

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Charles D. Stutzenbaker**

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Interviewer: Karl Baumgartner

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

Project / Group: Interview of Mr. Charles D. Stutzenbaker

28 Pages



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Charles Stutzenbaker with a flightless female mottled duck that was located in the grass by the Chesapeake retriever "Red", captured and banded before release back into the wild. Photo taken in 1963.

Transcript

BAUMGARTNER: Today is October 13, 2015, my name is Karl Baumgartner, and I am interviewing Mr. Charles D. Stutzenbaker at 3178 Mimosa Street in Port Arthur, Texas. This interview is being conducted by the Fort Bend County Historical Commission Oral History Project.

Let us start talking about growing up in Fort Bend County. Then we will move to your work history and your career with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department as a Biologist and much published author. When and where were you born?

STUTZENBAKER: Karl, I was born on October 8, 1934 on a farm between Fairchilds, Needville and Long Point in Fort Bend County. We lived there for a few years and then my Dad left farming and we moved to Rosenberg.

BAUMGARTNER: Was your father the first in Fort Bend County?

STUTZENBAKER: No, actually, my Grandfather Charles F. Stutzenbaker brought his family to Fairchilds shortly after 1910. You might find it interesting that I have been working for about ten years on a well-documented family history which starts in 1813 in Moravia, which is in the current Czech Republic.

In 1857 Jiri and Anna Jurkova Psencik left Vizovice, Moravia and arrived in Texas aboard the ship Frides. They settled in what was at that time a near wilderness near the small farming community of Wesley in current Washington County near Brenham. They arrived with four children including a 13-year-old daughter named Anna. One historical document lists the Psencik family as among the first 40 Czechs to emigrate to Texas.

In 1861, Fritz Sturtzenbecker, a single, 18 year old German boy arrived alone in Galveston and according to oral family history, began walking westward away from the coast. He eventually happened on the remote Psencik farm, hungry, cold and lost. The Psenciks fed him and temporarily sheltered him in the barn. Fritz remained in the general area and in 1869, married Anna Psencik when they were both 26 years old.

Fritz and Anna had 7 children including my Grandfather, Charles F. Sturtzenbecker. Charles eventually married a Czech girl, Mary Drgac and they had 4 children including my father, Alfred Wilhelm Stutzenbaker.

On my mother's side of the family, the Pultar and Ruzicka families along with others left Moravia around 1875 because of poor living circumstances and moved a short distance

eastward into Russia. Jan Pultar married Marie Ruzicka in 1888 and they had 4 daughters including my mother Kristina.

Living conditions in Russia turned out to be even worse than in Moravia. A family story relates that one morning, Jan went down to check on the mules and I might point out that at that time, livestock were held beneath farm living quarters. He discovered the mules missing and was able to trace tracks in the snow leading to an adjacent village. It turned out the mules had been stolen by the son of a prominent citizen and all efforts to recover the mules failed.

Jan moved his family back to Moravia to live with relatives. He sold all possessions and borrowed money and emigrated to America alone. He worked at common farm labor for two years in Virginia before being able to send for his family. In 1905, Grandmother Marie arrived in Baltimore, Maryland in steerage class aboard the steamship Hanover with her 4 small girls. The family moved to Cuba, Kansas where there was a Czech farming community and then eventually moved to Fort Bend County near the community of Beasley sometimes around the year 1910.

In 1926, Alfred Stutzenbaker and Kristina Pultar stood up after church services at the Presbyterian Church in Needville and were married by the Reverend J. R. Vilt and thus set the stage for my entry into life in 1934. Oh...yes, since this is a recorded interview to be transcribed later I need to point out that my original family name was spelled Sturtzenbecker but was later changed by family members to Stutzenbaker and Stutzenbecker.

BAUMGARTNER: There is Psencik Road today right there off of Mennonite Highway south of Rosenberg.

STUTZENBAKER: We are relatives. The Psenciks at Fairchilds are descendants of John Psencik who was the brother of my Great grandmother Anna Psencik Sturtzenbecker.

BAUMGARTNER: So you were born on the farm?

STUTZENBAKER: Yes, on the farm at home.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have a doctor or a midwife?

STUTZENBAKER: There was a doctor that came out, I was told, with a horse and buggy and his name was Dr. Balkey, one of the earliest physicians in Fort Bend County.

BAUMGARTNER: Wasn't there a Mennonite Colony somewhere out in that area?

STUTZENBAKER: Well, I do not have a good understanding of the Mennonite history in Ft. Bend County but I know that a group of them settled near current Fairchilds in the late 1800's and for some reason left. Then around 1900, Czechs began moving in. My family bought farmland just north of Fairchilds shortly after 1910.

The Mennonites created a small cemetery adjacent to Fairchilds Creek and after they left, new settlers used the cemetery. My grandfather, Charles F. Stutzenbaker was interred there in 1926 but later interred in the WOW cemetery in Rosenberg.

At some point in time, the one room Concord School was constructed a short distance from the cemetery. I have a photo of activities at the school that faintly show grave markers in the distance.

Karl, let me show you a number documents and pictures dating back to the late 1800's. If you are interested, you are welcome to make copies to be added to this interview report. Also, you are welcome to read through and perhaps use portions of this very extensive family history that continues through my own lifetime.

There are a number of interesting stories including the fact that old Fritz Sturtzenbecker actually met General George Armstrong Custer well before Custer's demise at the battle of Little

Bighorn in 1876. It seems that Custer who was at one time stationed in the army in Texas, traveled to the Brenham area to procure horses for the military.

Another interesting story concerns my Uncle Adolph, who as a young farmer, made bootleg whiskey to supplement his meager farm earnings. Uncle Adolph told me that he got wind of an impending raid on bootleggers operating on a number of adjacent farms so he dismantled his still and buried everything including a number of crock jugs with corn-cob stoppers in the cotton field.



(Top Photo) Girl's basketball game at Concord School located north of Fairchilds on Fairchilds Road.

(Bottom Photo) Fairchilds girl's basketball team in school yard with Olga Stutzenbaker Lily holding ball. A vertical headstone from the early Mennonite Cemetery can be faintly seen in the upper right hand corner of the photo. Photo taken about 1920.

The raid turned out to be a false alarm but he decided to discontinue the manufacture of alcohol and left everything buried in the field well below the depth the plow could reach. He reported the plowing configuration of the fields was changed and he lost the exact location of the burial site.

