

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Charles Fredrick Mahler II**

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Interviewer: Pat Pollicoff

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcaba

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Texas.

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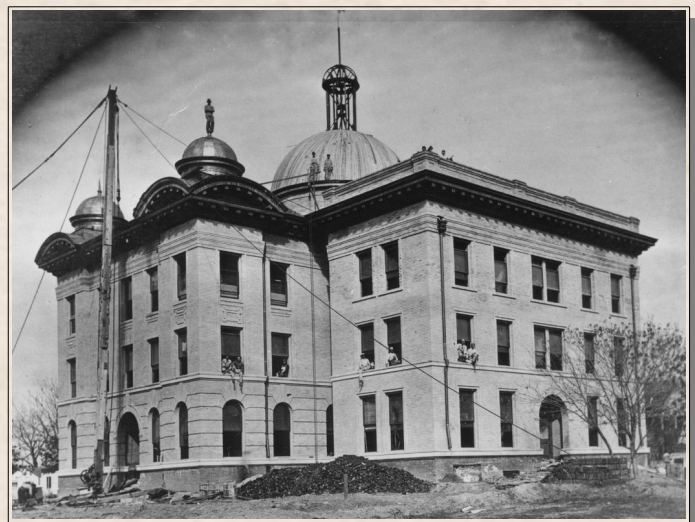
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Transcript

POLLICOFF: Let's get started with some basic biographical information. Tell me when and where you were born.

MAHLER: I was born in Richmond on February 1, 1952 at Polly Ryon Hospital. I turn 60 in two weeks (laughing).

POLLICOFF: It's a milestone.

MAHLER: Yes it is.

POLLICOFF: Now I know you said that your family had been here for many years or for a couple generations.

MAHLER: Briscoe family been here since here since 1835. My mother was a Briscoe.

POLLICOFF: Okay tell me about the family lore. What brought the Briscoes to this area? And where did they come.

MAHLER: My mother has actually written a book on it, I think somebody in the historical society has it. They were coming out of Tennessee primarily and they were horse traders. Came into the port of Galveston, they were not part of Stephen F. Austin's original three hundred but the second group that he brought in to settle the Brazos River basin starting in West Columbia and coming up to

POLLICOFF: Wow that's fantastic. How about your father's family?

MAHLER: My father's family emigrated from Germany. I think they came in on the west coast, down through Iowa and they settled in Orchard Texas in the late 1800s.

They bought some tracts of land from John Foster. Some tracts were given to them but this tract that we are sitting on right now was actually bought during the early 1900s. They were farming and ranching. At one time they owned all of the property from FM 1093 all the way to the Brazos River along FM 723 for about probably half mile strip. Essentially from about Westheimer Road to about where Kingdom Heights subdivision is now. Which is about 6 miles.

They were farming and ranching, because they brought slaves with them. This was discussed in my Mom's book. They were primary farmers, cotton and corn and they raised cattle during World War I. My grandfather and my great uncle raised mules for the army. In fact the army would not let them enlist because they wanted them to raise mules. They had a ranch down in Monterey, Mexico raising horses and mules to pull the army's wagons.

POLLICOFF: What kind of cattle?

MAHLER: Cross breeds strictly cross breeds back in the 1900s. Primarily Brahman cross – a good hearty breed. They had maybe 300-400 head of cattle on about 6000-7000 acres. They farmed up until the mid-'60s or maybe early- '70s then they started ranching only.

POLLICOFF: What type of work did your mother or grandmother do? Did they help in the operations in any way?

MAHLER: My grandmother was always in the house. Anytime we drove cattle to the shipping pins, we would stop in because the path we took from the river bottom up to the prairie went right by the homestead. So we stopped there for lunch and then continued on. Usually it was a day long process.

My mother was a high school teacher when she met my dad. She taught at Taylor Ray High School in Rosenberg. I believe it was Taylor Ray. Rosenberg and Richmond had separate high schools at that point in time. Actually they were big time rivals.

