! And a lot of people bought butter and that kind of thing from them, fresh vegetables.

One of the first jobs I got was working at a blacksmith shop for Uncle John. I had read in the latest books that there was a desire to save, I guess it was left over from the Depression. One of my projects was to recondition the boats and put them back in their boxes and their right sizes and everything. They did almost everything almost self-contained, we continuously refurbished the wagons, respoked the wheels. They would take the rim and size it and cut a little space out of it, weld it back together, then we'd take a whole group of them and put them in a fire and heat them all up, and then they'd take them and put them on a wheel and then spin them against a drop of water to cool them down quickly.

And we built sideboards, everything. Then there was a forge there and Uncle Charlie was an expert at sharpening sweeps for all the farmers in the area; they came and put them in piles, but they had a trip hammer and it was belt driven, had one electric motor, it was belt driven.

KELLY: You said there were many mules kept there, how were the mules used?

TARVER: The day laborers would furnish the mules to the farmers, and they would come and pick them up and bring them back in the evening.

KELLY: Just plowing?

TARVER: Yes.

KELLY: And for pulling wagons?

TARVER: Yes, everything.

KELLY: No tractors?

TARVER: No tractors. This was in the '40s, just after the war. The tractors came a little bit later. They were progressive; they kept up as things came along. They started raising feed, alfalfa; they had lots of alfalfa fields; a dehydrator, they actually moved it, it was down here, close to the --

KELLY: Brook Street?

TARVER: Well, just a little bit south of Brook Street. The mall is, across the freeway, the city has a sewage disposal thing --

KELLY: With the levy around it.

TARVER: Yes. So, if you just take a shot and go straight south, there was a road there and it went down, way down; it would go all the way to the levy.

KELLY: Was that Alcorn Road or Blair Road -- ?

TARVER: I don't remember. I know the one my Uncle Benji lived on was Tarver Road, but it's no longer there, haha. It went from my uncle's house to my grandparents' house, and then it went over the Oilfield Road. Another one of my jobs that summer was baling hay.

They had huge barns. Mr. Coburn had one next to his house, and it must have been thirty foot high, at least, and it was longer than a football field, and it was real wide -- and they filled that thing up with hay! (laughs) And there was another one -- you know how the railroad track used to go to Galveston? Well, uh, there's a road --

KELLY: The railroad track crossed Oyster Creek or Sugar Lakes Boulevard, is that what you're trying to -- ?

TARVER: Yeah, well, there's another one way further down, before it gets to 6 -- Lexington? If you go down Lexington and just this side of Dulles if you look, there's a bridge there, and then there's an old bridge with a dam on it? Yeah, right in there, that railroad track used to go across the area and there was a huge, big barn there beside the railroad track where they'd lower the hay down onto the railroad cars.

After I got a little bit older, Mr. White came that one summer. He started us painting the school, so George Salmon and I painted the first room, and we did it pretty fast, and so that gave us the privilege of doing all the windows, and man, (chuckles) 20 panes per window -- (All laugh) We painted all those, and that was a lot better. That summer the fellas got to repaint the roofs, the metal roofs. We'd go up there with that red paint in the middle of the summer.

KELLY: On the company houses?

TARVER: On the company houses. And they would redo those on schedule. But pretty soon Roy Cordes came back from the service, and he opened his cleaners, and I got to be the deliveryman, his first deliveryman! I got to drive a truck (laughs happily) and it was nice! It was a lot better.

GOODSILL: You liked that a lot better than manual labor!!!? (smiling)

TARVER: Boy, I'll tell you. But it started off there was an opening for a grocery sacker in the old mercantile, and it had about six steps up to it, and those sharecroppers would come in with their wagons and their mules, and I'll tell you, you could buy a wagonload of groceries for a few dollars!

GOODSILL: (laughs at his story telling)

TARVER: And we hauled groceries out there about twelve hours a day. Mrs. Anderson was extremely famous for being a fast checker (laughs) she would get that stuff out of there, and we'd haul it out. But then Mr. Harman offered me a job in the dry goods and – yeah, past mayor --so I got to work in the dry goods, but that was right as I was graduating.

KELLY: Was the dry goods still in the mercantile or had it moved?

TARVER: No, during that time they built a new store in the dry goods and I was in the dry goods. They got rid of those steps, (laughs with relief) but it was an interesting time. It was very resourceful and everybody did whatever it took to get the job done, and it was a self-sufficient community, I think, and it was well run and the people worked hard and lived reasonably well. I don't think there was a problem. I think that everybody knew what it meant to do the right thing, and they pretty much did it.