We both agreed the corn cob stoppers had long-since rotted away and contents of the jugs returned to the soil. We laughed that perhaps some person in the future might find the jugs and wonder about their origin.....another small case of history lost in time.

BAUMGARTNER: December 7, 1941. You were young...

STUTZENBAKER: I remember a portion of that day just like it was yesterday. I was out playing catch baseball with a neighbor when my mother came to the door and excitedly told me to come into the house immediately. She had just heard on the radio about the sneak attack at Pearl Harbor. She shouted, "Come in the house....the Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor and they might be coming this way!!"

I doubt she knew exactly where Pearl Harbor was geographically located but we all came to know this event was the beginning of great suffering and patriotism probably never to be approached again.

One of my older Cousins, Ben Dedek was a seaman aboard the aircraft carrier Lexington which was a major target of the Japanese attack. Fortunately the aircraft carrier was out to sea delivering airplanes to an island outpost and was saved from destruction.

Ben was aboard the Lexington when it was lost during the battle of the Coral Sea in 1942. He survived the sinking and spent the remainder of the war aboard a PT Boat and remained in the navy until retirement.

BAUMGARTNER: Is it moored in Galveston or Corpus now?

STUTZENBAKER: The retired, second generation Lexington is at Corpus Christi as a museum. The original Lexington is at the bottom of the Coral Sea..... here in the military history part of my family history document is a small section on Major Paul Stach. The Stach parents were our neighbors in Rosenberg during the mid to late stages of World War II. Paul Stach was a pilot and was leading a bombing run during D-Day and his plane did not return. His remains were discovered after the war and interred in the military cemetery in San Antonio.

The Stach family erected a small monument at the WOW Cemetery in Rosenberg complete with a sundial. The monument is only a few feet from my Pultar grandparents grave site. Unfortunately, vandals broke the brass sundial and I have often hoped the Stach parents did not live to see the monument damaged (continuing on)....That is a photo of the old dance hall in Fairchilds and there's the Concord School.

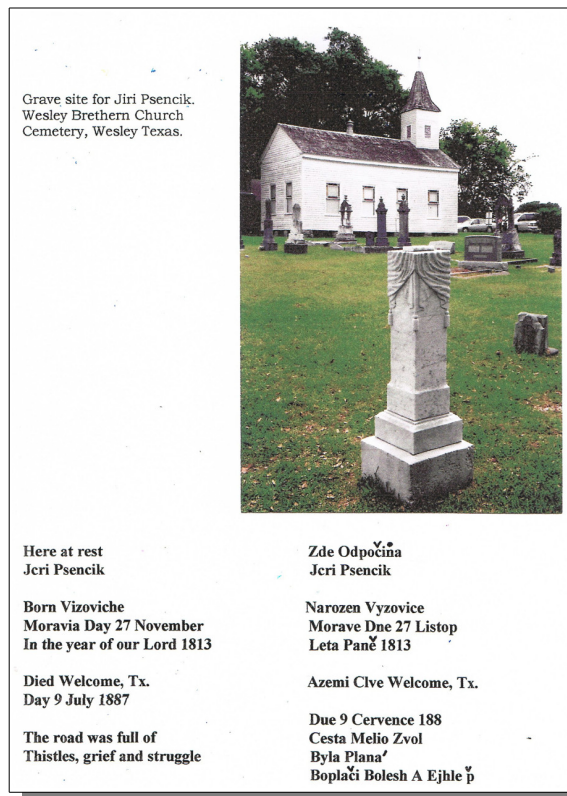


Photo of the Fairchilds Community Center (dance hall) which was located directly in the small town of Fairchilds. The date of this photo is about 1920.

Early community organizers sold shares in a proposed building. The money obtained was used to purchase necessary lumber and building materials. A professional carpenter was hired to supervise the construction which was completed by a volunteer labor force.

For many years, the building was the central focus for weddings, anniversary celebrations, holiday celebrations and periodic dances and barbecues.

BAUMGARTNER: Concord School was what and where?

STUTZENBAKER: It was a one-room, wood-frame school located north of Fairchilds, about 4 or 5 miles, almost at the Janda and Stavinoha Road....I believe they may have changed the road names.

BAUMGARTNER: It's still Janda Road and Psencik Road is just right down the road. Janda intersects with Mennonite Road.

STUTZENBAKER: Here's a picture of the Jiri Psencik's gravesite in the cemetery at Wesley. His tombstone is inscribed in Czech. He apparently suffered a number of misfortunes. The bottom of his vertical grave marker is inscribed with the statement, The Road Was Full Of Thistles, Grief and Struggle.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow this is really interesting.

STUTZENBAKER: Here are pictures of my dad and me on the farm.

BAUMGARTNER: Now what's this?

STUTZENBAKER: An old Farmall tractor. That picture was made in about 1935 and it was a used tractor so it was probably a '33 or '34 or perhaps earlier model.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow this is fascinating, I would like to leave something like this for my kids but I will never be able to duplicate the depth of this, but I have a lot of good stuff.

Ok, so you said your father farmed for a few years, and did your mom work or was she a housewife?

STUTZENBAKER: No, she was a full time homemaker. She knitted and sewed and loved to cook and I mean loved to cook. She baked kolaches and bread every week.

BAUMGARTNER: Sounds like a good Czech. And you had one sibling?

STUTZENBAKER: I had one brother, Alfred. He never married and died at age 62 from chronic vascular disease.

BAUMGARTNER: And your father took a job with Duval Sulphur Company in Orchard and you moved to Rosenberg?

STUTZENBAKER: We lived in the last house on the south side of town. There were cotton fields, rice fields and cornfields adjacent to us. It was a great place for a boy to grow up.

BAUMGARTNER: So you were just a few years old when you moved there.?

STUTZENBAKER: Well I started school there. I went to Robert E. Lee Elementary School and we started school in September 1941, and of course World War II started in December 1941. I started elementary school with a full classroom of kids and despite the war and various changes; nine of us eventually graduated High School together. I have been able to keep in touch with some of them and it has been most enjoyable visiting with them.



BAUMGARTNER: There was a reunion class picture in the Fort Bend Herald, which is where I noticed your name. In looking at the newspaper clipping and identifying people, you identified Barbara Bleil.

STUTZENBAKER: Yes, Barbara was one of the kids that started to school with me. We grew up as kids and graduated together. At one of the earlier class reunions I met Barbara's husband, Bert, who as you know, was a key individual in the organization of the Ft. Bend County Historical Society. I helped him with information on the location of some pauper graves near Richmond that no one knew anything about.