I think she taught English but I could be wrong. My mother had four older brothers. She started school at age 3 and graduated when she was 15 or 16. SMU wouldn't take her, because she wasn't old enough; so she went to Hockaday for two years and then went to SMU to earn a degree.

POLLICOFF: How about your father's family?

MAHLER: They were all water well drillers in Orchard. My dad wasn't a water well driller. I mean he did when he was young, but he went to work for Cameron Iron Works.

POLLICOFF: Is that how he came here and met your mother? How did he meet your mother?

MAHLER: He met through her brothers. They were involved in 4H projects together. He didn't actually start dating her until she was out of college and he was back from World War II. He was in the Army Air Corp. The Air Force wasn't formed at that time so it was the Army Air Corp. He was a master mechanic sergeant for a bomber group in England. They got married in 1950 at Saint John's Methodist Church in Richmond across from the county courthouse.

POLLICOFF: Have you ever lived outside of Fort Bend County?

MAHLER: For a couple of years in Harris County. After college, I was young and single so I lived in Houston. But pretty much Fort Bend County all my life working on the farm and ranch.

I didn't mind working in the cotton fields even though it itched like crazy and you're dragging a canvas bag down the row behind you. The corn, I hated because it's so tall in the summer time and hot. There is no wind getting through. We had a mule pulling a wagon, we picked the corn and put it in the wagon. It was tiring but a good, fun experience.

POLLICOFF: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

MAHLER: I have two brothers and one sister: Bill Mahler, Buddy Mahler and Drew Mahler Warren. I'm the oldest. I broke all the rules first (laughing) to find out what the boundaries were.

POLLICOFF: Tell me a typical day in your childhood - where you went to school and just what it was like growing up.

MAHLER: There was no typical days. I went to elementary school in Alief. Back then, Alief was a little farming community. Westheimer was an oyster shell road, there wasn't much there. We moved to the family land in '63-'64. I started junior high in Lamar Consolidated School District and my dad was not a big believer in idle hands. He made sure if he was gone that there was a list of chores for us to do. We were involved with sports in school and in 4H projects - lots of 4H projects. So there wasn't a lot of spare time to get in trouble. I think my dad made sure that's the way it was. I was heavily into sports, basketball, track and football until my sophomore year in high school. Then I concentrated on basketball and track.

We caught a school bus on FM 723, originally called Old Briscoe Road. It was just a gravel road at that time and did not get black-topped until about '66 or '67. The school bus would slip and slide going down the muddy road on rainy days. I think we caught the bus about six thirty in the morning after feeding all the animals and milk the cow.

POLLICOFF: One cow and what other animals did you feed?

MAHLER: We had over four hundred rabbits at one time. We were raising them to sell for laboratory test animals down at the medical center in Galveston. We were also selling the meat to a meat market in Rosenberg and one in Houston. And the skins we were sold to a tannery somewhere in East Texas. Then underneath the rabbit cages we were raising fishing worms. So it was nice little operation as a 4H project (laughing). We made use of every part of the cycle of life.

POLLICOFF: That is great, I never thought of doing the worms like that. We had rabbits growing up and they are so messy. Ducks, same way, same issue.

MAHLER: Yes and ducks exactly. Ducks are extremely messy you can't control where they go.

POLLICOFF: No you can not, they are just a mess. I love ducks but in the right place. Did you have a garden and what did you grow?

MAHLER: Small garden, just peppers, tomatoes, spinach, mustard greens and okra. I know we had okra and corn. I worked in the garden and picked the crops.

POLLICOFF: (chuckling) ...another task that was assigned by dad. All right, at that point you all are really more into the ranching. Your grandfather was he still working at the time? Did he have crops at the time?

MAHLER: Yes...my mother's father. His name is Andrew Clyde Briscoe and my grandmother's name is Amelia Moody Briscoe. She was a distant relative of Galveston Moodys, but how distant I don't know. They lived in Orchard. There was also Charles Frank Mahler and Jettie Priest Mahler.

