FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **D. C. Pickett**

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Interviewer: Bruce Kelly

Transcriber: Olga Barr

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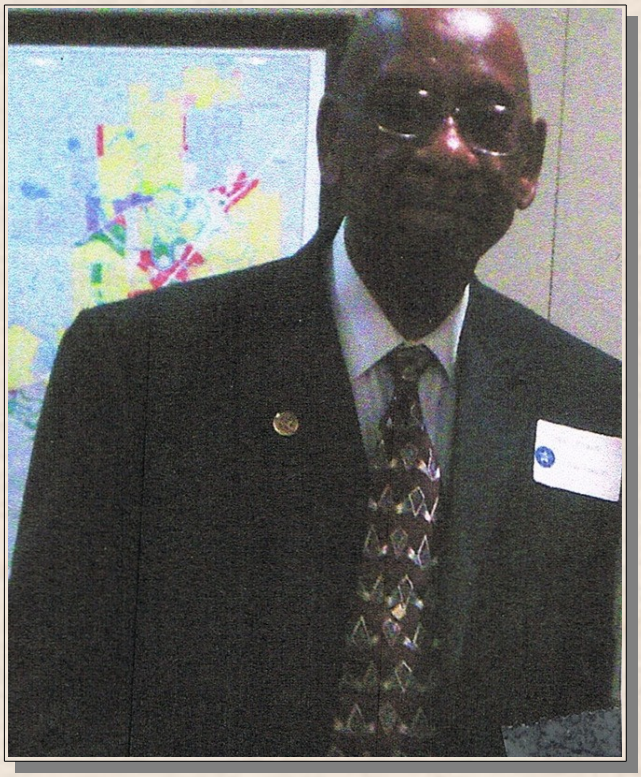

Transcript

KELLY: First of all, when were you born and who were your parents?

PICKETT: January 26, 1936 in DeWalt, Texas. My parents were Charlie Pickett and Daisy Pickett

KELLY: Did you ever know your grandparents?

PICKETT: Yeah, I knew my father's father. His name was Ben Pickett. He was the only grandparent that I knew from my dad. I had an uncle named Walter Pickett. And a cousin named Jake Pickett, Walter Lawson, Jr. My niece is Barbara Routt. I got Sandra Haywood. Then I got Voyvone Fields.

KELLY: Tell me all the places that you've lived.

PICKETT: I was born in DeWalt and lived there until I was 13. I lived in Sugar Land and went to M.R. Woods School in 1936 and graduated in 1953. I went to Prairie View A & M when I was 17.

KELLY: When you lived in DeWalt where did you go to school? Was there a school there?

PICKETT: Yes, in DeWalt.

KELLY: On the plantation?

PICKETT: Yeah, uh huh

KELLY: You went there until you were how old?

PICKETT: 'Till I was thirteen then I came to Sugar Land. I worked in the summer at Nalco.

KELLY: Living out on the Dew Plantation what was your very first job?

PICKETT: My very first job was driving a tractor. I LOVED THAT!

KELLY: What was the next job that you did?

PICKETT: On the plantation? I worked at the gin, at the presses.

KELLY: When you came to Sugar Land and started going to school, did you have a job?

PICKETT: I worked summertime for Imperial Sugar. They hired the kids in the summer.

KELLY: You graduated from Prairie View.

PICKETT: I taught for one year in Wichita Falls then I came to Sugar Land I worked at the city of Bellaire.

KELLY: What did you do there?

PICKETT: Worked in the Traffic Department, putting up road signs. People ran over road signs I'd take them down and put new ones up. I had my own office where I made my own signs with my machines. After that I came back to Sugar Land and worked for Sugar Land Industries for a while, for the feed mill.

KELLY: And after the feed mill?

PICKETT: They taught me for the Post Office.

KELLY: I knew you at the Post Office. You retired from the Post Office.

PICKETT: Right

KELLY: Going back to living on the Dew Plantation, tell me your impressions of your father. What was he like? What kind of work did he do there?

PICKETT: He was very dedicated. He was something like a foreman over the rest of them. At that time you had mules and you had a wagon. He was over all that. On the weekend he took the truck and would bring the truck home. He was over everybody. If something would break down he go fix it. He was a fix-it man. He would go fix it. He was in charge of everything. He worked hard. He loved to work. He was always working; he loved to work. He was very dedicated. When somebody got sick or something, he had to go out and do their work.

KELLY: Did you work for him at all?

PICKETT: No, I worked for the gin. He wasn't over the gin, Mr. Dedo was over the gin.

KELLY: It is my understanding that everybody that lived on the plantation worked.

PICKETT: Oh yeah they worked, yeah.

KELLY: Did your mother work on the plantation.

PICKETT: No, she was a housewife.

KELLY: What was your mother like?

PICKETT: She was real nice, she was fair but she was firm. If you did wrong, she would put it on you.

KELLY: Were you in trouble a lot?

PICKETT: No, but I was always sneaky. She would know what I'd do… If she'd be gone, me and my sister would be bouncing the ball against the wall or something that she didn't want. I would see her coming, I would sit on the floor like this and my sister would still be bouncing the ball.

KELLY: Where was your house on the plantation? Was it south of Hwy. 6 or north of 6?

PICKETT: South of six

KELLY: Remember where the DeWalt store was. Was it kind of behind the DeWalt store on that road?

PICKETT: The store was on north of six, wasn't it?

KELLY: The old store was, but I thinking the one that the Smitheys ran later that was a little convenience store.