KELLY: Your father and your uncles, who did they answer to?

TARVER: Tom James [President of Sugarland Industries]

KELLY: What was your father's job?

TARVER: My father, I don't know. I don't think he stayed very long. About all he told me was that one time he was supposed to pick cotton, and he did it for about a half hour and he said "There's got to be a better way of making a living!" [All laugh]

TARVER: I think he worked for Mack Parker for a little while.

KELLY: And Mack Parker did the infrastructure?

TARVER: The drag line and the graders and the bulldozers and things like that.

KELLY: Tell us a little bit about the Pauswangs.

TARVER: They were my grandparents. They moved from Smithville, he came to Smithville. I guess it was a long time ago, I was trying to remember.

KELLY: Let's work up; your mother was Sophie Pauswang. And were there Pauswang brothers and other siblings?

GOODSILL: John, Charlie, and Walter

TARVER: Yeah. Annie worked in the old café --

KELLY: The Crown?

TARVER: Yeah, it used to be the Crown. They went through several different owners and everything.

GOODSILL: She got a good job!

TARVER: Haha, yeah, well, the girls couldn't go back and forth, the roads were so bad. Back then, they all stayed with somebody in town.

GOODSILL: Boardinghouse, or friend?

TARVER: Just friends, just personal, small houses. (Shows a photo).

GOODSILL: Great picture.

KELLY: I have never seen that picture. You're the only one that's got one.

GOODSILL: Your mom had several sisters, too. Big family.

TARVER: There were seven altogether. You can look through here (photo album) This is Uncle John, and then that's my Uncle Walter, and that's their oldest daughter Annie, and she married a butcher. And they moved to Schulenburg. That's my mother, you recognize her. That's Uncle Charlie out there.

KELLY: Is Tarver a German name, because there's a lot of Bruno --?

TARVER: No, I think English. The Bruno is the Pauswang.

KELLY: Oh, that's right.

TARVER: My Aunt Ellen was still in school when I was living with my grandparents, and she was about 5 years older than I, and she graduated a little bit before I did.

GOODSILL: These are great. We'll look at these later. Okay, so --

TARVER: I was probably the luckiest fella in the whole wide world. I had the whole run of the whole farm.

GOODSILL: That horse is way bigger than you!

TARVER: And that saddle is big. I had to figure out a way to hang it from the top of the barn to pull it back, and then pull the horse underneath it.

KELLY: Nobody did it for you?

TARVER: No, no. Very rarely, let's put it that way. But I could stay at any one of the seven houses and I could stop at any one for a meal; eat breakfast, or spend the night, and I thought I was all by myself but --

GOODSILL: Did you have brothers or sisters?

TARVER: No.

GOODSILL: Wow!

KELLY: So, your experiences here were really good as a child?

TARVER: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. I thought I was all by myself, but when I got grown I found out each one of them was watching me all the time, haha.

GOODSILL: And you lived primarily out in the county? Did you come into town very often?

TARVER: Well, that's another story. On Saturday, I could ride my bicycle in, and I could come all the way from the oilfield to downtown and go back and never pass a car on Highway 6! (Laughs in amazement)

KELLY: My mother drove in the Humble Camp, remember that?

TARVER: Yeah, it was just a little further down. I had a lot of friends. We went down there and played. Yeah, a lot of kids that lived down there rode the bus. We'd catch the bus to a lot of different places.

GOODSILL: When you were in high school you were still living out there?

TARVER: Yes. Well, my senior year I moved into town. My mother rented a room, a couple of rooms, I really went uptown.

GOODSILL: What was that like for you living there?

TARVER: It was nice, it was nice. And then, too, I have another story. My Uncle Benji had arranged for me to raise a calf, a fat calf, for the fat stock show. And he and Mr. Fatheree, who were taking care of the feed mixing, well, they got together and mixed for me the best feed, and Mr. Coburn went with Uncle Benji to pick out the best calf he could find.

The only problem was that calf had a mother that had horns that looked like a Mexican bull. I had to let that calf suck every morning, and that cow would chase me out of the pen every time. So I tied a rope onto that calf, I let that cow out with the little calf running behind and I'd grab the rope, close the gate, bring that calf back in. [All laugh]

TARVER: But it was really nice, I won the reserve champion and Bill Williams bought the grand champion, and his wife said that my calf was better than the calf that won, and so she bought mine. So, he ended up buying two. (laughs gleefully) I went to settle up with Uncle Benji and he said that I should go buy me a car. And I was happy about it, but my grades went down!

GOODSILL: Was that in your senior year?