POLLICOFF: So was raising cattle the main source of income for the family? Did you butcher some for your own use?

MAHLER: Yes it was and yes we did. Grass fed beef is better than any corn fed you ever had. It's the texture of the meat, it's not nearly as fatty. It's not tough and it just has a better flavor to it. A five hundred pound calf that's been on grass and mama's milk until the time you butcher it, it just taste better.

POLLICOFF: When you were in school did you have friends close by?

MAHLER: No. Everybody was spread apart so there really wasn't anybody out here. Renee Rosenbush lived across the street from our house. Then I had a cousin that lived across the swamp from where we lived. My friends were at school and they all lived mostly in town. I had chores before and after school and basketball practice. I was about ten year old when I started playing competitively for church league back when I was in Alief and then in high school. I was short in high school.

POLLICOFF: You got your growing spurt later.

MAHLER: I grew like three four inches one summer and my mom kept buying me pants, (chuckling) over and over again it seem liked. I played basketball all through high school and didn't play competitively after that. I tried out for A&M's team. Me and a friend of mine were the last two people cut off the freshman team at A&M. We found the twelve they kept all had scholarships already so it would have been a long shot for us to make the team anyway.

POLLICOFF: So you graduated high school in 1970? And after that you went to A&M?

MAHLER: Yes but I did not graduate. After 3 ½ years I left A&M because the real estate market was good in Houston. I left A&M hoping to tap into that. About a year later recession hits (laughing). I was majoring in Environmental design which is pre-architecture. It had a lot of building construction courses. That's what I do now, build homes. I never graduated.

POLLICOFF: What did you do for fun during elementary, junior high then high school?

MAHLER: Elementary and junior high I was pretty much told what I was going to do for fun. In high school I had a core group of friends. Every year we would go to Matagorda and go fishing. We'd go floundering and shrimping. Each summer we would have a party and hunt wild game... we'd go frogging too. We would cook it all and invite a lot of our friends.

Water melons was our dessert. We had water melon seed spitting contest and throw water melons in the pool. After oiling it up, we fought to see who could get it out. (laughing)

POLLICOFF: That's all great. What about community events? You told me that your family donated the land that this church actually sits on. Tell me what it was like coming to church every weekend?

MAHLER: My mom and dad did donate the land, yes. This church has only been here since nineteen eighty. In fact, it was the year my wife and I got married. The church was open in May of 1980 and my wife and I got married in August. My dad wanted to know how come we didn't have the services in the original church.

Well, we are sitting in the original church that we built like a barn raising. We laid the foundation, raised the walls and built the thing. My dad and mom had a bible study group at their house. We had gone to Alief Community Bible Church but they wanted get back to a non denominational type of bible teaching. The people at their home said, "Well let's just start a church." So my dad then donated about 2-2 ½ to start the church. This was the first building. One of the first members owned a lumber yard in Katy - Johnson's lumber. He donated a lot of the material

POLLICOFF: That's fantastic and so before that time you went to the church in Alief.

MAHLER: Alief Bible Church and my mom's family were all members at Saint John's Methodist in Richmond. That's primarily where I went to church growing up through my high school years.

POLLICOFF: So what kind of community events did you all attend?

MAHLER: Fort Bend County Fair of course. We were really involved in 4H projects. My two brothers were in FFA and I was in 4H. We raised steers, chickens, turkeys, pigs, rabbits. I showed horses, lambs, just about everything. I didn't win a lot because we didn't specialize I guess. We were a little bit too diverse (laughing). It looked like the Beverly Hillbillies going to Fair. We had the trailer loaded with crates of chickens hanging off of it on one side and rabbits on the other side. Because you pretty much checked in everything on the same day which was a Friday. It was challenging.

The fair was a full week. It was two weekends. We'd go there after school and feed the animals. We were off school one day, the day we checked in. Judging was usually that next Saturday and Sunday.