PICKETT: Well it was kind of down in front, but it was down farther like going to Galveston—down farther.

KELLY: As a little child what would you do to have fun?

PICKETT: When I was working at the gin, I was young then. We were having to haul the cotton. When they get a bale, we'd haul that to Sugar Land. They had a pickup truck and when we'd get a bale we'd take to Sugar Land. We'd go the back way not on the highway. One day Miss Ruth [Dew], she asked me, you want to do it? Drive! I was thirteen years old driving—taking the truck—bale to the gin. When my momma heard about it she upset! But after she found out about it I had been doing it about six months. When I was fourteen years old I was driving a truck taking a whole bale of cotton to the cotton gin.

When I got out of school my dad and my brother, Rudolph, was driving tractors when I got out of school. I'd drive the tractors. On the dirt road let me drive the tractors. I wasn't getting paid, but I was just driving. I'd plow up a whole heck of land just driving.

KELLY: Is it true you were a chauffeur for Ms. Ruth? How old were you when you did that?

PICKETT: I was about fourteen. When you say chauffeur, you know, there wasn't no highway like there is now. We only had dirt roads. She had a big large station wagon, an old-time station wagon. I'd pick up the guys and put them in the back and take them to the fields and drop them off.

KELLY: Did you ever drive her into Houston or pick up guests that would come to visit?

PICKETT: I'd pick up guests, but I wouldn't go all the way to the town. They had what you'd call a dinky or train.

KELLY: You'd meet the dinky.

PICKETT: I would love to drive the station wagon on the dirt roads—I'd see the dust flying up. (laughter) It was like in the old movies, you know.

KELLY: Did you have a uniform?

PICKETT: No, I didn't have a uniform.

KELLY: What do you miss most about living on the plantation?

PICKETT: The freedom! Behind our house there was nothing but pasture. You could pick up your fishing pole and go. They had dynamite holes back in there because they'd tried to find oil and so no oil but they left the hole there—it rained and filled up and they'd call it a dynamite hole. I'd go in with a cane pole. I'd make my own hooks and my mother did snuff and I'd take the cork out of the thing and I'd make my corks. I'd go and come back with a bucket load of fish. Then the next day I'd get my BB gun and go to the woods and kill me some robins. I'd see a rabbit and I'd kill them too. Everything there was loose—I mean freedom.

KELLY: Children don't have that today, do they?

PICKETT: No, if fact everything today now is private. They don't want you to go into this and go in that. But back then we had acres and acres of land just to roam and do what you wanted to do.

KELLY: Did you ever go down to the Brazos?

PICKETT: No, I didn't go to the Brazos. I'd go a couple of times when we'd have a picnic or something, but I didn't go that far. We had Oyster Creek running right through there.

KELLY: Did you fish in Oyster Creek?

PICKETT: Oh yeah. In fact, I found alligators in Oyster Creek.

KELLLY: You did! What would you do with the alligators?

PICKETT: Sell the hide.

KELLY: Did you make good money?

PICKETT: What we'd do is shoot them. They'd go to the bottom. Next day they'd be floating. After they were dead and floating you could pull them out. We'd make good money. Alligator hide was good money.

KELLY: Where would you go to sell the hide?

PICKETT: I don't know this other guy would do that. He was older than me, but I would just help him out.

KELLY: Were your parents religious?

PICKETT: Oh yeah, very religious. We went to St. John Baptist Church right there in DeWalt.

KELLY: Tell me about that church.

PICKETT: It was a small church, but everybody went together. I'd wait until they had the anniversary and that's when they had the home cooked meals—the home cooked pies and cakes and chicken. Oh man, it was nice! I was junior deacon in the church. It was small, but I was a junior deacon. On Tuesdays, I would open up the services. It was nice.

KELLY: How many days a week would they meet?

PICKETT: Tuesday and Sunday

KELLY: Most people work six days a week didn't they? So Sunday was your day off. What would be a typical Sunday for you and your family?

PICKETT: Sunday – day off! We'd go fishing or go to the creek or a bar-b-que or something like that after church. Lots of times the church had something on Sunday like a bazaar or something.

KELLY: It was your social center. Everybody that went to the church, were most of them from the Dew Plantation or were there other people that came?

PICKETT: Most of them were from the Dew Plantation. My mom she called that the Sabbath day and you'd do nothing but go to church. You didn't cut no yard or nothing like that. No work on Sundays.

KELLY: How long would you be at the church on Sunday?

PICKETT: My dad would be there all day because he would go to Sunday school. I would just go to church in the evening. If they were having some special thing, we'd be there all day long. Most of the time it was just a couple of hours. But if they were having something and some other churches come over there and visit they'd be all day long. They'd have three or four different preachers there. It was a small church and everyone was together.

KELLY: Did you have a sweetheart when you were at the Dew Plantation?

PICKETT: No, I was too busy I guess. Life back then was so completely different from now. We never was rich, but we never wanted for anything. Dad was a good provider.

KELLY: What did you like least about living on the plantation?

PICKETT: Going on in the city—the stores and stuff like that—shopping. We'd have to come to Sugar Land. We had just a general store, but that was it. For buying underwear or clothes, anything like that you'd have to come to Sugar Land.

KELLY: Could you ride the train to Sugar Land?

PICKETT: No, no we'd just go in car.

KELLY: Well at about thirteen or fourteen you say you moved to Sugar Land. Why did y'all move to Sugar Land?