TARVER: Yeah, my junior and senior. It was, like, October of my junior year and we bought it and I had it my senior year.

GOODSILL: But not many kids had cars did they?

TARVER: No, no.

GOODSILL: And you were going to the Sugar Land School from the seventh grade on?

TARVER: Yes.

GOODSILL: So, you were friends with all the kids, grew up with them all?

TARVER: Yes, there wasn't very many of us.

GOODSILL: Yes, small group.

TARVER: Here's my aunt on the back of my motor scooter I bought from a fella in Humble Count, named Popeye the DeBlanc.

KELLY: I've heard of him.

TARVER: Yep, and like I said, my aunt was about five years older than I was.

KELLY: What house is this in front of?

TARVER: That's one of those old Humble Camp houses that they moved, you know near Settler's Way community center?

GOODSILL: The Aquatic Center.

TARVER: Yeah. Well, I went to a meeting there one day and we were out in a break, and were looking both ways. If you stand out in that parking lot and look west and east, you can see a road used to be there with trees on each side. Well, that's where that house was, it was just about a quarter of a mile from Oilfield Road back this way and about a mile from Uncle Benji's straight down that same road.

KELLY: So, that would be now off of Austin Parkway.

TARVER: Something like that, yeah.

GOODSILL: Wow. This is a great picture, look at these young handsome men!

TARVER: Haha, eating watermelon!

GOODSILL: Who's that?

TARVER: That's Bobby Donnam and myself.

GOODSILL: Great picture.

TARVER: That's an old picture of the Eldridge Sons' house over there. That got torn down.

KELLY: That's where Charlie Howard's house is now.

TARVER: No, well, that's next door. It's the bigger house.

KELLY: Next door. This was Mr. Eldridge's William's son. Was it Randall that lived there, do you know which one?

TARVER: No, I don't.

KELLY: Later, an owner by the name of Morrison bought it.

TARVER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. This is Grandma and Grandpa.

GOODSILL: Which, Pauswang or Tarver?

TARVER: Pauswang. And this is Tarver, my dad's mother, and myself.

GOODSILL: Oh, that's a wonderful picture! Great looking people. Your father was very handsome!

KELLY: Tell me about this picture; Bobby Newton's in here, Uncle Marcus, and Patsy Ruth.

TARVER: Yeah, yeah.

KELLY: Did the Newtons live close to you?

TARVER: Yeah, this was before my dad got married and he was living with my Uncle Cleo on Main Street there.

KELLY: Bobby Newton is my mother's age, and she'd be about seventy-six now, so he was born about '31, 1933.

TARVER: This is a picture of Uncle Benji and this is his retirement picture. Uncle John retired about the same time.

KELLY: Your Uncle Benji, his last house was on Brook Street about two hundred long, or ten, or something like that?

TARVER: Yeah, he bought some of the houses when the industry sold the houses, and when he retired, he moved into town. This is Uncle Otto.

GOODSILL: The men with their babies!

TARVER: With one of his children. This is the dad of all the brothers.

KELLY: Okay, did he ever come to Sugar Land, or the brothers came here separately?

TARVER: Yeah, they came here separately. Cleo came first, and the other brothers were working at the prison farm, and then they came here over here when they saw what a good deal it was.

KELLY: Well, a lot of families did that. My grandmother's family, the family, one came and then the other. They liked it, and Sugar Land liked that.

TARVER: Yeah, yeah. They wanted families. This is Uncle Otto and my dad. This is at the funeral of Cleo. One of his responsibilities was to go over to Richmond and pick up the prisoners during the WW II.

KELLY: The German prisoners of war? And they stayed at the old fairgrounds, across from the Twin City Drive-In?

TARVER: Right. He was on his way back and he was supposed to follow the trucks to make sure nobody escaped, and apparently they had some kind of accident and he got hurt and they carried him into Sugar Land, and the ribs got all right, but Dr. Slaughter found out he had TB. So they treated it for him for several years, and he went to a sanitarium, but he still passed away at a very early age. But my experience with those prisoners; they brought them out there, and they were chopping cotton and everything, and the guard was sitting there under the wagon in the shade, and I was out there talking with him, and I looked up and, man, here come these prisoners, all of them at a dead run, and I said, "Man, what's the matter? Here they come!" and he said, "Don't worry about it, the captain's coming." (Chuckles) They were warning him that his supervisor was coming!

KELLY: They were on the lookout for him!

TARVER: Yeah. They were nice and friendly and they were glad to be over here, I think.

MRS. TARVER: Did you tell her you were named after Dr. Slaughter?