The parade was that Friday. Everybody would get off of school and the parade would go down the middle of Rosenberg and Richmond. We never participated in the parade because we were getting our animals checked in that same day (laughing).

POLLICOFF: Well that's fun. Obviously that was huge and still is obviously in the county. What other community events?

MAHLER: Well clearly you had your school events. I had track meets, basketball tournaments in the spring time. The majority was spent at home fixing fence, picking up tree limbs, doing the list that I had to do.

POLLICOFF: What about for the Fourth of July?

MAHLER: We would invite friends over and we would set off fireworks in our driveway since we live out in the country you could see for a long ways. Mom and Dad would do that and we had a pretty good size black top driveway at that time.

POLLICOFF: Did you set off any fires or blow off any fingers?

MAHLER: No we didn't. We had a few fire cracker pops in the hands but no body blew any fingers off.

POLLICOFF: Ouch! We grew up the same way. We had a few fires out in West Texas because it was dry.

MAHLER: My dad almost burned the barn down when he was younger. Right behind us here in Sugar Land is the old rail line that used to go out to Foster Farms' cane fields. The rail line came out to the plantation and dead ended. In fact, part of FM 359 was built on top of the line. They used convict labor out of the prison in Sugar Land to run the plantation and harvest the cane.

POLLICOFF: Tell me a typical day as a young married couple. Where did you meet your wife and what it was like living out here?

MAHLER: I met Paula, my wife on a blind date in Houston at one of the clubs. We met and hit it off. I didn't know this until after we married, that the night we met she went home and told her mom that she was going to marry me. We dated for about nine months. One evening we were going out to dinner and she starts a little boo-hooing and said, "Charles I want to ask you something. I don't know what the answer is going to be". Well just ask it.

She goes into this long spiel about not knowing where this relationship is going. "My mom asked me if I getting married. I want to know". I said, "Well what do you want to ask me"? She said, "Will you marry me"? I said "No," and the tears started flowing. Then I asked her if she would marry me and she said, "I don't know, that's so sudden"! (giddy laughter) So we were married about nine months later. I guess we dated and were engaged for about a year and a half prior to getting married in 1980.

POLLICOFF: That's really a great story. Where did she grow up?

MAHLER: She grew up in south Houston and graduated from Memorial High School. She was a city girl. We moved back here in 1983 after finishing our house. Our son was sitting in a bassinet in the middle of the concrete floor while I finished putting tile on the house. She loves it out here. Our daughter went to Sam Houston (University) and she is one of the few kids that actually was raised in the same house all her life. Most kids moved around every two years so being raised in the same house was a real big thing to the kids. Establishing roots, having roots makes a big difference.

POLLICOFF: And your family has such deep roots here. How many kids do you have and what are their names?

MAHLER: I have three kids. Eric was born in 1983 and he is twenty-eight. Amanda was born in 1985 and she is twenty-six; and Trey was born in 1987 and he is twenty-four. They are all still single. I didn't get married until I was twenty-eight. My oldest it twenty eight and I said, "don't rush it; just get married when you find the right person". Both my wife and I both said if we got married any earlier we wouldn't be married today. We had to get all our playing out of our system first before we got married.

POLLICOFF: She felt the same?

MAHLER: Yes, she felt the same way. When I met her she was dating Mike Renfro. He used to play for the (Houston) Oilers (football team).

POLLICOFF: Really. And you beat out Renfro.

MAHLER: Yea, well he had a wild side to him (laughing).

POLLICOFF: Tell me about your work. You've continued any of the family ranching operations?

MAHLER: No in fact I don't. I had just a small herd, maybe 1500 cows until about 3-4 years ago. When the drought got really bad, I was busy at work and just didn't have time. Raising cattle is a full time daily operation. You can't do it when it's dark – it was dark when I left for work and it's dark when I got home. Building homes takes a lot of time, a lot of time.

POLLICOFF: So you have your own construction company or did you work for somebody?