BAUMGARTNER: Who else was in the newspaper picture?

Nine first grade students who graduated from high school together in 1953



ROBERT E. LEE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

FIRST GRADE CLASS

1941

(Top Row from left to right) Janis Behrens, Frances Dodd, Evelyn Howard, Emil Tejml, Milton Kroesche and Charles Stutzenbaker.

(Middle Row, far left) Gertrude Knorr.

(Front Row left to right) Second from left, Warren Keith and fourth from left, Barbara Roane.

STUTZENBAKER: Of the group of 9 who started school and graduated together only 3 were able to attend the 65 year class reunion and they were Milton Kroesche, Barbara Bleil and myself.

BAUMGARTNER: That's neat to start out in the first grade and graduate with them from high school.

STUTZENBAKER: Looking through this stack of photos, here is a picture of Milton Kroesche's older brother Roland, and that's my older brother, Alfred with the Zdunkewicz brothers, Victor and Sylvester. They are holding a good number of ducks they killed on the opening day of duck season back in 1947. They hunted on the ranch that is currently the Big Boggy National Wildlife Refuge.

BAUMGARTNER: It is amazing how much things have changed so much. In your high school pictures there are 93 people and they are uniformly white Caucasians. That is before the Supreme Court starting requiring integration. It happened in '54.

STUTZENBAKER: I remember that experience quiet well. I think it was late '53 or '54 when I was going to Wharton Junior College. We rode a bus daily from the Post Office in

Rosenberg to the Junior College in Wharton and the route came directly through Kendleton which had a predominately black population.

I remember the morning that we stopped in Kendleton and 4 or 5 black students boarded the bus. There was a lengthy period of silence and I now understand how uncomfortable the black kids must have felt in a totally different atmosphere. But anyway, the integration process came about in an orderly fashion and I am not aware of any serious issues that developed.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you recall any interaction with blacks or Hispanics when you were growing up?

STUTZENBAKER: We had no contact with black kids. There were two Hispanic boys who were very popular and one was a very good athlete. One of the Hispanic girls was strikingly attractive and very popular. She was voted "Most Beautiful" in the school annual.

BAUMGARTNER: So when you were growing up you lived in town. What was growing up like? I am wondering how you got so avidly interested in the outdoors and hunting and fishing and the land.

STUTZENBAKER: My grandfather was an avid hunter and fisherman as was my Dad and also my Uncles and Cousins so the influence was there. Growing up, we lived in the last house on the south side of Rosenberg. I can't tell you the name of the road, but across the road was a big rice field. We grew up during the war and my best friend was Emil Tejml.

BAUMGARTNER: Is he still around?

STUTZENBAKER: He currently lives near Dallas and had a really productive life as an engineer and corporate attorney. Emil and I were inseparable friends in those early days. We grew up with slingshots around our necks.

We would go to the Brazos River or the railroad tracks or any City or County gravel road and fill our pockets full of nice round gravel rocks and travel as far as we could walk or as far as a bicycle would let us go in order to be home at the agreed upon time.

For our parents, there weren't any problems with kids scooting around through the country. We explored every back alley, every rice canal and creek, we made it down to the Brazos River, cooked out on the river and killed birds with our slingshots and later with

BB guns, shotguns and rifles. We cooked them and ate them; we just grew up being out of doors hunting and fishing.

My peer group were the kids that hunted and fished and those in athletics. Growing up in Rosenberg was just great -- you seldom saw a car on the street because of gas rationing and tire rationing while the war was going on.... you had to buy gas and groceries with Government coupons. I still have several of the World War II ration books in my files. We just grew up doing things that semi-rural kids do.

BAUMGARTNER: And what would you be able to shoot with the sling shots?

STUTZENBAKER: Rabbits, robins, especially robins in the late winter when the robins would come through migrating; boy we worked those robins over.

BAUMGARTNER: You wouldn't eat them...

STUTZENBAKER: Oh yes !

BAUMGARTNER: You ate them?

STUTZENBAKER: Oh yes, we ate mostly rabbits, robins, blackbirds and doves because they were the most plentiful to shoot at. We seldom got a yellow-billed cuckoo we called a rain crow. We hunted them relentlessly but (chuckle) seldom got one.

BAUMGARTNER: They look like, kind of a large stringy bird to me; they were not great eating, were they?

STUTZENBAKER: They all taste the same [both laugh] they are all good....salt and pepper made them taste better when roasted over the fire on a stick. When we got older and could go farther from home and started carrying shotguns we started spending a lot of time duck and goose hunting.

BAUMGARTNER: Where? Ponds or sloughs?

STUTZENBAKER: In rice fields, along the sloughs and river. When the new Lamar Consolidated School was built between Richmond and Rosenberg in open farmland, a gravel road was constructed to provide access. Immediately adjacent to the road and directly across from the school was a large rice field with several large ponds.

On a number of occasions my parents would let me take the family car to school early in the morning and I would drive the car and park it on the gravel road before daylight, put

my hip boots on, grab my shotgun and go out there and hunt ducks on those ponds. Since I was hunting less than a half mile from the school, I would check my watch and at the right time come out of the rice field, put my ducks in the car, lay my shotgun on the back seat, change into school shoes and go park my car in the school parking lot with the shotgun locked in the car and get to school just before the morning bell rang. There were not any prohibitions against it.

Anyway, I grew up just being an outdoor boy. We hunted and fished and camped and cooked and did all those things.

BAUMGARTNER: Did they have Boy Scouts then?

STUTZENBAKER: Oh yes, I was deeply involved in scout programs. Started in the cub scout program, advanced through the Boy Scout program, became an Eagle Scout and went through the Explorer Scout program.

BAUMGARTNER: Me too, I was an Eagle and my parents were real involved. Where was the high school?

STUTZENBAKER: I believe the name has remained as Lamar Consolidated High. When the school was built between Rosenberg and Richmond in a farming area, there was a very large rice production area on the south side of Avenue I across the road from the football field and extensive cotton fields facing the front entrance of the school.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow!

STUTZENBAKER: It was In the middle of nowhere.

BAUMGARTNER: What about other farms?

STUTZENBAKER: The Stern family continued to farm cotton there for many years and I am not aware of the names of other farmers in that area.