GOODSILL: Really? Tell us that story!

TARVER: Well, they were having a hard time; they didn't want to name me a junior, and it's a pretty far stretch, but they were trying to find something that might rhyme with Marcus, and they came up with Carlos -- if you don't stress the low C-A-R. Yeah, they wish I'd become a doctor, haha.

KELLY: Did Dr. Slaughter deliver you? No, you were born in Angleton.

TARVER: Angleton, yeah. See, my dad was working at the prison farmdown there.

KELLY: You were talking about the Pauswangs and we got a little sidetracked. How did they come to Sugar Land?

TARVER: Well, see, I don't know exactly how it happened, but for some reason or another my granddad found out there was some land down here, he bought about 160 acres close to Clodine. I don't know exactly how that transpired, but they lived here for a long time.

KELLY: So, he's the only Pauswang, the first Pauswang, to move to Sugar Land, and then he had children that stayed here?

TARVER: Yes, I think that's correct. I really don't know exactly how that all happened.

KELLY: And they lived by the Tarvers, didn't they?

TARVER: My – oh, interrelated, the Industries were -- they assigned the different jobs and so it just worked out they had houses. Like Lou Eva's dad and mother lived right next to my Uncle Cleo [after he] moved from Main Street. They had a row of houses out there and he lived in one, and my Uncle John lived in another one and eventually my Uncle Charlie lived over there too. He was a little bit younger, and over a period of time my Uncle Garrett moved, and Uncle Charlie moved into his house, so it was just as -- they just moved around into whatever was convenient. But it was an interesting place to grow up, I'll tell you, there was just something going on all the time.

KELLY: You were here when the Palms Theater opened, what was that like?

TARVER: That was nice. We used to have to go all the way to Rosenberg and it was amazing, but it was really a trip to go into Houston. It was just a long ways, haha, but then, too, I think that over time the roads got progressively better and for a long time it was pretty bad, but it was nice to have mules because those other cars didn't go too good. Lots of ruts. One of the things -- I guess it's worth telling -- they used to have a gin here in Sugar Land, and my granddad would bring his cotton in here and he might get a little tipsy, and he would get in that wagon and turn those mules loose, and they went home… so you had a chauffeur. [All laugh]

GOODSILL: So, you had quite a family growing up here.

TARVER: Well, a lot of interesting uncles that were very capable individuals. It was amazing what they could do. They were, I think, extremely successful; they raised a lot of different crops for the Industries and managed a lot of people.

KELLY: Were they salaried by the industry or did they take a share?

TARVER: No, I think it was salary.

KELLY: They were like foremen.

TARVER: Yeah, that's right. Mr. Brooks, I think, was hourly. I worked with him some, too, and he would go around and repair all the little houses, put screen doors, put glass back in the windows.

KELLY: And you're talking about Ellis and Donald's --?

TARVER: Yeah, their father.

KELLY: Tell us about school.

TARVER: Oh, now you're on my favorite subject!

GOODSILL: Best time in your life?

TARVER: Yeah, yeah. I wanted to participate, I guess. One of the reasons I wanted to stay in one place is so I'd be eligible to play sports. But when I was -- I guess it was eighth grade -- we had a junior high football team, and it was pretty good. When I got into ninth grade, the team seemed to not be as successful for one reason or the other. Then in the middle of my sophomore -- well, my freshman year – Mr. White came and it was amazing. He was a can-do kind of a military man, he was in the Navy, he came from Pearsall.

KELLY: He replaced Mr. Barker?

TARVER: Yes, right. And he immediately, first thing out of the box, got us together and started painting the school - it was in such bad repair, he said we needed a new school building. So he started that school building and it was completed in weeks. Had our senior year in that new building. He said that to have a good school, you had to have a good football team. I don't know how that works, but that's what he said.

And apparently, he couldn't stand us losing -- we lost the first five games my sophomore year. He apparently had a discussion with the coach, but HE ended up in school practice that next Monday and it was amazing. He was a gifted public speaker; you just got quiet when he started talking, you know? And he wanted to know if we wanted to be champions, and of course we wanted to be champions. He said, "Are you willing to pay the price?" And, of course, we thought we were already paying the price; we had broken legs, arms, ankles, you know. Oh, well, we were willing to pay the price, and he said, "You have to run a play right sixty times in practice before you call it in a game." And some people have doubted that, but Ken [Hall] told me the other day he counted that we ran that play thirty-four times in one day! [laughs] He was perfectionist, and apparently had a photographic memory. He said, "Every play is scheduled to go for a touchdown, and if it doesn't, somebody didn't do their job, and I don't know who it is." He worked and worked and worked and he changed everybody's position, almost, and then he changed the formation.