MAHLER: I worked for several different builders now. Start off in 1982 working for General Homes and then Perry Homes. I was project manager out in First Colony for about 3 1/2 years. After Perry Homes I had my own company for about four years. Some of my old friends at General Homes had started up a new building company, and they asked me to run their custom home division for them in Memorial. So I did that for about three years until it folded. That's when I started my own business again - Castle Builders.

I also work as a contractor for other. I have worked as a subcontractor and a construction manager for two other builders since then. In fact I'm working for one right now called Belmont Custom Homes. We build in West U (University) primarily. I started to work for him mainly because he had no knowledge of building house out in the country. That's the main part of my business - I build houses in Bellville, Cat Springs and all over. You have to go where the work is.

POLLICOFF: What organizations are you a member or do you have time to be a member of any organizations?

MAHLER: I have been a Deacon here for 20 of the 30 years that the church has been in operation. I am currently board president of Rosenberg Richmond Helping Hands, the food pantry. We gave food and clothing to over twenty-two thousand people last year. I volunteer there too. I built a building for them a couple of years ago in Richmond, George Park 2001.

I designed and arranged for the manufacturing and shipment of a building for an orphanage in Uganda. I have been to Uganda with our church. The program is now called Grace International Children's Foundation. We have an orphanage running in Uganda that houses about 95 kids. We have started to build a school and have gained some backers there.

I am involved with the Fort Bend Museum, serving on the museum board. I was also on the board of the Old Foster Colony Museum for a while. I figured I had to give up something. I can't do everything. Being a Deacon and on the board of Helping Hands keeps me pretty busy.

POLLICOFF: I'd say that does keep you pretty busy. Was your wife born in south Houston?

MAHLER: Actually she was born in Liberty Texas. Her mom and dad lived in south Houston. Her mom was working for Rico Chemical on Katy Freeway so they moved. When Paula's dad saw her out here at our house in rubber boots feeding the pigs that my kids were raising for 4H, he about came unglued. He couldn't believe his daughter was doing that. He said, "My city girl is out there in rubber boots and an old shirt feeding the pigs".

POLLICOFF: I think that's great, I think that's fantastic. Tell me what your kids are doing now?

MAHLER: My oldest works for Sanderson Farms in North Carolina. He got a degree in Poultry Science from A&M. My daughter, Amanda, teaches art at a charter school on the other side of Houston. She got a degree in Photography from Sam Houston State with a minor in art. I wasn't going to pay for her to go to the East or West Coast to pursue her photography career. While she still does weddings and stuff; she went ahead and got her teaching certificate. She is also teaching French. She was made department head this year so she's teaching French and photography. Trey is twenty-four and his given name is Charles F. Mahler, III. He graduated from A&M last May and is still living at home. Hopefully he has a job interview and a job waiting next week. He interned for two summers with an oil and gas company running in their health environment and safety department. He was in Arkansas and he would investigate well sites before and after they drilled. He did that as an internship for the same company for two years and really liked it and that's what he's interviewing for now. If he wants to go to North Dakota he could have a job in a heartbeat. This time of year is not the time to go to North Dakota.

POLLICOFF: What are the major changes you have seen in this area?

MAHLER: Traffic (laughing). I built my house in '83 and I had no neighbors to speak of. Now I'm located behind the church here. There was a little five house neighborhood to the east of us. That was the only neighbors I had for the longest time. I've got subdivisions on three sides of me now. It's just the growth influx of people coming out here and the traffic.

My kids all went in town to go to school. At least my oldest one graduated from Terry High School. My daughter was in the first graduating class from Foster High School; and my youngest graduated from Foster also. It's just the growth and the number of people looking. This is one of the few areas in the Houston area where you still go and find some acreage lots, 1-5 acre lots. Where you can build houses on and still be fairly close to Houston. Up on the north side of Houston you have to go past Conroe - out to Montgomery County to find tracts like that to build on. It's still a pretty decent way of life out here. The people are friendly for the most part.