PICKETT: I had asthma when I was young. Every time I'd have an attack, I'd have to come to Sugar Land to the doctor. They had no doctors in DeWalt. I had some sisters living up there Sugar Land. You know Bertha and Lillie Mae?

KELLY: Yes I do.

PICKETT: Well they're my sisters. So I came to stay with Bertha when I was fourteen years old. That way if I'd get sick I'd just go to Doctor Kuykendall. They didn't have but two doctors, Dr. Kuykendall and Doctor Slaughter. I didn't have the attack often but I'd have to have a shot.

KELLY: Efrenefrin?

PICKETT: But when I was in DeWalt someone would have to come get me in a car and take me there, so I moved up here.

KELLY: Did you like Sugar Land and living with your sisters, or was it hard for you?

PICKETT: No, it was nice. It was a fast life. (laughter)

KELLY: Sugar Land was fast?

PICKETT: Compared to DeWalt, yeah!

KELLY: Did you already know young people here in Sugar Land or did you have to adjust?

PICKETT: Oh yeah, because the Dewalt School competed with M. R. Wood. Yeah, I knew everybody there. Sometimes I'd come to Sugar Land to visit my sisters, so I knew everyone in Sugar Land too. I was a resident of both places really.

KELLY: So you came to Sugar Land in 1949 and went to M. R. Wood School. Who was the principal when you were there? Was it Mr. Jingles?

PICKETT: Yeah, it was Jingles. He was very humorous.

KELLY: That's what I've heard.

PICKETT: Yes, he was very humorous. He knew what he was doing. He was very smart.

KELLY: Was he a disciplinarian?

PICKETT: Oh yes, yes. He would get you to do things that you didn't want to do by being humorous. He helped me out a whole lot; I had lots of fun.

KELLY: Do you remember your teachers at all? Do you have any favorite teachers?

PICKETT: I had one Mrs. Carr. She was bookkeeping. I loved bookkeeping.

KELLY: Were there teachers that encouraged you to go on to college.

PICKETT: Oh yeah—quite a few of them. I think Mr. Mooring, Leon Mooring.

KELLY: He taught at Fort Bend as well, didn't he?

PICKETT: Oh yeah

KELLY: Did they encourage a lot of students to go on and get a college education?

PICKETT: Oh yes. We had one teacher named Bob Rayford. He taught at Sugar Land, but he left Sugar Land and went to Prairie View. He was over the dry cleaners. He was the one that told me to go to Prairie View. I got a scholarship at Prairie View—a BIG scholarship.

KELLY: Athletic or academic?

PICKETT: Academic. $100!

KELLY: That was a lot of money.

PICKETT: [laughs] One hundred dollars.

KELLY: It paid for your tuition. Did it pay for any of your living expenses?

PICKETT: No, just tuition.

KELLY: I guess your parents were really pleased that you went to college.

PICKETT: Oh yeah they were. Lillie Mae and Bertha were working for the Sugar Company then, and they supported me with that.

KELLY: I remember your sisters. Tell us what they did at Imperial. What were their jobs?

PICKETT: They were bagging boxes of sugar in the packing plant. My dad worked there too.

KELLY: He left the Dew Plantation and came to work at Imperial?

PICKETT: Yeah. He worked there a long time. Not sure what he did.

KELLY: Why did he leave the Dew Plantation?

PICKETT: I don't know. He still lived in DeWalt.

KELLY: Did you play football?

PICKETT: One year at M. R. Wood and then I left there and went to go college. I played a lot of basketball before then. But they just got the football the last year that I finished, 1953.

KELLY: Did you play at Kempner stadium your home games?

PICKETT: Yeah over there on Woods Street.

KELLY: Which schools would you play? Do you remember who you played?

PICKETT: Sweeny, A. W. Jackson in Rosenberg. Powell Point in Beasley, Kendleton. We played five or six schools. Coach Jones, Coach Carrillos. Coach Jones, he was good! If fact, after I left they went on to the state.

KELLY: Who were some of the other boys that played football with you that year? Do you remember any of their names?

PICKETT: Do you know Charles Thomas? Forrest Johnson, he was from Stafford; John Rushin, he was from Four Corners. Quite a few of them.

KELLY: Did you win many games that first year?

PICKETT: First year we won a lot of games. I think we only lost about four.

KELLY: When black high schools competed in those days, they could win district? Did they go to further playoffs after that?

PICKETT: Right

KELLY: Tell me about basketball. You were a good basketball player? Was there a gym that you could play at at M. R. Wood?

PICKETT: Yeah, there was a gym there.

KELLY: You would play the same schools you did in football.

PICKETT: Same schools we played in football. In basketball, we had more teams because more teams were in basketball then--only one or two teams in football. Everybody was in basketball! We had a really good team. In fact, we went to the state—to the playoffs--regionals one year. Our coach he was real strict. He didn't want us to eat no sweets—none of that sweet stuff. Charles Thomas and I went out that evening and got some donuts. He found out about it and wouldn't let us play until the second half. We were losing. We thought he was kidding because he wouldn't let us play; we were the best on the team. Charlie was short but he was good, but I was tall. We were surprised, but he put us on the bench. He was real strict.

KELLY: You and Charles Thomas went to Prairie View together?

PICKETT: Right, in fact we were on the same baseball team. He was a captain; I was a captain. We didn't room together, but we was in the same dormitory.

KELLY: So you played baseball at Prairie View.

PICKETT: Yeah four years. It fact, we played baseball here and we called it sandlot baseball. You know what I'm talking about? We'd play every Sunday here. We had a heck of a team.