We went from the T to the Notre Dame box, which nobody had ever heard of, which was an advantage because no one knew how to defend it. Kenneth was a 140 pound freshman at the time, but he selected him. You know some people are able to select horses? Well, Mr. White could select football players. So, he put myself and Popeye -- and I didn't weigh 120 pounds when I graduated -- but he put me at guard, left guard, and Popeye at right guard. And Popeye had been playing quarterback and it was somewhat of a demotion for him. I asked him about it and he said, "Yeah, we talked back and forth all the way to the Humble Camp and back every day trying to keep him on the team."

But that next Friday night, we won fifty-three to nothing. When you went from losing to winning, no one had any complaints. And that was just the beginning of it, and it went on, and [is in] the history books, records, and everything. The only thing I told those people about Kenneth was that it was a miracle that he ever had any records, because they kept pulling him out all the time.

I've got fifteen games I went through and looked at, and he only made two of seven touchdowns, two of eight, you know, and when he got two touchdowns ahead, they'd pull him out and it was so bad. It takes fourteen quarters to letter, and he and J.B. almost did not letters, because they had them on the bench so much.

GOODSILL: When you got so far ahead, they pulled him out because they wanted to make it fair to the other team?

TARVER: The interesting part was -- and some people like B.I. Williams said if they'd had Mr. White as coach, they would've had a championship team because it was timing, it was faking, and being in the right place at the right time. And he said, too, to have a good football team, you had to have a good track team, and it was the same motley group of kids, you know. We didn't even win a track meet the year before, and that year we started off and he had a little procedure he went through: you started off, you would run 130 yards, which is almost a quarter of a mile, you know, and he said, "You don't run it, you gut it out, you give it everything you got!" And we did that for about a month, and then he selected his team. And that group of boys, seven boys out of seventeen, went to state meet and they won the state meet. And the amazing part is, Kenneth scored enough points to beat the next closest school, and George Salmon scored enough points to beat the next closest, so you had two kids who --

KELLY: Scored more points than the whole team…

TARVER: And the other thing was, J.B. Kachinski qualified to run in the state meet, but they wouldn't let but two boys run per school, and so Ernest Trevino -- a little fella, I don't think he weighed 115 pounds when he graduated, but he was fast -- and those four guys ran the quarter of a mile relay and won it in record time, 43.5, I think, and they did it two years in a row. But it was just amazing, you know.

You wish – well, let me tell you the other side of it: my son, twenty years later, was at Dulles, and he'd come home and ask me, "Well, Dad, how'd you play football?" And I said, "There were only seventeen, it was pretty easy." And he said that there were 750 boys out for seventh grade football, can you imagine that? So, how many boys get lost or never even try? And there was some lessons -- Paul Martin -- I got a tape of, you've heard that; he was famous for not talking, but he was a deep thinker and he was very intelligent. He was second in his class but he said it affected his whole life. He said he knew if he worked hard and paid attention, you could succeed, and he did real well.

Someone said, "School doesn't need to be about bigger than 900 kids, so that its small and everybody can participate." But it would eliminate a lot of education problems if you had teachers that cared about you, knew what you were doing, could help you get through. It was a real experience and I really enjoyed it.

KELLY: Who was the head coach at that time?

TARVER: Chuzzy Jenkins.

KELLY: How did that work with Mr. White coming in and helping Chuzzy?

TARVER: Well, see, he couldn't say much because he'd had three years, and we were losing. And he [Mr. White] turned it around in one week, and I mean to tell you, this town went wild. There wasn't anybody in the stands before, and then they had to build another grandstand, and then they were chartering two Greyhound buses to every away game, and we had more people away than the home team did!

GOODSILL: Did your uncles all come?

TARVER: Oh, yeah. Everybody – they'd come out of the woodwork. There were people all in the grandstands, standing around on the sidelines; you couldn't get them off the field! It was something else, they were happy.

KELLY: What happened to Mr. White, how long did he stay?

TARVER: About six years. There are a couple of stories going along: one of them is that he had a heart bypass, and then an aneurysm, but I'm not sure. I just heard both stories, but one person, I think it was B.I., was saying he met the doctor that was in the operating room when Mr. White died. He was saying it was a bypass, but he said some of the equipment failed. He was one of the first ones at Methodist, I think.

