

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewees: **Hugh Lamar Rouse**

Interview Date: 09/17/2007

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill and Bruce Kelly

Transcriber: Jane Goodsill

Location: Interviewed at 'The Teacherage' in Sugar Land, Texas. 41 Pages



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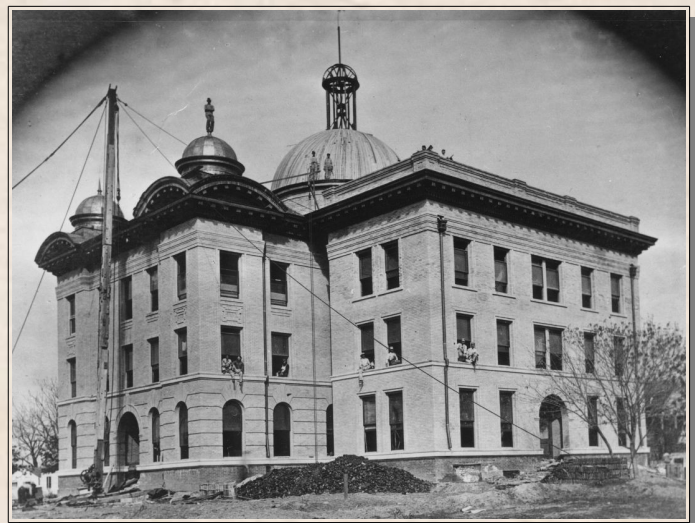
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Transcript

GOODSILL: I am interviewing Mr. Hugh Rouse at The Teacherage, the home of Bruce Kelly and Jane Goodsill in Sugar Land, Texas. Could we begin by your telling us where you were born and when?

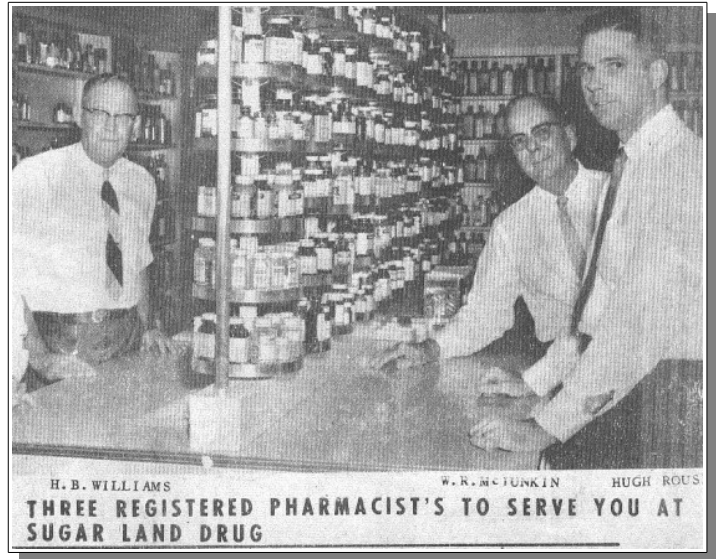
ROUSE: I was born in Corsicana, Texas April 17, 1926.

GOODSILL: How did you get to Sugar Land?

ROUSE: I came to Sugar Land to be the manager of the Sugar Land Pharmacy. It was owned by Mr. Kempner out of Galveston.

GOODSILL: We are interested in the company town of Sugar Land the Company but could you tell us a little bit about your growing up years?

ROUSE: I worked in drug stores as a child and worked on a soda fountain in a drug store.



KELLY: You were a soda jerk?

ROUSE: A soda jerk! There were very few of them, about 6 drug stores in Corsicana that had fountains. So there weren't many kids that had the opportunity that I had to work on the soda fountain. It was one of the cushy jobs in town. All the kids came in and had cokes and sandwiches. I had the number one job in Corsicana as far as those in the High School were concerned.

KELLY: At that time Corsicana was a pretty thriving place, wasn't it?

ROUSE: We had a population of about 8,000. We had a steel mill, the original rotary drill for oil was made in Corsicana and we had Oil and Oil City Iron works. We had a real thriving community because we had quite a few oil people who came into town. One of the major companies was Magnolia Petroleum, started in Corsicana. And then we had several other small oil companies that collected oil. At that time you had to collect oil and truck it out because there was no pipeline.

KELLY: What did your father do?

ROUSE: My father owned a used car business in Corsicana, Tx. There were only three of us in high school that had automobiles. I was one because my dad was in the business. It was nice.

GOODSILL: You had a nice life as a high schooler!

ROUSE: I did! I enjoyed high school! (Laughs)

KELLY: So your dad didn't get you to try to work on cars to become a mechanic?

ROUSE: No, he wanted me to be a lawyer. (Laughs) He wanted me to have a company that took care of bonds and estates and things like that.

KELLY: So you went to high school in Corsicana, then what happened?