KELLY: Where would you play that baseball?

PICKETT: Over there by the stadium you know where Nalco's at? They had a stadium back in there.

KELLY: At the end of Imperial Boulevard. What was the name of your team?

PICKETT: Imperial Tigers

KELLY: We have a picture of the Imperial Tigers. Imperial Sugar Company sponsored that team.

PICKETT: Yeah. We played Hitchcock, Houston, Rosenberg, Mexico.

KELLY: Mexico? Where was Mexico?

PICKETT: Pierdas, Mexico. They found we had a good team, so they were a traveling team. They'd come through here and play us. We had cars lined up from back there all the way to past Nalco. We had four or five hundred people there.

KELLY: Did you have anybody do play-by-play?

PICKETT: Yeah not on the air but announcing Lee Blackburn and his brother, Cornel Blackburn had speakers. They'd make it real. It was good.

KELLY: Did the Tigers win a lot of games?

PICKETT: Oh yeah. We won. That's the reason others wanted to play us--we won. In fact, I was going to Prairie View then. I'd come the summer and play with them.

KELLY: Did Charlie play too—Charlie Thomas?

PICKETT: He played outfield.

KELLY: I bet that was fun!

PICKETT: Oh it was! In fact, back then when we was playing ball Saturdays we'd be ready for Sunday. Sunday morning we'd be out there on the field before even the coaches would get there. Lots of fun, lots of fun.

KELLY: So I bet Prairie View knew about you guys—baseball wise..

PICKETT: Oh yeah

KELLY: Did you play any other sports at Prairie View?

PICKETT: No, that's all.

KELLY: What did you major in at Prairie View?

PICKETT: Industrial Education

KELLY: Did you like it?

PICKETT: Oh yeah, I loved it. I loved to do things with my hands, and that's what it was all about. Everything industrial did—that's what I did with my hands.

KELLY: That helped you get the job at Bellaire to build signs.

PICKETT: Yeah, welding—first I was in the welding department at Bellaire. I was in the welding department back then and that's where I got my job there.

KELLY: What other things did you do for fun in Sugar Land when you were here?

PICKETT: I'd go fishing and go hunting. When I was a boy We'd play baseball and then we'd go fishing or go on hiking trips, or different stuff like that.

KELLY: Did you have a best friend or a group of boys that you hung out with?

PICKETT: Well just the ones the played base--like Jewel Jenkins and a David Lewis and Charles Thomas--there were four or five that I hung out with.

KELLY: Sounds like a nice group of guys.

PICKETT: Oh yeah they were all. If fact, that's one thing my mother always told me: if a group is bad divide from them. If I find anything or something wrong I'd leave out.

KELLY: Were there some bad apples in the area that you would stay away from?

PICKETT: Oh yeah, there were some bad apples.

KELLY: On the whole though in Sugar Land everybody worked, so there wasn't any poverty in that sense.

PICKETT: That's something about Sugar Land. Sugar Land was one of the most advanced cities in Texas. In Sugar Land there wasn't any poverty at all. If you didn't work there you couldn't stay there. We had everything. Sugar Land was self-contained. They had Imperial, the sugar company, they had Nalco, Sugar Land Industrials, and they had the canning plant, our own stores, own doctors, company doctors, stores, everything. When you worked for Imperial Sugar, you'd get the tickets as coupons and buy food with it. Doctor, go to the company doctor.

KELLY: When you were here they would pay people with company coupons.

PICKETT: Right, yeah.

KELLY: They obviously had to pay them some cash, right?

PICKETT: Oh yeah they paid them some cash, but most of them like groceries and doctors —it was coupons. We didn't want for anything. And another thing about it too is that back then we didn't know anything about segregation because everybody was together. Everybody worked at the refinery together.

KELLY: Blacks and whites worked side by side in the refinery.

PICKETT: Yeah. If fact, sometime they'd come to our house and play and we'd go to their house and play.

KELLY: There were two minorities in the quarters or Mayfield Park. It was the blacks and the Hispanics. Did they mix much? Socialize?

PICKETT: Yeah

KELLY: But each of them still had their own community too?

PICKETT: When the Sugar Company built homes for employees—I'd say that we had to pay about $6000 for a home. Everybody working bought homes. If you were Hispanic too. We lived next door to each other.

KELLY: So you are talking about when they developed Mayfield Park? You bought a house?

PICKETT: My sister did, not me. In the fifties because she paid about six thousand for hers. Everybody that wanted a home bought a home. All that land was for sale, and some people bought extra lots because they were able to and they were for sale.

KELLY: Wow that is fantastic!

PICKETT: We were always blessed because everybody had homes. Everybody else, Richmond and Rosenberg, they were scuffling, homeless. Imperial Sugar took care of their workers. If you wanted a car, they had their own credit union. In fact, Sugar Land had their own everything--their own credit union. You'd go there and say you work for the Imperial Sugar, yeah.

KELLY: Your job was your credit, basically.

PICKETT: Yeah. In fact, back then the only way somebody could get in the credit union was to be a Sugar Company employee.

KELLY: You said you went to Wichita and taught a year. You industrial education was a teaching degree?

PICKETT: Yeah. Most of the businesses in schools had departments; welding department, plumbing department and so on.

KELLY: But you only stayed there a year.

PICKETT: Yeah because I didn't like it. I couldn't put up with it. I tell you what we had a principal there named Barnett. He owned a private club. I think the main reason why I turned in my resignation because we couldn't have our own apartments.