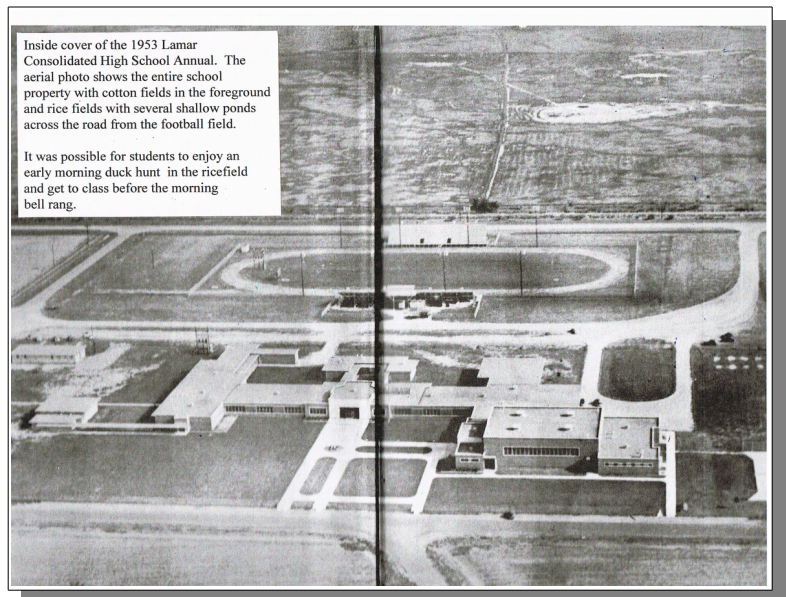
BAUMGARTNER: This is your yearbook with an inside cover aerial photo of the school and surrounding area.

STUTZENBAKER: Yes, that 1953 yearbook inside cover photo shows how easy it was to go duck hunting and then go to school.

BAUMGARTNER: And now most of the surrounding area has turned into a concrete jungle.

STUTZENBAKER: That's right its the way of the world.

BAUMGARTNER: That's true. When did you get your first car? Do you remember when you started driving?



STUTZENBAKER: We had one car, a family car and there were four of us in the family. The car did everything we needed it to do-- work, grocery store, visit friends and relatives and hunt and fish. I got my first car when I came home from the Army. I spent two years in the Army, saved nearly my entire military pay and came home to go back to school and I bought a used car.

BAUMGARTNER: What church did you go to?

STUTZENBAKER: We went to the John Hus Presbyterian Church in Rosenberg. The Reverend J. R. Vilt served both the Needville and Rosenberg Churches. When I started going to church they spoke mostly Czech but with some English. When I was a teenager Reverend Vilt was ready to retire and the church was withering away with the death of older Czech speaking church members so a young English-speaking minister was hired and the church attendance began to rise significantly.

BAUMGARTNER: Did your mom and dad speak Czech at home?

STUTZENBAKER: Only when older people where there. On rare occasions they would just start conversing in Czech between one another, but they never spoke the language when someone else was there.

BAUMGARTNER: Did anybody speak any German?

STUTZENBAKER: My dad spoke just a tiny bit of German.

BAUMGARTNER: So you graduated from high school in '53?

STUTZENBAKER: Yes and enrolled at Wharton Junior College.

BAUMGARTNER: What sports did you play?

STUTZENBAKER: I was involved in everything but I really preferred baseball. I played baseball at Wharton Jr. College and must admit....I was a better athlete than scholar. But I ran out of money, my dad got hurt on the job and money was a bit short so I dropped out of school and since the draft was still going on, got drafted.



BAUMGARTNER: Was that the Korean War?

STUTZENBAKER: Well just after. I missed Korea and wound up in the Third Armored Division and was sent to Germany. When I was in the Army I knew I wanted to go back to school, so I had 75% of my military salary automatically withdrawn and sent home.

My folks put it in the bank and when I got out of the Army I had enough money to start back to school and I finished college at A&M.

BAUMGARTNER: At Texas A&M?

STUTZENBAKER: Yes, I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Wildlife Science. From there I went to work for the Texas Game and Fish Commission, which was the forerunner of the present Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, you had summer jobs?

STUTZENBAKER: Yes...In addition to oil field work, I spent one summer working at the Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana dealing with plant recovery after a hurricane and managed to publish a report with the Texas Academy of Science. Most of my college classmates were interested in deer while my interest was in waterfowl and wetlands. I did not know it at the time but when I graduated, the State Game Department

was looking for a young man to do wetlands research work and they offered me a job and I wound up in Port Arthur. My job was to develop a research and management area on an 8,400 acre tract of land.

BAUMGARTNER: Is that the Murphree Wildlife Area?

STUTZENBAKER: That is correct except that it was originally the Big Hill Bayou Wildlife Management Area but was renamed after a fellow who was killed by a hunter in 1963.

BAUMGARTNER: Murphree Area has been a major project. What were the objectives?

STUTZENBAKER: The objectives were to establish a research and demonstration facility for wildlife habitat management on private lands. We researched issues like grazing, burning and fresh and salt-water manipulations. Our research findings were then made available to private landowners so they could better manage their lands. The Mottled Duck book textbook and plant book that I published came largely from that research.

BAUMGARTNER: Yes, I've read those books. Aquatic and Wetlands Plants of the Western Gulf Coast is the primary text that Andy Sipocz and Marissa Sipocz use at a seminar they teach at Sheldon Lake State Park that I've attended more than once. It's my bible on identification of aquatic plants. I've re-read sections of it three or four times. It's a massive book. How long did it take to write it?

STUTZENBAKER: The foundation for it began in my college days with a new-found interest in plants. Over the years I took thousands of pictures and began to realize there was a scarcity of good aquatic plant identification and management literature. As I approached retirement age it seemed a waste to not make use of some of those pictures so I started working on the book. Some of the pictures went back to the 60's or 70's. Once I started, it took about four years to do the writing, complete the detailed pen-ink drawings and print the several hundred photos. I spent a career here in Port Arthur and was able to retire at the desk that I sat at when I first came to work. I made the decision to forego higher salaries of an administrative position and remain as a field biologist. I fought many times to avoid being transferred to Austin to an administrative position and won those battles every time.

I had many opportunities for other employment during the years. I was offered a position on the faculty at A&M and offered a research scientist job in Canada, but had no desire to change citizenship. I was offered environmental jobs with private industry and had opportunities to work for the US Fish and Wildlife Service. But to make a long story short,

I was able to stay right here in Port Arthur and I still live in the same house that my wife Becky and I bought when we got married.

BAUMGARTNER: Well what a blessing. When was that?