POLLICOFF: The amenities are incredible, I mean I just coming down here looking at it. When I first moved in the area twenty years ago and today it's astounding to me the changes that have come about. Best-worst changes? Which is the best? Which is the worst? Traffic is the worst?

MAHLER: No, I don't think traffic is the worst - close neighbors is the worst. You can't shoot deer off your back porch anymore. (laughing) Ohhh! All of where River Forest is now, we used to hunt deer and hogs in that that river bottom land. I miss those days especially with ranching. Some of the hardest stuff you do with ranching was some of the most fun stuff. Being on a horse all day long ... I mean ALL DAY LONG going from the river bottom all the way up to the prairie by FM 1093 to ship cows. Chopping ice off the horse troughs in the winter time so the cows could get water. We use to have some pretty hard winters on occasion. That aspect of growing up... that's something that I have missed. But I'm not in a position because right now land is at such a premium in order to raise that number of cows. To do those kinds of things you'd have to live pretty far out from town. My kids asked me one time, they said, "Dad, why don't we live in a neighborhood so we can ride our bikes over to our friends house"? I said, "Well living in a neighborhood you couldn't go fishing in the lake behind you; you couldn't ride four wheelers; and, you couldn't go doe hunting in your front pasture. They said, "Okay, were happy." (laughing)

POLLICOFF: (laughing) Did the kids ever think about coming back and living in this area?

MAHLER: Oh yea, my oldest son wants to come back to Texas just as soon as he can. But he just got a promotion and transferred to North Carolina so it's going to be awhile. My daughter has always said she wants to live exactly on the same land where she was raised eventually. Now if that happens great. If not, she can make her own place.

It's having roots. I mean my youngest son wants to get good job. After interning in Arkansas for two summers; while he loved being there and doing the work, he was so glad to get back to Texas. As soon as he hit Texarkana he was able to get a Whataburger. You know that was a big treat for him because they don't have them in Arkansas. He's got to get his life started in east Texas or west Texas or this area. It doesn't matter to me as long as he's happy and doing well for himself.

POLLICOFF: I forgot to ask about your wife, does she work?

MAHLER: Yes, she is executive assistant to the president of Excel Auto Parts located on Hwy 290 and Beltway 8. It takes her about 40 minutes to drive to work.

POLLICOFF: What's your most vivid memory growing up here and all it meant to you?

MAHLER: A most vivid memory... what it all meant was just a sense of roots. A sense of this is home. This is a place to come to, it's a refuge where our family started. It just seems like the place to be. The most vivid memory, gosh there is a lot of them. The most vivid memories to me are times my Mother and Father would invite some friends over and they would bar-b-que. My Dad converted the barn into a party house. We had a pool table and a big bar-b-que pit on the patio that was overlooking a lake. In the afternoons and during the summer months he'd bar-b-que and we sit on the patio and eat with friends and family. That's most vivid memories of living out here. That and working cows. Working cattle is really a unique experience. If nobody has ever done it they need to do it at least once. It's kind of like picking cotton and corn, you got to do it at least once. Working cattle is hot and drudgery. At the end of the day you're tired and worn-out but you have accomplished a lot and it gives you a good feeling. Great satisfaction. The only thing I didn't like about working cows was the trek across the prairie up ... up where Rolling Oaks and Hines Nursery is located. In the summer time the mosquitoes would eat you alive. If you put on mosquito repellent ... the only thing was had was OFF. By the end of the day you were felt a mess, you smelled bad and it burned (laughing).

The most vivid... there are so many stories to tell about when we were working cattle. One was my brother standing in a gate and my dad runs the cows through the gate. My brother is laying on the ground with the gate on top of him and the cows are running over him. Cows are big but it was a wooden gates so it had planks so he was hurt.

POLLICOFF: We talked about some of your extracurricular activities but we didn't get back to the high school days, what did you all do for fun?