KELLY: They were real strict about the teachers.

PICKETT: Yeah. I'd say my own home? He said, "Nope." So on the weekend we could go down and drink in his place.

KELLY: When you left Wichita did you try to find another teaching job or did you decide to get out of teaching?

PICKETT: Back then teaching was just like a high place—like a God or something. I knew I couldn't stay there. Because I was wild then, not wild but…

KELLY: The teaching life just wasn't for you, and they expected you to have high standards.

PICKETT: Oh yeah. Go to church and that's it--come back and don't go nowhere else.

KELLY: Yeah, be a good example for the kids. So you came back to Sugar Land and then you went into Bellaire and worked in the traffic department. Bellaire was kind of outside of town in those days—the edge of Houston wasn't it? It was just kind of developing in those days—new streets and things like that.

PICKETT: Well, just like Sugar Land they had older parts —been there a long time.

KELLY: Then you decided to leave and you came to Sugar Land and work at the feed mill.

PICKETT: Right, drove a truck.

KELLY: Drove a truck. Who was your boss there?

PICKETT: Mr. Bailey, he lived in Sugar Land.

KELLY: Glady Bailey's husband? He lived on Terry Street didn't he?

PICKETT: Yeah. I know your parents' know him.

KELLY: I'm trying to think of what his first name was. So you drove a truck. Where would you drive the truck?

PICKETT: Everywhere they had a dairy. I'd drive down to Matagorda, Coldsprings.

KELLY: So you delivered the feed to the customers. You liked driving; was that a job that you enjoyed?

PICKETT: Yeah, I like the truck I was driving because it was a bulk truck. It was no sacks on it. You put seeds -like the pellets- in the truck and I'd put the thing in the bin and it would burrrr, spit her out.

KELLY: You didn't have to do any lumping?

PICKETT: No, nothing like that. One thing about the dairies, you couldn't even get a wagon in there let alone a truck. Tight squeeze. Sometimes I'd have a trip to Coldsprings —I'd come back and 7:00 in the evening when it'd dark, he'd says this guy wants some pellets down there in Matagorda because he is completely out. I remember one night I left here at 7:00 going down to Matagorda. There're plenty of rattlesnakes down on the farm because there is nothing out there but those little plants. He had the lights and I backed the truck up and put the stuff in there and every night I here prrrr. (mimicking rattle) "Boy don't go out in there bushes! As long as you stay in this area it's okay."

KELLY: Dangerous. So you say you'd go to Coldspring, which was north of town up by Lake Livingston. And then you'd come back to Sugar Land and you might have go down to Matagorda?

PICKETT: Matagorda, yes, yes.

KELLY: So you did a lot of driving back then.

PICKETT: Went to Galveston. You'd be surprised Galveston had lots of dairies.

KELLY: I've heard that on the west end. So how long did you work at the feed mill?

PICKETT: At least three years.

KELLY: Tell me a little bit about the summer work you did at Imperial.

PICKETT: We cleaned. Sometime they needed us inside back in the plant, but most of the time we'd be outside cleaning around the tanks and stuff like that. My boss was named Mr. Curtis Hall.

KELLY: Ken Hall's father.

PICKETT: Yeah, him and another guy called Harold. I forget his name. There was two of them. They'd pick us up and take us out there. It was lot of teenagers—holes and stuff and we'd go out there shoveling.

KELLY: Did you paint anything? Did y'all do much painting?

PICKETT: Painting and scraping houses, yes. I was kind of mischievous. When Harold was our foreman he'd drop us off and go somewhere else. He'd leave four or five of us chopping. I'd always get where I could see the road coming in and coming out. We'd sit there talking and no one doing no chopping. I'd see him coming so I'd get the hoes and put them behind the building where they couldn't find them. There would come Harold and they couldn't find any hoes.

KELLY: But you'd be hoeing.

PICKETT: I'd be hoeing.

KELLY: Getting other guys in trouble

PICKETT: The funny thing about it, Bruce, is that when he'd come back to us, "'Y'all ain't doing nothing. Y'all better get the hoes and start doing something." They were mad with me. The boys told me they'd whip me when the boss left, but I'd play sick. I went over there and told Harold to take me home because I was sick, when really they were going to whip me. (laughter)

KELLY: That's a good one. What was Mr. Curtis like to work for? Was he mean, or was he pretty fair?

PICKETT: It's hard to say because he was never directly over me.

KELLY: Did they pay you by the week?

PICKETT: By a check—back then it was a week. I worked with Cotton. He worked for the Imperial Sugar Company, but he drove. They had a wagon that piced up the trash. He drove that. Sometime I would help him with that for the summer.

KELLY: Would that be the trash just for the refinery or for the city trash?

PICKETT: No, the city trash.

KELLY: Was it an orange truck?

PICKETT: No, it wasn't a truck; it was a wagon. Wagon and mules.

KELLY: Wow, did you do that all over town, or just in the Mayfield Park?

PICKETT: No, it was all over town. After that they went with a truck.

KELLY: What year were they using mules for the trash? Was that in the fifties?

PICKETT: Yeah, way back.

KELLY: How about that? I never knew that.

PICKETT: Remember when they used to have an ice truck? It had the blocks of ice.

KELLY: Was the old dairy still in operation over here?

PICKETT: Yeah, I went over there for a while too.

KELLY: For Mr. Scarbrough? What did you do there?

PICKETT: Helped keep the cows clean. The dairy had to be spic-n-span. It couldn't have nothing on the floor. I'd kept that clean.