STUTZENBAKER: In 1964.

We have enjoyed a conservative but very happy life in this much re-modeled and up-dated house all though the years. I have been able to do the wildlife work that I wanted to, publish my research findings and watch our family grow and prosper. It really is good to walk through the yard and surrounding pasture and admire the mature live oak, citrus, pecan, pine and water oak trees I planted 50 years ago.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you remember what your salary was when you started, your first job?

STUTZENBAKER: Yes, I remember it well. The salary was whopping \$340 per month. Back in those days, if one lived a very conservative life style in a small town, the monthly salary was sufficient to get by. The daily travel allowance was most helpful. For work travel involving an overnight stay, the per diem allowance was \$ 9 per day. For \$ 9 per day, you could get a nice motel room for about \$ 3.50, a good breakfast for 75 cents, a noon meal for about \$ 1.50 and the remaining \$ 3.25 for a steak dinner or if a person skipped a meal or ate a much cheaper fare, a bit of cash money was available for the next day. For a single boy this was living high off the hog.....(both laughing).

BAUMGARTNER: So when you were laying out the Big Hill Bayou Wildlife Management Area doing levees and water structures, how would you go about it?

STUTZENBAKER: Well I drew it out, but had help. There was an engineer in Austin and I had a civil engineer who was a land surveyor.

BAUMGARTNER: What was your approach?

STUTZENBAKER: We designed a system of low levees with both fresh and salt water control structures. This created 11 separate management compartments. We would initiate a certain land treatment in one compartment, and then the adjacent compartment was left alone so you could compare the differences in what happened. For instance, we would plan to burn in one and not in another, or put salt water in one and not put salt water in the other.

We were able to come up with techniques for managing wetlands, for livestock grazing, and wildlife use for all species of birds but especially waterfowl along with other wildlife species including frogs, fish, alligators and even red wolves.

BAUMGARTNER: So you like compartmentalized. You said small levees, how high were they?

STUTZENBAKER: The earthen levees had a settled height of between 3 and a half to four feet above mean sea level.

BAUMGARTNER: Was there flooding that affected the whole area?

STUTZENBAKER: Yes. Sometimes water topped the levees during hurricanes or really heavy rainstorms when we would get up to 6 or 8 inches of rain.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have aerial photos to start with?

STUTZENBAKER: Yes we did, and we used black-white aerial photos made by Tobin, a World War I aviator who came back to Texas and did extensive aerial photography beginning in 1936.

BAUMGARTNER: And did you begin with a certain portion of the 8,400 acres or did you try to get a master plan for the whole?

STUTZENBAKER: We had a master plan for the whole acreage.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow that would be a lot of fun!

STUTZENBAKER: Well it was [both laughing] but it would make for a long day when we walked the whole 8,400 acres on foot carrying survey equipment in real swarms of mosquitoes. In the beginning, we went by outboard as far as we could go and then waded in water the rest of the way. But for this 25-year-old boy, this was ideal.

BAUMGARTNER: How were the mosquitoes?

STUTZENBAKER: Well, the mosquitoes were always pretty rough but the worst days were when there was a hatch of deer flies. We laughed because it seemed when you swatted a deer fly, he would fall to the ground and then fly back to bite you again.

BAUMGARTNER: I can imagine, wow that seems to be like a great assignment.

STUTZENBAKER: Well it was, and I enjoyed every bit of it. A number of people thought we were rather strange because we enjoyed staying wet and muddy all day long. In the early days of my career and before I got married, I reserved my office work for nighttime hours.

BAUMGARTNER: And what was your office work, what would you have to do, reports?

STUTZENBAKER: Well, you had to compile your data and we had written reports to do. In the early days it was with a typewriter and several sheets of carbon paper.....nothing like computers and copy machines of today.

One of our major activities was setting up long-term, permanent vegetative study areas where we measured the health and abundance of various plant species. We were able to compare annual as well as long-term changes in the vegetation, which continues to be very important information.

BAUMGARTNER: So you were measuring the effect on the habitat. When you compared one year to the next two or three years were you anticipating certain results from your experiments, or was it primarily observation to see what would happen.

STUTZENBAKER: We did a great deal of experimentation within the management compartments. We experimented with various water levels and salinity. We set annual fires to burn off old, rank vegetation and watched new plants come up after the burns. We recorded the results of all those experimental practices.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you pump the salt water in?

STUTZENBAKER: No, the system was designed so we could catch fresh water coming down from major fresh water bayous from the north and take on salt water from the intra-coastal canal.

BAUMGARTNER: And how did you take it?

STUTZENBAKER: Opening of the gates, just gravity flow, Karl.

BAUMGARTNER: You put in water structures.

STUTZENBAKER: Yes.

BAUMGARTNER: And channels or something with the levees.

STUTZENBAKER: Well, of course, we borrowed the dirt to build the levees so there was a 30 foot wide inside ditch all the way around. We built 44 miles of levees.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow. And so how long did you do Murphree?

STUTZENBAKER: Well I spent nearly 40 years and retired there but I added new assignments. My job work was elevated through the system but I was always able to stay at Port Arthur. I was the only fellow in the Agency that was assigned to the Austin administrative staff and didn't live in Austin

BAUMGARTNER: Really! Another blessing.

STUTZENBAKER: That's right. [both chuckle]

BAUMGARTNER: During your career I'm sure you got pulled off on different tangents and different projects looking at some stuff outside of the Murphree.

STUTZENBAKER: Well that's true. I operated the Murphree Area but I also had the statewide waterfowl program. I was the representative to the Central Flyway and was the spokesman for the State of Texas. I dealt with the Canadian Federal Government, Canadian Provincial Governments and the US Fish and Wildlife Service and made a number of commercial flights to Washington and other locations to speak on behalf of Texas. I was involved in the setting up of hunting regulations. The thing that people do not understand is that under the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty that was signed between the United States, Mexico and England signing on behalf of Canada, all migratory bird seasons are closed and must remain closed until the States can prove with sound biological information that the seasons may be opened for short time periods without jeopardizing the overall health of those bird populations.

BAUMGARTNER: I know, it's just like duck season; they have to determine that ducks up north and the nesting habitats....

STUTZENBAKER: It was my job; I handled it for many years.

BAUMGARTNER: And you did that for the State of Texas.

STUTZENBAKER: Yes, for Texas Parks and Wildlife

BAUMGARTNER: So you greatly influenced hunting seasons.