ROUSE: Then I went to the University of Texas. I spent a year at the University of Texas. I was 16 years old when I went to the University of Texas.

KELLY: You're kidding?

ROUSE: There were only eleven grades and I skipped fourth grade.

KELLY: They moved you up?

ROUSE: Yes. It was a bad, bad thing to do, let me tell you, because you are a year younger than everybody.

KELLY: Socially it is not very good.

ROUSE: Socially it is not very good. And athletically it is not very good.

GOODSILL: So it was 1942 after one year at UT?

ROUSE: 1942. Course the war had broken out in December 1941. When I got to be 17 years old I joined up in the Navy Air Corps. At that time we didn't call it air corps but that is what I signed up for was to become a pilot in the Navy. We got called up as soon ... they told everybody that we were going to stay there until we got a degree. Of course I thought "Three years." (Laughs) As soon as they got everyone signed up they called the Marines up and Navy up, practically on the same day. And hauled us all out and we went to Norman, Oklahoma to flight school, pre flight.

Then we got a directive from the navy department that they didn't need any more pilots. They needed crewmen. So I went to Aviation Radio School. I spent around a year and three months in the Aleutians. The Japanese wasn't our problem. It was the weather. The weather was our bigger problem than the Japs.

KELLY: How was the weather a problem?

ROUSE: The weather can change. That's where all the weather for the United States forms, right there in the Bering Sea. It is the coldest water in the world. It develops up there then comes down across Seattle. If you notice the weather, it all starts up there.

KELLY: So fronts would prevent... would there be high winds, snow, everything?

ROUSE: [nods] It's called Willow Walls, they are storms in the Aleutians that come all the way through, as far west as Alaska. That's what you have when you have a Blue Norther'.

KELLY: Sure. Would it prevent you from going on your missions?

ROUSE: It did. Nothing moves. In fact we had to use a mask, everything covered. The wind was blowing so hard that the crystal on the snow would cut your face or anything that was exposed. Very few things moved. Not even the traffic. Everything just comes to a halt.

KELLY: When you were discharged what rank were you?

ROUSE: I was a Radio Man Second Class.

KELLY: After the war what did you do?

ROUSE: I went back to the University of Oklahoma to finish my degree. I had a year at Texas. Then I went back because I'd gotten to know the people at OU.

KELLY: In Norman?

ROUSE: In Norman. At Texas they ran us all over. The pharmacy building was the third floor of the chemistry building. They had their own little enclave and we were sort of stepchildren. So at OU, they had a great big nice... At UT they ran us all over the campus. You may have a class on the north end of campus and your next pharmacy class would be on the south end of the campus. At OU they had their own great big building; they didn't run you all over. And you'd have 10 minutes to get from one place to another.

GOODSILL: Before the war you had already decided you wanted to be in pharmacy?

ROUSE: Yeah. From my years of being a soda jerk. My father would rather I go to law school but he was happy enough. My brother was a pharmacist. If you remember I have a brother here.

KELLY: I do remember! So you followed your older brother's footsteps?

ROUSE: I got my job in Corsicana because of my brother. There were so many people in line wanting that job. Half the boys in the school had gone to every store there trying to be a soda jerk.

KELLY: Well, was your brother a pharmacist at the time?

ROUSE: Yeah.

KELLY: Ok, so you went to pharmacy school, you graduated from University of Oklahoma. What was your first job?

ROUSE: It was in a prescription shop in Oklahoma City. In the meantime I got married a few weeks after I got out of college. She was going to pharmacist school.

KELLY: And your wife's name was?

ROUSE: Francis. She never graduated. She put in three years and I tried to get her to go to the University of Houston. She said, "No, no, no." She was happy to be a housewife.

KELLY: So your first job was ...

ROUSE: In Oklahoma City in a prescription shop. From there I moved to Houston.

KELLY: Where did you work in Houston?

ROUSE: I went to work for Merck Chemical Company, as a drug salesman.

It was different then than it is now. We were detail men. When Merck came out with a new product they put all their salesmen in for at least two weeks, maybe a month, to have all these doctors, ones who worked on the drug before it was released, come in and lecture us on what they found about the drug action. We would impart this to the doctors.

KELLY: So you gave information to the doctors, whereas today how is it?

ROUSE: They come in and they say: "What time do you want us to bring lunch?" (Laughs) And, "We were going to have a boat to Hawaii; we'll book passage for you and your wife." It's changed. It's what have you done for me today.

GOODSILL: Did you enjoy it back when you were a drug sales rep?

ROUSE: Yes, I did! I had the best manager in the world.

KELLY: Why did you leave that job?

ROUSE: I wanted to have my own store. And I did. I had two stores in Houston. I had one in the Oil & Gas building across from Memorial Hospital downtown corner of Lamar and Louisiana. And I had one in Jacinto City. I had them at different times. I bought the one in Jacinto City. Then I sold it. Then I bought Continental Drugs in Houston. When I sold Continental and I came to Sugar Land.