KELLY: Do you remember what year the dairy closed.

PICKETT: No, I sure don't because it has been so long. In fact, it was before I went to college. It might have been about fifty-three—somewhere around there.

KELLY: Did you ever work at Nalco?

PICKETT: Yeah, in the year I went to college, well that summer before I went to college, I went to work at Nalco. They hired me. They wanted to keep me up because I was a good worker, but I had asthma and them chemicals wasn't good for me. That was one reason I went to college, I can't work here so I went on to college. In fact, if I had stayed at Nalco I'd have stayed there. Working with chemicals back you'd have no kind of protection--nothing, the mask was obsolete. Sometimes you'd dump a chemical in a thing up there and two or three weeks nothing... They'd have the mask on, but things would go inside the mask. So I left there.

KELLY: Going back to when you helped haul trash, where was the dump in those days?

PICKETT: They had a dump out there—you know where Food Town is now? Up on Eldridge Road? There was nothing up there then.

KELLY: I can remember the dump being what we called Stink Creek across the highway from Nalco. Do you remember that?

PICKETT: Yeah, I remember that too.

KELLY: Did you like that job?

PICKETT: Yeah, I was young. I loved it. In fact, I was working so long that I'd just loved to work. In fact, I worked at a Bill Williams (restaurant) for a while.

KELLY: Did you work there with Jewel Jenkins?

PICKETT: Yeah

KELLY: What did you do at Bill Williams?

PICKETT: I was a busboy. I'd keep the tables clean.

KELLY: That was a fancy place in those days, wasn't it? People would drive out from Houston.

PICKETT: Everybody knew where Bill Williams was.

KELLY: Did you ever work for Charlie White here in Sugar Land?

PICKETT: No, I never worked for him. The only time I worked for Bill Williams was on Thursday when the Lions Club came out—forty or fifty people.

KELLY: They needed extra help? So you'd do that part time?

PICKETT: Yeah, but I loved it then. In fact, when I was working at Bill Williams you didn't have a boss because you'd know what you were doing. Bill Williams was never there. Bill Williams was a bigwig; he was somewhere else.

KELLY: Did they pay you okay for the work you did?

PICKETT: For the work you did, yeah, because they'd feed you too. I ate most of my money right there.

KELLY: What year did you start working at the Sugar Land Post Office?

PICKETT: 1966. Ms. Iiams was the postmaster.

KELLY: She was kind of old by that time wasn't she?

PICKETT: Oh yeah. The postal exam test back then was eight hours. You had to go downtown to take the postal test.

KELLY: Tell us about the postal test then. What did you have to do?

PICKETT: One thing you had to do is route the mail through the trains, but we didn't even have that yet. That was on the test.

KELLY: What would happen is they would sort mail on trains between town to town. You had to know how to do that?

PICKETT: Know how to do that, yeah. We didn't do that, but still we had to do it on a test.

KELLY: Plus you had to memorize addresses, right?

PICKETT: And Mrs. Iiams didn't know that I was black.

KELLY: She didn't know?

PICKETT: Uh uh, until she called my sister one day. So I came out to see her.

KELLY: You were the first black or woman to work at the post office, and it was by mistake because Mrs. Iiams didn't know--

PICKETT: No, it wasn't by mistake. She didn't have nothing to do with it at all because the test went through Washington. You see when I passed the test and made eighty-five on the test I was applying for this office.

KELLY: Was it hard for you as a black person?

PICKETT: No, because there wasn't no mail. Like over at Mayfield Park—see back then people didn't get no bills like they do now. It wasn't no credit cards or nothing.

KELLY: Who were the other mail carriers when you worked there?

PICKETT: John Hess, remember John Hess? And there was another guy called Willie. Willie and I worked inside. John Hess was on the rural routes. And another guy called Billy Kozack. He lived on Seventh Street. He carried all to the Hill and the Flats; he carried all that.

KELLY: And in those days they were all walking routes, right, except for the rural route?

PICKETT: You'd leave the post office with your pack on your back.

KELLY: Did you carry you whole day's mail with you or did you go back?

PICKETT: We had what you call collection boxes. Mid way on your route, they'd put that mail in that box. You'd deliver the first part of your mail and get there and get the rest your mail.

KELLY: How long would it take you to walk your route?

PICKETT: It wouldn't take me long. Bill Kozack lived by the post office; he'd carry up to the Hill —carry all over the Hill and then come back and take all the Belknap addition. He was strong, he was strong. You know where Lakeview is? He had to walk to Eldridge Road and back--that was just one street.

KELLY: So what was your route?

PICKETT: Venetian Estates and Mayfield Park—the Quarters.

KELLY: Would you walk Venetian Estates?

PICKETT: No, no, I'd ride. I'd call it a motor route.

KELLY: You saw a lot of changes in Sugar Land through working at the post office. You saw the growth.

PICKETT: I'll give you an example. When I started working at the post office in 1966 there were 3800 people. When I left there it was 65,000. In the morning it was three carriers—we'd get there and put our mail up and work the window. People come and get their mail. After ten o'clock the window closed to go out on our route.

KELLY: When you started at the post office had it moved from the shopping center over to the Brooks Street location, or did you ever work in the shopping center location?

PICKETT: I worked some time in the shopping center route. I worked there about three months and they moved to Brooks Street.

KELLY: That was a real small facility wasn't it?

PICKETT: Right, yes, it was small. In fact, where the drugstore is, Mrs. Iimes was never there so we were our own workers. We had keys—everybody had keys. We come in in the morning and open up, put the mail up and leave and go on our routes.