STUTZENBAKER: Well it was a part of my overall job to go out and secure the season, provide the justifications to the federal government.

BAUMGARTNER: While we are discussing this, I would like to see Dove season open a little earlier on the south side of I-10.

STUTZENBAKER: Well... [both laugh].

BAUMGARTNER: That's a pretty politically sensitive job now, isn't it? I don't know about then but it seems like people are never happy.

STUTZENBAKER: Oh yes, it's always been the case where there are many personal attitudes and seldom can all persons be pleased.

BAUMGARTNER: So waterfowl hunting must have changed profoundly though, as far as abundance of birds, and maybe not so much in ducks, I think, over in our part of the world the geese evolved and moved to Arkansas I guess.

STUTZENBAKER: That's right, profound changes are continually occurring.

BAUMGARTNER: But isn't the duck population fairly stable, relatively speaking?

STUTZENBAKER: Its stable on a continental basis, but we are losing our ability to winter birds here in Texas because of land use changes including urban expansion into former wild areas and significant changes in agriculture....we are losing many acres of important rice land and many wetland areas have been drained and many more stand in the way of human expansion.

When I first came to Port Arthur, on a very windy day, I could shoot snow geese in the morning from my yard as they were bucking the north wind trying to get to rice fields less than a mile away. But that's all gone, there are no more rice fields The land has become an urban area.

BAUMGARTNER: Even in Needville not that long ago people could practically sit on their back porch and shoot geese...

STUTZENBAKER: And I remember that well when I was a boy when we hunted Big Creek on the Booth Ranch.

BAUMGARTNER: And Big Creek now is hollowed out and water goes down it 50 miles an hour.

STUTZENBAKER: We frog hunted and fished and duck hunted along Big Creek and Deer Creek. Do you know where Deer Creek is?

Among photos in my family history document, I have a photo of one of my Aunts standing on a very narrow wooden bridge crossing Deer Creek. Of course the original wooded creek is now a clean drainage ditch with a paved road crossing over the original wood bridge site. This is a good representation of the changes that have negatively impacted wildlife habitat and corresponding outdoor recreation.

BAUMGARTNER: So what are the biggest changes today? The ecosystems and the environment and the habitat and the ecology of the areas since you were a young man getting out of college?

STUTZENBAKER: Well, let's go back when I was a kid starting in the 1930's. When you got out of town (Rosenberg, Richmond, Needville) the majority of the roads were dirt roads and the more traveled roads were narrow gravel roads and water stood in the road borrow ditches year round.

Much of Ft. Bend County was prairie land with a very fertile heavy black clay soil interspersed with heavily wooded creeks meandering through the prairie land and eventually emptying into the Brazos River.

By the time I came along, most of the tall grass prairie had already been plowed but most farmers maintained a hay pasture and grazing acreage for horses and cows.

Today, the wooded creeks are largely drainage ditches and it would be difficult to find any prairie land that has not been plowed for cultivation.

BAUMGARTNER: What about fishing?

STUTZENBAKER: Catfish and some bass but mostly white perch or crappie.

When I was a boy, we had a key to the gate of some property between Richmond and Sugarland that was eventually purchased by the Houston oilman, Bob Smith. We fished in a big oxbow lake adjacent to the Brazos River and would bring out big stringers of white perch. We also had access to the Huggins Estate at Fulshear where we could go behind a locked gate and hunt another series of oxbows that came off the Brazos River. The other day I was looking at the computer maps and I tried to find those oxbows and they are surrounded by urban development.

BAUMGARTNER: And all of the little sloughs and potholes are laser leveled now. Earlier you said the prairies were wet but that's what you mean they flooded...

STUTZENBAKER: In the early days the soil stayed wet because there was only natural drainage...no government sponsored drainage projects. Wet conditions did not hurt the ranchers and their livestock prospered but farmers had a tough time and spring planting was often much delayed until the soil could dry after fall and winter rains.

In the early days, there were a number of shallow, brush-covered lakes scattered across the County and these lakes wintered tremendous numbers of waterfowl. Most of these lakes have been drained but one lake remains well preserved. This is Pilant Lake on the Brazos Bend State Park.

Smithers Lake or Albert George Lake (as earlier locals called it) continues to exist but in a much modified form with an industrial site along the shoreline. In my dad's time, he reminisced that Albert George allowed local farmers go catch catfish in the lake but they were disallowed from taking bass or perch. The lake had an exclusive hunting club. Club members came in by railroad to hunt ducks.

Practically all of the original shallow natural lakes in the County supported private hunting clubs where wealthy sportsmen came to hunt. There is a really neat book entitled A Hundred Years of Texas Duck Hunting by R. K. Sawyer. The book has photos and describes several of those early hunting clubs. I actually furnished some photos and narrative for the book and also edited portions of the book.

There was another really neat shallow, prairie lake at the small town of Orchard. The 1,800 acre lake was on the John Moore ranch and there was an affluent hunting club located there. The club hired local farmers to act as hunting guides and local farm boys were hired to pick and process the ducks killed by club members. But gas and oil and later sulphur was discovered underneath that lake and in 1926 the lake was drained.

BAUMGARTNER: Really.

STUTZENBAKER: The lake was three to four feet deep and full of aquatic vegetation. I actually knew several older fellows who picked ducks as kids and remembered the clouds of ducks that covered the lake.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow!

STUTZENBAKER: But that's all gone. The average person would never guess there had been a major waterfowl wintering ground as you drive by the community of Orchard.

BAUMGARTNER: Really. Don't the Moore's still own that property?

STUTZENBAKER: I really do not know but more than likely the land is still in family ownership.

BAUMGARTNER: You said something about the Bob Smith Ranch, R.E. "Bob" Smith was I guess one of Houston's best known civic leaders and property owners around here. Did you ever meet Mr. Smith?

STUTZENBAKER: Yes I did. Mr. Smith was an avid hunter and he bought a part of Mad Island Slough in Matagorda County. Mad Island Slough was a large fresh water marsh that drained into the bay and Smith built a nice lodge and hired a former Houston city detective to be his caretaker. Mrs. Smith was also an avid hunter and she had her own trained Labrador retrievers. But anyway.... the reason I knew a good bit about the Mad Island property was that during my early mottled duck banding project, Mr. Smith let me use my airboat to transport my retriever dog to catch and band flightless mottled ducks on the property.

BAUMGARTNER: What do you mean, flightless mottled mucks?