MAHLER: Go to the dusk-to-dawn show at the Twin City Drive-In in Rosenberg. We made our own fun a lot of times. We'd go out in the country and find something to do. We'd go hunt alligators at Fulshear Lake; down town Rosenberg had the Cole Theater. I went on my first date at the Cole Theater in Rosenberg where the Fort Bend Opry is now. We just found things to do. We'd drive around and have a good time. A lot of our dating experiences were spent just in cars and going around Richmond and Rosenberg seeing our friends. It was really quite fun (chuckle).

POLLICOFF: So it wasn't an issue trying to borrow the family car or truck.

MAHLER: No, because both my brother I being raised on a ranch we started driving when we were like thirteen and we had a... the ranch pickup truck was our vehicle to use. My first date I had to go drop my brother off at the theater then go pick up my date and take her to the theater. (chuckle) We made do. In fact, that pickup truck had a camper on it and after basketball practice I would take about three or four other guys home. They would pile into the back of the camper and most of them lived on the north side of the tracks and didn't have rides. In the dead of winter, it's not fun.

When I started junior high at Lamar, that was the year that they closed Jackson High School and the year they desegregated. You know for the most part Richmond Rosenberg didn't have any problems. It was really a fairly smooth transition.

POLLICOFF: Did you have friends in different minority groups?

MAHLER: Yea, it seemed like Hispanics and blacks were at odds more so than the whites and blacks. I don't know why. I think I only saw one racial motivated fight the whole time I was in high school. The people who were involved in sports kind of ran the high school. They had a lot of control/influence in the high school. We all played together and go along great. So there really wasn't any big problems. I took a lot of those guys home every night so there really wasn't a lot of problems that I ever saw. Maybe I lived a sheltered life but I'd like to think everybody for that most part, in this community and part of it is being a rural community, we all were doing the same thing.

POLLICOFF: Did you all have water wells on your property?

MAHLER: Windmills for the water troughs for the cows. We dug a lake to get rid of the swamp and to stock fish. The swamp was a breeding ground for the mosquitoes and giant alligator snapping turtles. I found one that big around ...it was huge. They are not friendly and very aggressive too.

POLLICOFF: Yes they are. So when you put in the lake did they go away?

MAHLER: No, we were able to see them better and shoot them (laughing).

POLLICOFF: Is there anything else that we haven't touched on that you would like to add?

MAHLER: No, as far as from a historical standpoint. My Mom did a lot of research book about the Briscoes family coming into Texas and getting off the ship in Galveston. The book talks about the original Spanish land grant that was given. Back then it was like you know this distance as far as a man can yell and be heard. It's all in Spanish. Washington-on-the-Brazos State Park has information on it; about half a day's ride in this direction and half a day's ride in that direction ...that's how they measure some of the land back then. Eventually it was surveyed but that's how they called out for the Spanish land grant. By the way my uncle was a special Ranger specifically for this locale. He had a Ranger's badge and anytime they had an operation going in this Fort Bend County he would assist. But he wasn't employed by them. He was commissioned and had a rangers badge but wasn't employed by them on a full time basis.

POLLICOFF: You come from a rather large family so do you have a lot of extended family that is still in the area?

MAHLER: Yes, we have Briscoe family reunions. My mom's first cousin Dolph Briscoe was governor of Texas for a while. When I was at A&M in the Corp of Cadets I was in Ross Volunteers so I was in the honor guard when Dolph was inaugurated as governor. You know the guys in white suits that hold the swords up for him.

My grandfather had one brother and six or seven sisters. They are scattered... we have the Wiliford family ...there are so many different family extensions in that direction. My one uncle, Frank Briscoe was D.A. (district attorney) in Houston for a number of years in the '60s. In fact, he ran against the older George Bush the first year he ran for House of Representatives.

In fact he and my Mama's oldest brother was Andrew Briscoe the Second. Next in line was Mason Briscoe who died in the spring time of this past year. He owned the Fort Bend Feed in Rosenberg. My mama's older brothers were twins, Frank and Bill. Frank died I think February or March and then Mason died in April of last year. No more Briscoe family on that side as far as my Mom's immediate family. My dad has one older sister still living at 94 or 95 years old.