KELLY: So you didn't need a lot of supervision? Did you like working at the post office? How many years did you work before you retired?

PICKETT: Thirty-five. Ooo, I loved it because I was blessed to have my route in Venetian Estates. I had everybody there. I had the mayor, city councilman, a lawyer, doctors. I get most of my services free.

KELLY: You enjoyed people. You liked delivering their mail and getting to know them?

PICKETT: In fact, Alkire Lake, you know where that's at? I'd deliver out there to. All out there was doctors. I delivered mail to Mike Newlin (Houston Rockets) Randall Onstead, owner of the Randall's stores. I'd deliver mail to Hakeem Olujawan (Houston Rocket), all of them guys.

KELLY: They'd give pretty good Christmas presents?

PICKETT: Olujawan didn't—I think his religion--

KELLY: Wouldn't let him do it

PICKETT: The time they won the title for two years, man I tell you what, he was getting so much mail. He was getting 15 or 20 bundles of mail. I'd have to make a special trip to his house. He was a Muslim and you couldn't go in the front door. The mail would go in the back door, and I'd leave it. He wouldn't give me nothing. But Mike Newlin, Randall Onstead, all them guys—one of those other baseball players was on my route too—they'd give me good gifts.

KELLY: Venetian Estates, Jim Ewell.

PICKETT: He was on my route. Now Jim Ewell he was a trainer—trainer for the Astros. He'd give me passes. I'd go to an Astros game—took my car and I'd park free—go to my seat. I'd tell you it was nice because I had a good route. In fact, lots of people out there they'd want to give me keys to the house when they'd go on vacation. I told them I couldn't do that—I couldn't take no keys. That's how close we were. When their daughters got married, they'd invite me to the weddings. Like on your parents Bruce, your daddy and them—they'd love me too. In fact, everybody was wonderful people. They were different from Sugar Creek because we had lots of problems at Sugar Creek. But at Venetian Estates, people had money but they didn't let it go to their heads. You understand what I'm saying?

KELLY: The people that moved into Sugar Creek didn't have as deeper roots to Sugar Land as Venetian Estates. You retired from the post office, and what did you do after that?

PICKETT: I was off one year because my wife was real sick so I took a year off. Then I started driving the school bus.

KELLY: I didn't ask you about your wife. Where did you meet your wife?

PICKETT: Right here in Sugar Land in high school. She went to high school here too.

KELLY: When did you get married?

PICKETT: I was thirty-three years old when I got married. I didn't do a lot of traveling after that. I was too crazy to settle down before then. But I got married when I was thirty-three years old.

KELLY: Was she the influence in your life that got you to settle down?

PICKETT: Yeah, well in fact I got tired. Thirty-three years old I had run down.

KELLY: So the two of you went to school at M. R. Wood--you rediscovered each other later in life, or did you kind of date each other for a long time?

PICKETT: No, we were just good friends. We'd go out with neighbors, so we were neighbors so we'd go out together and stuff like that. She had two kids before I married her. I don't have any kids at all.

KELLY: And your sisters, Bertha and Lillie Mae, are they still alive?

PICKETT: Bertha's passed, but Lillie Mae is still living. I had another sister named Lula Fields, she was my youngest sister. She was a teacher at Lakeview School. She died of cancer.

KELLY: You said Bertha worked in the packing department, right.

PICKETT: Both of them did. Your dad worked at the sugar company.

KELLY: My dad (Charles Kelly) worked in the offices, but my grandfather (Charles Edward Kelly) was a mechanic in the packing plant, so he worked with Bertha and your sister.

PICKETT: What I was saying is that the sugar company didn't have too many turnovers. Most people there were thirty to forty year employees I mean, because my sister had forty years and my other sister had forty-two years. So there wasn't any turnover at all. The employees at Imperial Sugar Company stayed there a long time. I think George Morales—he broke the record. Remember Mr. Morales, George Morales?

KELLY: Did he? Going back to your summer jobs at Imperial, did you ever do the dumping? (opened and dumped 100 pound bags of sugar into the hoppers)

PICKETT: No, I didn't do the dumping.

KELLY: Jewel said he did.

PICKETT: They'd put us in different departments. They had three go here, three go there.

KELLY: They were smart weren't they? (laughter)

PICKETT: Yeah, smart. But I did most of mine outside.

KELLY: Well is there anything else D.C. that we haven't covered?

PICKETT: You know that I was on the Sesquicentennial Committee.

KELLY: Sesquicentennial Committee, tell us about that. I had forgotten about that. We were on it together. But I didn't do a whole lot.

PICKETT: Yes, I was in charge of the parade. I planned the route, parade and everything. It came down Alkire Lake and end up at CoAmerica Bank. You know who our guest was, don't you? George Bush, he was the vice-president then.

KELLY: And he made a speech in front of CoAmerica Bank.

PICKETT: Right, right, yes. Allison, me and my sister were sitting right in the front row.

KELLY: That was in 1986 during the Texas Sesquicentennial.

PICKETT: You know who our sister city is, don't you? Somewhere in Australia!

KELLY: Well you had quite a responsibility then to be charge of planning the route for the parade.

PICKETT: Yes, I was working night and day with Lillian D. Hamilton. We worked with Judge McMeans—we worked with Jane McMeans—we all worked together. I think in Mayfield we tried to strategize the safest way. We had to talk to security from George Bush. They came out too to help us write it up because security.