STUTZENBAKER: Well, when mottled ducks breed, the hen lays eggs and sits on them for about 29 days until they hatch. After hatching, the hen remains with the ducklings until they can fly at 8 weeks of age. The male deserts that family group and begins his annual molt where all feathers are gradually lost and replaced.

It is called the post-nuptial molt. They lose all their feathers including wing feathers and are flightless for a month. At the end of the month they have grown brand new pretty glossy plumage. They are flightless during the molt and that is when you can locate and catch them using a trained retriever dog.

The birds hide in the tall grass but the dog can smell and locate them easily. When the ducklings are ready to fly, the females undergo a month-long molt and are incapable of flying and this is when you can easily catch them.

BAUMGARTNER: Now is this typical of ducks, the molt?

STUTZENBAKER: All ducks do this. They have to replace their feathers once a year.

BAUMGARTNER: What month? What part of the year?

STUTZENBAKER: The majority of the males are flightless in June and July while most females are flightless in late August and September.

BAUMGARTNER: And how do you band them?

STUTZENBAKER: Well, of course, you have to locate and catch them first.

BAUMGARTNER: With mesh nets?

STUTZENBAKER: Well, several different ways. We used retriever dogs to capture flightless birds and we transported the dogs in airboats and helicopters. I flew the coast 3 times in a helicopter. We removed the doors from the helicopter which was on floats and this allowed us to land both on land and water. [Formatter, insert photo #16 here]

We wore tennis shoes and coveralls and carried a pair of pliers, pencil and a record book and a string of leg bands. We strapped on a seat belt and the dog sat on the helicopter floorboard between our legs and we would fly until we saw the flightless birds.

Then we would maneuver the helicopter down towards the flightless birds and land near where they tried to escape in the dense vegetation. We would get out with the dog and find the birds in the grass, catch them and attach the numbered leg bands and release the birds and fly on looking for additional birds. We caught and banded over a thousand birds using retriever dogs. You should have seen all this in the Mottled Duck book. There are several photos of the banding operation.

BAUMGARTNER: I watched my momma band birds for years and years. She banded birds, mostly songbirds for 50 years and sent the data to US Fish & Wildlife Service in Washington.

STUTZENBAKER We also caught flightless birds using airboats and very bright lights. We would spend the night in a large marsh area cruising along slowly looking for flightless birds. The birds would try to swim away but we could dip them up with a large dip net. In addition, we used swim-in traps. There is a picture of a swim-in trap in the Mottled Duck book.

BAUMGARTNER: What did you use for bait?

STUTZENBAKER: Mostly used rice, corn, but rice was by far the best.

BAUMGARTNER: How big a trap, like 6'x6' or 10'x10'?

STUTZENBAKER: Our traps were about 6'x8', some larger. I built mine from scrap stainless steel tubing that we got from a local refinery. The stainless steel framing was covered with wire mesh. Every few years you would have to replace the wire because of rust and wear.

BAUMGARTNER: And did you set them in shallow water?

STUTZENBAKER: Very shallow water.

BAUMGARTNER: Is that still the way they are banded today?

STUTZENBAKER: Yes, that procedure is widely used but currently, some biologists use rocket nets to propel netting out over feeding birds.

BAUMGARTNER: What, the rocket propels the net over them?

STUTZENBAKER: Yes, the small rockets are loaded with several types of gunpowder and a detonator. The rockets are attached to the folded capture nets and the rockets are then fired from a distant observation point through an electric wire.

BAUMGARTNER: Is this the way all ducks are banded? Or just mottled ducks?

STUTZENBAKER: Well Karl, regardless of waterfowl species, you must either catch them while they are flightless or use rocket nets or swim-in traps in a baited area.

BAUMGARTNER: So what's happening to the Mottled Duck population, I know it is under a lot of pressure?

STUTZENBAKER: Here in Texas, the future for wildlife and mottled ducks is not bright. We are steadily losing important habitat to urban-industrial development, wetland drainage and agricultural changes. The overall population is destined for a long and slow decline as habitat is displaced. However the population should continue to exist in safe numbers on the many acres of State and Federal Wildlife Refuges and Management Areas along with some private lands where wildlife remains an important part of the land. As far as hunting goes, the hunters of tomorrow will be happy with what they see when they get out of town to hunt. They will have absolutely no idea of the number and locations of birds that earlier generations saw. When I was a kid we could kill all that we wanted, but we killed only what we could eat, because in those early days we did not have a freezer.

BAUMGARTNER: I guess it is a lot like fishing. When I used to go offshore fishing in the '70's down in Matagorda there was no limit on Snapper and coming back the ice chest would be so full they would overflow on the deck of the boat; we would bring them back and take them to everybody we knew. I went out one time this summer and the limit now is 2. You go out thirty miles for 2 fish??

STUTZENBAKER: And burn that expensive gas!

BAUMGARTNER: I left at 6:30 from my place in Matagorda, at what used to be the mouth of the Colorado River and went out early about thirty miles to Texaco Rig 538 where I had spent many hours, got a nice early start and when we got there, we were the eleventh boat at the rig!

STUTZENBAKER: Well I am an avid fisherman and fish as often as I can. I turned 81 recently, and I have to admit that I have really slowed down the last year..... don't quite have the gumption but I fish a good bit in the Keith Lake Marsh. It's a very large marsh with about 3,000 acres of very shallow, open water. Often it is best to kick up the engine and use a troll motor or push pole. In about another 2 or 3 weeks the shrimp are going to start coming out of the little shallow ponds in the marsh and when the shrimp come out, the trout and redfish come in and fishing really picks up.

It is best to go out early in the morning and watch for fish feeding action. It is common to find gulls working over schools of feeding redfish as they force shrimp to the top and thus become available to the hovering birds.

BAUMGARTNER: Fishing the birds, it's amazing, how there are no gulls anywhere and then all of a sudden...

STUTZENBAKER: You tell me you, fish with field glasses to spot the bird then you know what I am taking about. I need to tell you Sabine Lake is an unknown gem. Thank goodness the lake is a well-kept secret and unknown to the horde of fisherman in the Houston area. You can still go on Sabine Lake and have a big part of the lake to yourself and some-days you can go to Keith Lake and not see anybody.

BAUMGARTNER: And so, how much of a challenge and a chore and a pain is it dealing with the different administrative levels as far as trying to keep the habitat the way we would like to keep it? Is there a problem with bureaucracy? Is it better or worse?