... a little bit about how the academics went. You know, we had three or four PhD's the sixth year and several masters, and we didn't even think about going to college, haha. But he [Mr. White] really, right away, [got] Mr. Ernest started doing advanced math courses to get you up, ready to go to school. It was amazing. Something else that J.B. mentioned; not only was he interested in football, but he was interested in all the sports, and the band, too. And our band director, Mr. Gary, he was just out of school and it wasn't going just like Mr. White wanted, so he spent a lot of time out there, and they ended up with first division in every area. You know, it's just instant. All you got to do is do your best!

And then, too, a lot of the stories -- he helped a lot of people, you know? Jerry mentioned that his folks -- his dad had bankruptcy, you know, they had that big house, Eldridge house out there, and he said that his mother asked him if he could talk to Mr. White about getting lunch tickets, and he said. "No problem." George Salmon said that while they were at the state meet that Mr. White got the Rice coaches together and introduced him to the coaches, and they offered him a scholarship on the spot. There were just so many things that [were] really – heartwarming, you know?

KELLY: Do you see many of your classmates often?

TARVER: Not often. I've made a conscious decision to continue working, so I don't get a lot of extra time, but most people are retired and I could see more of them but they're pretty busy, too.

MRS. TARVER: You see some at reunions.

TARVER: Yeah, at the reunions; it's good.

KELLY: I know it's very emotional for you, but how did you personally benefit from Mr. White? How did he affect your life?

TARVER: Well, I think that he raised the bar, and it was excellence, you know? Everything was good, you wanted to do your best, and then when you saw him turn that football team around in one week -- if he said go through that brick wall, you just hoofed it up and gave it your very best effort, and it was just a can-do attitude.

KELLY: That's what he taught you most?

TARVER: A can-do attitude. I went to work at WKM just as they opened, and I stayed there for nearly ten years, and it was a learning experience. And then I went to Hughes Tool and I thought there would be not many opportunities there, but it's amazing. They put me in several different areas that were having problems, and you started looking for the problems, and then you started solving the problems. And my first one took me six months, and they told me, "Well, we don't need you in here any more; you got to go over to this other one." And I had hoped that I would go back to school, right close to University of Houston. I had an apartment over there, and the second one, they said, "Well, we'll give you two weeks to figure out what's wrong with this one." You know, and it was interesting, they had about forty machinists in different areas. I respected all the men, and I would call them and say, "Mr. Everything, you know." I'd ask them, "Is there anything I can do to help?"

About the third one I came across, he was snaggle-toothed, and had tobacco running down his mouth, and cussed, and said, "I've told everybody, including the boss, president, manufacturer; why should I tell you?" And I said, "Well, Mr. Ross, if you'll help me, well, then it'd get me out of trouble and we'd get this thing going." And he said, "Well, this is the third operation and the first operation is not concentric with the second operation, and when I put these slots in there, they're not going to have a good bit to get to the end." And sure enough, you know, it was only :007 they were putting carbide compacts in there, and the wall would reject them. It took me less than a week [to fix the problem]. And we got it going, haha! They told me I wouldn't last, because if there's something that needed to be changed, I'd just sign it and date it, and that's all I had to do. But there's some people who had thirty years there, they wouldn't do anything to check except to retire.

KELLY: Were you an engineer?

TARVER: No, they called it a manufacturing technician.

KELLY: So, did you get to go back to school?

TARVER: No, never did.

MRS. TARVER: Well, you did at night, for eleven years.

TARVER: Yeah, well, I went to night school for eleven years, but I didn't go after. I didn't go back, but it was interesting: one of the problems they had at that time, they had just got over a recession and they had cut the company in half and retired all of the experienced people. And you could get from sweeping the floor to tool maker in nine months, and it was dangerous because it was a constant training program. And I got to working with one of these managers, and it was evident that we had to be able to prove that a person couldn't do the work, so we had to set up some tests, so that if they could do these tests, well, then they could be alright. But if they couldn't do that, well, then they had to stay back. And we worked that out and that settled it down and people weren't getting into that department if they couldn't do work.

GOODSILL: Sounds like you learned something about how to handle people from Mr. White and maybe how to do problem solving.

TARVER: Respect, you know, you respect everybody. And then, too, you don't know what the potential of an individual is. If you had looked at some of those boys that were state champions, before and after, haha. You don't ever underestimate it. People would surprise you.

You were talking about the depth; it wasn't the depth, it was the training, the ability to function, as these younger players, they got to play. And they said Kenneth was the substitute's best friend because everybody that played on the team got to play because they would just kept going down, and if the next guy got two touchdowns, well, J.B. called them useless touchdowns, haha. And the defense was good, too; they didn't score a lot of points on us. But respect, and potential, individual potential – it's just if these young people nowadays could realize their potential, because, man, there's some Edison's and GE people -- just all kinds of -- John Pauswangs, haha. They were can-do people.