KELLY: So you had a meeting with the Secret Service? Tell me about that. What was that like? Where did you meet?

PICKETT: At the bank, CoAmerica, upstairs at the bank.

KELLY: And they were men in black? I mean that kind of deal?

PICKETT: There weren't but two of them, just two of them. If fact they rode with me to the route I was going on.

KELLY: So you took them in your car and rode them around?

PICKETT: Yeah I drove them in my car on the route I had planned.

KELLY: Did they make any comments?

PICKETT: They changed when we come back to the bank. They changed that route to go around to the back instead of going to the front because they say someone could be on that hill—a sniper. That's is the only thing they change. And the amazing thing about it when he was talking you could look up on the hill and the freeway is running right behind that. You could see the guys in black coats on the hill.

KELLY: When you are talking about the hill you are talking about the overpass where Southwest Freeway overpasses.

PICKETT: Right, yeah you could see those black men standing up there. But I guess I lots of people didn't know what was going on—the ones passing on the freeway.

KELLY: That's probably the biggest thing that ever happened in Sugar Land.

PICKETT: Don't forget the capsule in the monument across form the Post Office. It's due to be opened in 2036.

KELLY: Yeah, you're right—twenty thirty-six would be fifty years.

PICKETT: I got a pair of eyeglasses, sunshades in there a note in there for whoever opens it. [chuckles]

KELLY: Dee Hamilton, who was in charge of that, she was quite a go-getter wasn't she?

PICKETT: Ooohhhh, she was so vivacious—energy. Sometimes she would call me and I would say, Dee I just left you. She would say, would you do this. I'd say, okay.

KELLY: She was a patron on your route. You got to know her that way?

PICKETT: Yes, she lived in Venetian Estates.

KELLY: Well that was quite an accomplishment to be part of that.

PICKETT: Oh yeah, I was real proud. I was proud the way it turned out. It was real nice.

KELLY: Did you belong to any clubs or anything in Sugar Land?

PICKETT: Oh yeah, I was on the Sugar Land Park and Recreation Board. I am an Alum of Sugar Land Fire Department. I'm working now for the program called CAST.

KELLY: What does CAST do?

PICKETT: They relieve some of the pressure off the policeman—writing handicap tickets stuff like that. Policeman is out there doing something else besides writing handicap tickets. We do that. No weapons or nothing like that. We do house watches. That's a relief for the police because they don't want to drive and look at some house when they can be doing something else, so we do that.

KELLY: Something I forgot to ask you. Did you ever serve in the military?

PICKETT: No, I never served in the military. I missed the military because going to Prairie View you had to be in the ROTC the first three years. When I was up to go to military, I got exempted. After two years I had a chance of going to advance corp—then go to second Lieutenant. We did the same thing they did, but we did it in school. I was exempted from the main thing.

KELLY: Very good D.C. If there is nothing else that is pressing on your mind to say I think we had a really great interview, and I appreciate it.

PICKETT: I'd like to say the people at Venetian Estates—I'm a lucky guy because back then there were 300 families there. And I was lucky to have them—I called them all of my family. Your parents were just wonderful. Ms. Burcalow on Belmar, put a petition when I retired. She put a petition for me to keep working. [laughs]

KELLY: D.C. you're just lovable guy. People love you because you love other people. You have a big heart.

PICKETT: There's another lady on San Marino named Mrs. Thompson. She walked with a cane. The sidewalk had sunk a little so when it rained water stood in the yard. When it rained, I'd take the mail to the door.

KELLY: You'd get out of your Jeep and walk, which was against regulations?

PICKETT: Oh yeah

KELLY: That's nice. You looked after your people. I know having worked with you at the Post Office that people had great respect for you because of the kind of person that you were.

PICKETT: Well I tried to treat people like I would like to be treated. That's the way I look at it.

KELLY: We don't have much of that nowadays.

PICKETT: But I was real fortunate because people like you were good people. I was blessed all my life to be around good people.

KELLY: Good people attract good people. Is there anything that you've learned in this life that you'd like to share?

PICKETT: One thing that I do—I look around and see the things that I can change—I'm gonna do my best to change them—It's my business to change it. But if there is something I can't change I don't even worry about it.

KELLY: Good way to live. Is there anything in this life that you haven't done yet that you'd like to do?

PICKETT: People with mental illness—lots of people if they had the medications. See lots of illnesses can be controlled by medication. People can't get the medication and that is when you see lots of shooting and stuff going. Bipolar people need medication. In fact one day I was on CAST working over there in First Colony. They got a call over the radio saying two women were fighting in the front yard. I couldn't do nothing because the police take care of that, but I heard the radio. Finally the guys reports that it is all right. He said, one of the ladies was bipolar, and he was trying to hold her down. She said she missed her medication because she didn't have any money to pay for it.

KELLY: So you would like to see something happen where people with mental illness are better taken care off.

PICKETT: Better taken care of, yeah. They say lots of that mental illness can be controlled if you have medication. My wife always told me that if I would be rich, I'd be poor because I try to help everybody I see.

KELLY: You'd give it all away.

PICKETT: [laughing] I'd give it all away, but I can't do that.

KELLY: You may not be rich, but you're not poor! As long as you have friends and people.

PICKETT: I enjoyed the interview with you, Mr. Bruce Kelly.

KELLY: Oh, that's nice. Thank you. It's good to be with you again. I never really had a chance to sit down and talk with you much at work because we were so busy, but I feel like that I've gotten to know you better. This is great.

Interview ends