POLLICOFF: Are your parents still living?

MAHLER: No, they are both deceased. My dad died in 2000 on April Fool's day and my Mom died September 19, 2006.

POLLICOFF: Obviously lots of Briscoe cousins, so do you have an annual reunion?

MAHLER: Our generation is trying to make it an annual thing again. It use to be an annual reunion where everybody would get together at the homestead place which right up here on FM 723. The house was built in the early 1900s. My cousin Chip lives in it. He's got a degree in restoration architecture and he is living there. In fact, he travels all over the world to do architectural restoration projects. He does missions in south Texas; he's doing a ski resort in Vermont. He's on the original homestead that we all gathered during hurricane Carla in '61.

All my Mom's brothers, the whole Briscoe clan, were in this one house during the hurricane. They were running generators and cutting cedar trees down that had fallen partially on the house. The house is four feet off the ground, it held up just fine. It's well built. That house is built pretty much on the same location the original house was that burned down back at the turn of the century. It is a typical two story home, pier and beam. The second floor is permanently converted attic space where all the boys slept. There was three bedrooms downstairs. The house has been added onto so many times it's hard to tell what was the original part of it. Originally the cooking part was way from everything else so they added a back porch. The house has been altered several times.

A lot of memories there. Lot of Christmases spent there. When everybody was home they would gather in this house. The hired help had little houses right behind the house where they actually lived on site. They had been slave's houses at one time. They were using it for the hired help when I was young,

My grandmother would have a turkey cooked while everybody would usually bring a little something but for the most part, she would take care of everything. I'm not saying she cooked it all herself, she had help in the kitchen cooking. The extended Briscoe family would gather there - my grandfather's sisters and my grandmother's brother. I mean everybody would be there essentially.

POLLICOFF: What were the main foods that everybody loved?

MAHLER: Turkey and ham, sweet potatoes, and casseroles. All the kids would be outside doing stupid things like popping fire crackers. On Christmas Eve all the kids went to see the newest movie. We'd all pack up and go to Rosenberg to the theater. This little bitty tiny theater, which was cool, for us it was huge thing you know.

Growing up as a kid out in the country was great we'd have corn cob fights, my grandfather fed his horses in corn bins and he would feed them whole cobs of corn. After they got through with the corn their cobs were left over. My cousins and I would arm up on both sides and we'd have corn cob fights. Throwing corn cobs at one another. Then we went to a Bois D'arc tree and pulled the horse apples off it. Those things are as hard as rocks and you throw those out there. We had china berries and sling shots (laughing)

POLLICOFF: Everybody shot including the girls?

MAHLER: Not so much so, not so much so. My daughter does that. The girls back then, no. That was not a girl thing to do. The girls, my cousins that were the same age as me. That just wasn't a girl thing to do. Now could they, probably so. (chuckling). But they didn't advertise it.

POLLICOFF: How about Easter egg hunts. I'm sure were fabulous out in the country.

MAHLER: Big things, big things. Easter egg hunt were big at my grandmother's house and my Mom continued the tradition having big Easter egg hunts and the only problem was she put the golden egg and have money in it and sometimes forgot where she put it. (laughing) She'd forget where she hid the plastic egg with money in it.

POLLICOFF: How many of the family would gather at a time like that? Either Easter or Christmas?

MAHLER: Easter it was primarily just immediate family. Frank was living in Houston he wouldn't always come out, but my Uncle Bill who never married did. So it was Bill, Mason, Bud and my Mom. Our families always got together for Easter egg hunt. Usually would do it right over here on FM 723. There is a pecan grove there; we would mow it the week before to get all the grass nice and short and we'd go over there and have a picnic. A big picnic, we had tables set up and have an Easter egg hunt.

POLLICOFF: Sounds great, well anything else? That you wanted to talk about at this point. I think were done

MAHLER: Okay.