KELLY: Did Mr. White get involved with individual academic classes like he did with the football team?

TARVER: Some. I know that one time, and I think that I was trying to remember -- I think it was Kenneth. Well, first of all, we had a Mr. Jenkins teaching our chemistry class, and for some reason he had to be out. Mr. White came in, asked if we had any questions, I forget now, but I think it was a question about balancing chemical equations, you know, and then he went into that and, man, he cleared it up just like that. [snaps his fingers]

And he went through the whole course almost in one period, and all of a sudden lights came on. Kenneth said that he was having trouble in chemistry, and he came home one weekend and asked Mr. White if he could talk to him about it, and he set up an appointment and went down there, and he said, "Well, man, nothing to it!" Haha. He was an educator, a communicator.

GOODSILL: Do you have any pictures of him?

TARVER: Just a few, in the annual, I think. Do you have those?

KELLY: It's just amazing, with his talent, that he ended up in a small school.

TARVER: Well, I think he loved it.

KELLY: I think he chose it.

TARVER: Yeah, I think anything he wanted to be, anything he wanted to be. Yeah, I think he loved kids and he loved to see them excel. It was just a natural talent. I talked to Mr. Ernest about him before he passed away, and I repeat myself, but he said that he could look at a person and he could find out his potential, and he said he was especially good at sports, but it didn't take him long to find out what you could do academically, too. But it was amazing, just raised the level of the whole school in less than two years.

GOODSILL: Very good story.

KELLY: Tell us about some of your teachers. I know Mr. White probably overshadowed them, but tell us about your teachers in high school, who they were.

TARVER: Well, Mr. Ernest was the one that had all the technical: math and trig, those kind of things, and Mr. White seemed to have a talent for picking good English teachers, and they would say if you get all your work done, we'll read you stories on Friday. They read some good stories; everyone wanted to hear the stories. And I told you Mr. Jenkins was chemistry. There's another little story: the first year, thats when we started winning. Well, Mr. White would go to the next game and give us a scouting report, and the second year he hired Mr. Parker, Paul Parker I think his name was, and he was -- all of the junior high coaches, football, basketball -- and he scouted the games for Mr. White, and he was algebra and math, so they filled in that slot a little bit and gave Mr. Ernest a little bit of rest.

KELLY: Who was your history teacher, Miss Berry?

TARVER: Yeah, haha. Yeah, she was there forever.

KELLY: Yeah, she was there when I was, as a substitute teacher.

TARVER: Yeah, she was a fixture. Ms. Ioa Landreth was a typing teacher, home economics, I think. Hey, you had home economics, haha.

KELLY: Did the girls benefit -- do you feel like they got a fair shake from Mr. White in attention as much as the boys?

TARVER: Oh, yeah.

KELLY: What would he do with the girls?

TARVER: Well, see, they had volleyball, softball. There was a little bit of dissension; a bunch of the girls wanted to go to the state track meet when we went, and they had a baseball tournament, a softball tournament, at the time, and Mr. White sat them all down and says, "Now, you made a commitment to your team, and you've got to live up to your commitment." So, they had to go to the softball game, haha, but he talked them into it. They knew it was the right thing to do, but they sure hated it, haha.

KELLY: Who were some of the girls who participated in athletics in your class?

TARVER: Well, all of them.

KELLY: They had to.

TARVER: Well, yeah. Well, it was pretty much –

KELLY: Who were some of the girls in your class?

TARVER: Betty Parker, Monnye Alice McCord -- I can't remember ... got to get my annual out. Beverly Sontag -- she taught Kenneth Hall how to play ball. [All laugh]

TARVER: You know, right on the tip of my tongue, but my mind doesn't work anymore. Ya'll about twenty years late on this. [All laugh]

KELLY: You've given us two really good aspects of Sugar Land, the Industries and the farming community, which we haven't heard too much about, and the school.

TARVER: This is the Tarvers. [looking at photo]

KELLY: This is my grandmother's garage!

TARVER: Yeah, I was going to show it to you. That's where we stayed. These are the kids that graduated, and the year they graduated, and the Tarvers and the Pauswangs. This is my mother in 1933 -- Uncle Benji's son, Alfred. And he's the one that was on the winning team with Coach Jenkins back in '38, and this is Uncle Otto's daughter, and this is Uncle Garrett's oldest son, and this is my Uncle Walter's wife, Annie Barosky.