STUTZENBAKER: Well, there has always been a bureaucracy, but in my own personal view it is magnified. When I went into the profession just about everybody came off a farm or ranch, and was a hunter or fisherman and was really interested in wildlife.

Today, because of the legal hiring practices, they have hired many people who do not hunt or fish and have no experience and a weak philosophy towards land management. They are content to stay in the office and because they have little background knowledge are hard to deal with in making proper land and wildlife management decisions.

BAUMGARTNER: Are there any landowners in particular that you remember that you have had dealings with, I know you talked about Bob Smith, any characters or helpers or environmentalists...

STUTZENBAKER: Well I worked on a lot of private property and had dealings with a lot of ranchers, rice farmers and land owners but two people really stand out. David Wintermann over in Eagle Lake was a prominent wildlife enthusiast and managed his land for wildlife benefits. Joe Lagow managed the large Barrow Ranch and operated a large scale public hunting program for many years.

BAUMGARTNER: Has technology changed the Texas Parks and Wildlife or the environment or the ecology much?

STUTZENBAKER: I will tell you my big pet peeve that some may consider petty. When I went to work my boss said "We are going to issue you a pickup truck, a gasoline credit card and pair of field glasses. You go buy a clip board, a camera, some notebooks and get some boots and warm and dry field clothes. Get out in the field and learn everything you can learn about wildlife then tell us about your findings and give us your recommendations. We will take your recommendations and make the final decisions".

That's the way I went to work and I worked my early years in wet, muddy shoes. Currently too many people wear clean shoes, sit in an air conditioned office and stare at computer screens and don't get out in the field especially after 5:00 pm or on weekends.

BAUMGARTNER: And what is scary to me is one of the big things that we are trying get involved with in the Texas Master Naturalist program --the kids don't get any exposure at all to the outdoors anymore. I mean they go to the mall, and watch their computer games, TV, and I mean they don't know anything about the natural world.

STUTZENBAKER: Well let me tell you a little story. The street in front of this house leads directly to Taylor Bayou which is surrounded by a large productive marsh. When Becky and I first came here there was a steady stream of kids on bicycles on Saturday mornings. They had a minnow seine on the handlebars, a 410 shotgun, a fishing pole and some steel traps. The kids in this area lived on that Bayou.

In late evening there was a parade of kids returning home after a day on the Bayou. They most often had a string of small bass and perch, a couple nutria or muskrat and a couple ducks or coots. It's been about 10 years or so since we have seen more than one or two kids heading to the Bayou.

The older guys that I knew who grew up in this area commonly reminisce about living on the Bayou. They laughed about rolling used 55-gallon barrels to the bayou and using rope, wire and scrap lumber to fashion a houseboat of sorts.

Things like that can still be done. The Bayou and marsh are little changed from early times and fishing continues to be very good but there is little interest. Times have changed we are now an urban, television-computer society.

BAUMGARTNER: I asked David Lobpries.... what do you remember about Stutz and he said, "Racing him across the marsh to see who was the first one to get back to the boat". [both laughing]

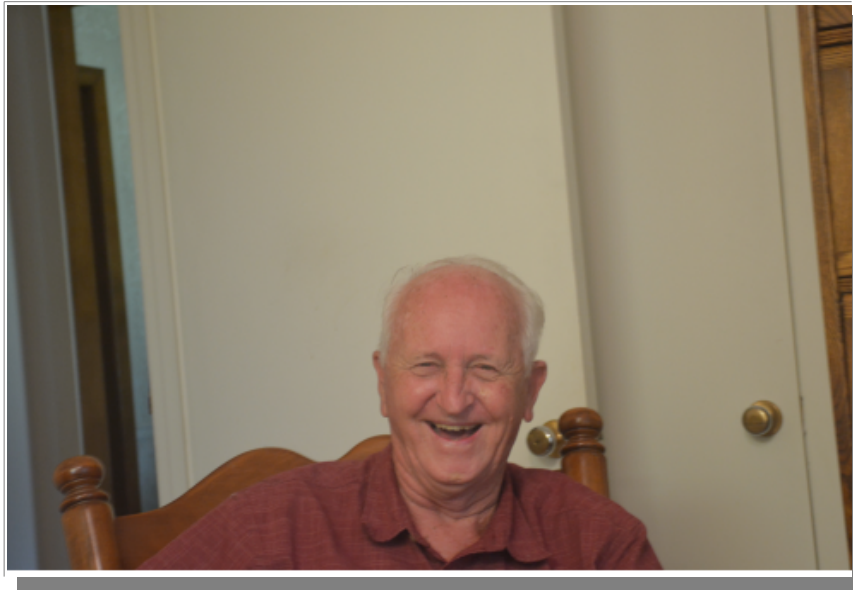
STUTZENBAKER: That's right, we used to run a race [both laugh] and he would give me 20 feet advantage and still beat me every time.

David is a topnotch person. His dad taught him a work ethic that is not found in many people today; he is a hard worker and really does a great job.

BAUMGARTNER: He has been the advisor at our Master Naturalist Chapter now since 2004. We have these guys from Agir-life come and go but David is such a notch above them and he has been a real help to us at the chapter. Of course he loves the outdoors and he wants to get out of the office whenever he can.

STUTZENBAKER: David is old-school. I should say one of the few remaining younger fellows from the old school.

BAUMGARTNER: But he has been fun to work with. Well let me see here, we covered a lot of ground. You've been having a good life and certainly a productive life as a biologist.



(Epilogue taken from Stutzenbaker's third grade writing assignment)

Whut is a Biologist ?

A biologist is something whut grubs around in the woods or marsh looking for bugs and other things. When he finds them, he put them in a bottle. When he don't find nothing, he walks around all day like he was lost.

A biologist is always wet from the knees down and attracts lots of flies, ticks and skeeters. He usually walks all bent over looking at things on the ground which is why he looks so stooped.

His face looks like old red lether from the sun. He talks terribul and calls weeds and plants by funny sounding Greek and Latin names. He can't read or write cause he always measures dead animals and puts the numbers in a leetle book which is always diffrint from whut my Uncle Bill and the boys at the pool hall say about wildlife.

He is not too bright because he is always putting marks on trees and red ribbons on bushes and fence posts to find his way home. His pants are always tore from barbed wire fences and his shoes look like they was made from mud. People stare at him, farm dogs growl at him and he always looks wore out at the end of the day.

The gray haired ones are nearly deaf. They never have any money. I don't know why anyone wants to be a biologist.