KELLY: And who did she marry?

TARVER: Walter. And this is Uncle Otto's daughter, Edith Shepherd Tarver, and this is my Aunt Ellen. And Johnelle Pauswang Cooper, and Charlene Pauswang Steven, she lives in Florida.

GOODSILL: Whose father is Johnelle?

TARVER: Johnelle is John Pauswang's daughter. This is Charlie.

KELLY: Now, we met her granddaughter.

GOODSILL: Kelly. Great gal.

KELLY: Her parents were --

TARVER: Johnelle and Jerry Cooper.

KELLY: So, Johnelle was her Grandmother? So, Kelly was a Cooper. Okay, so Johnelle is Kelly's mother.

GOODSILL: Kelly's mother is Johnelle.

KELLY: Oh, yeah, she graduated in '59. Sure she is! Absolutely.

GOODSILL: We've interviewed different people and heard different aspects of old Sugar Land: the pharmacist, and a man who worked on repairing all the homes, and teachers, but we haven't talked to anyone who lived out in the countryside.

KELLY: We talked with Dot Hightower and she told us about Mr. White, and she just had nothing but praises for him and how he helped the teachers in the elementary school teach, and allowed them to teach as a team, and found out who was good in what area --

TARVER: And make the team leader.

KELLY: And they'd go from class to class and trade off and they really weren't supposed to, I mean, that wasn't the standard.

TARVER: It's amazing, if you have a good teacher, what a difference it makes, you know? It's just amazing.

MRS. TARVER: I wish Mr. White could know the admiration and respect these people had for him.

GOODSILL: Were you in Sugar Land when he died?

TARVER: I can't remember now but I think I was.

KELLY: I think he died in about 1956, because I think that's when Mr. Mercer took over. Little bit further than that, I think – see, I think it was six years. '56, '57.

TARVER: Yeah, right in there. And, see, I was still working at WKM then.

GOODSILL: Were you able to come to the funeral?

TARVER: I went to visitation.

MRS. TARVER: I asked Carlos the other day if Mr. White's relatives were here and that maybe he could talk to them and tell them how much he had admired and respected Mr. White.

KELLY: Dot said this affectionately, that the teachers called him The Great White Father.

TARVER: Yeah, Kenneth does too, haha.

KELLY: And he only wore white shirts too, and had gray hair.

TARVER: Yeah, Kenneth was saying that about the time you got completely tired and wore out, you'd look across the field and here he'd come, "Fellas, let me see what you learned today!" [All laugh]

KELLY: After practice.

TARVER: And he turned lights off 8:30 P.M. haha. It was something else.

TARVER: -- old Paul Martin, and this Vernon Goerlitz, the center -- they would come back the other way, so immediately as Kenneth turned around, he had a hole, and so he was going to get ten yards going forward. But we also had George Salmon coming across and getting the opposite linebacker, and then Popeye or myself would go down and get the halfback, the safety, and he told us whoever got the fake, either one of them could get the fake -- and he said, "Don't stop until you get to the goal line, run as hard as if you had the ball."

And he would tell the downfield blocker, he said, "Listen to the running back and he'll tell you either 'in' or 'out', and you take him in or out." So, what Kenneth would do, he would set that guy up and we'd come across and throw a side body block and he'd cut in off, and there wasn't anything but daylight. He was the fastest man in the state. Watcha going to do? (All laugh)

They said that a lot of times they would try to get angles on him, coming across, you know, they could cut off most people but Kenneth would outrun them with that angle, he was just so fast.

KELLY: Did Mr. White play football, did you know? How did he learn all that about football?

TARVER: I never heard, never thought about asking. But I knew he was a coach at Pearsall.

KELLY: Oh, okay, he was a coach.

TARVER: But I don't know if he had any experience himself.

KELLY: Do you recall at the time that you were on the team and you were doing all this -- did you ever have the sense that you were a part of something great?

TARVER: Oh, no, but I just wanted to be a part of it. [All laugh]

TARVER: I just wanted to do my best. And then, too, we had suffered so long; it was so good, the win, man, there was no limit. Whatever it took.

KELLY: You and Kenneth lived together when ya'll were --

TARVER: Toddlers. It was very difficult paying seven dollars a month rent, took two families to pay it, haha.

KELLY: They took in the Harringtons, Dot and Bright Harrington, when they first got married, there's a story about that, and they were living on a little brick house, I think on Brook Street.

GOODSILL: You can just imagine, you and Ken growing up to be these rough and tough fast football players, can imagine what you were like as toddlers? (All laugh)