KELLY: I want to show you a record, a housing record that I have of the house you first lived in in Sugar Land. [114 Venice] The house next door to where we sit right now.

ROUSE: Bob Armstrong left from that house to go to Texas A&M.

KELLY: Right, his father was O.R. Armstrong and they moved there in 1926.

ROUSE: Yeah, he was the vice president. I lived here after Cordes [Roy Cordes Sr.].

KELLY: You moved to Sugar Land August 12, 1959 according to this. You paid \$60.00 a month rent. They went up on your rent to \$65 in 1962. And then you moved away from there on July 30th, 1962.

ROUSE: That's when I moved into Venetian Estates.

KELLY: So you came to Sugar Land in 1959. How did you hear about the job at the Sugar Land drug store?

ROUSE: I'd gone to a PTA meeting. I lived in Willow Bend. And the high school principal was there and we sat right next to each other. We talked about the problems he had in high school, the drug problem he had in high school.

KELLY: The drug problem? Already in late 1950's?

ROUSE: Yes. So I came home and told Francis about it, this is when Bill was just a baby. We decided we'd rather go live in a smaller community. So a few days later, why, I heard about this job out here through another pharmacist. He said, "You know they got the best jobs in the state of Texas out in Sugar Land. But you got to move there. And you ought to see the house they want you to move in! (laughs) All of them said just about the same thing. "The job is great, the people are nice as they can be, but let me tell you - that house!" You bring your wives here and the house killed the deal.

GOODSILL: What was wrong with the houses?

ROUSE: Well, they'd let the weeds grow up to about this tall. [holds arm up about 4 feet] (all laugh) And then when you've lived in Houston with central air conditioning and a slab for a floor... And then the wives out here all had their people that they knew and Francis was kind of a loner. She didn't club or things like that. I talked to Mr. James and he said bring your wife, we'll show you the house. My wife was born and raised on an Indian Reservation. Her father was superintendent of the school system on this Indian Reservation. And this is the type of house that she lived in when she was a child. So she knew all the good points and the bad points. So this didn't scare her. I could see how it could scare the gal who's never lived with a house raised off the ground.

GOODSILL: There was no air conditioning in these houses in 1959?

ROUSE: No, we had an attic fan drawing all this moisture in this house. We had every window raised about this tall [motions 3-6" inches]. You could put your shoes in the closet, close the closet door, come back in two weeks, pick up those shoes and you had mold all over them. [makes distasteful face] You could go swimming under the bed. (all laugh) There was mold all over the kitchen. They talked to me about mold! I was born and raised in mold! (all laugh) "Take a little Clorox water and wash the walls down, that's all you can do to get rid of it" That would last for about 6 months and you were right back at it.

KELLY: Did you replace another pharmacist in Sugar Land?

ROUSE: I replaced Mr. Matlage. You probably remember Mr. Matlage? There were three pharmacists there, Mr. Williams, Mr. McJunkin and Mr. Matlage. Mr. Matlage had been here from time when time began. (Laughs) Mr. Matlage was one of the nicest guys I ever met. People didn't like him because he was very quiet. If you'd ask him a question, he'd answer it. He was kind of sharp. But he'd been here for years and years.

He came here originally as the sugar chemist. He'd gone to school at the University of Texas. All chemistry was taught in Galveston at that time. University of Texas chemistry department was pretty much in Galveston, along with the medical school and the pharmacist school was there. You could get two degrees. He got a degree in pharmacy and he got a degree in sugar chemistry. So originally he came here as a sugar chemist. Well, they only worked about 6 months a year.

KELLY: Do you know about what year he came to Sugar Land?

ROUSE: He was in the 1900 storm; going to school in Galveston. I wish he was doing this [interview] because he could tell you about that storm. He worked in the hospital during the storm and he gathered bodies, all the pharmacy and the chemistry people were out trying to do the best they could. He came to work here a little after 1900, 1901, 1902. Colonel Cunningham owned it. He came here as a sugar chemist. He didn't realize that they didn't make sugar but about four to six months a year. (laughs) So he went back and talked to Mr. Cunningham and said, "Hey, the plant's closing down." He said, "Yeah, we are going to lay you off for about three to four months. But we'll call you back." He said, "Look, I've got a wife and a couple of children. I can't be off three or four months. I have to have a job." "Well, don't you have a pharmacy degree?" "Yes, I do." "Well, a fellow down there in the pharmacy has been trying to find somebody to take his place. You know pharmacists are hard to find, and he's been looking three to four years. (laughs) You go down to talk to him and if you want the job you can have it." And he said [to the pharmacist], "I came here to talk to you about the job." "Well, are you a pharmacist?" "Yes, I'm a pharmacist." The guy just got his hat and coat and walked out the front door. (all laugh)

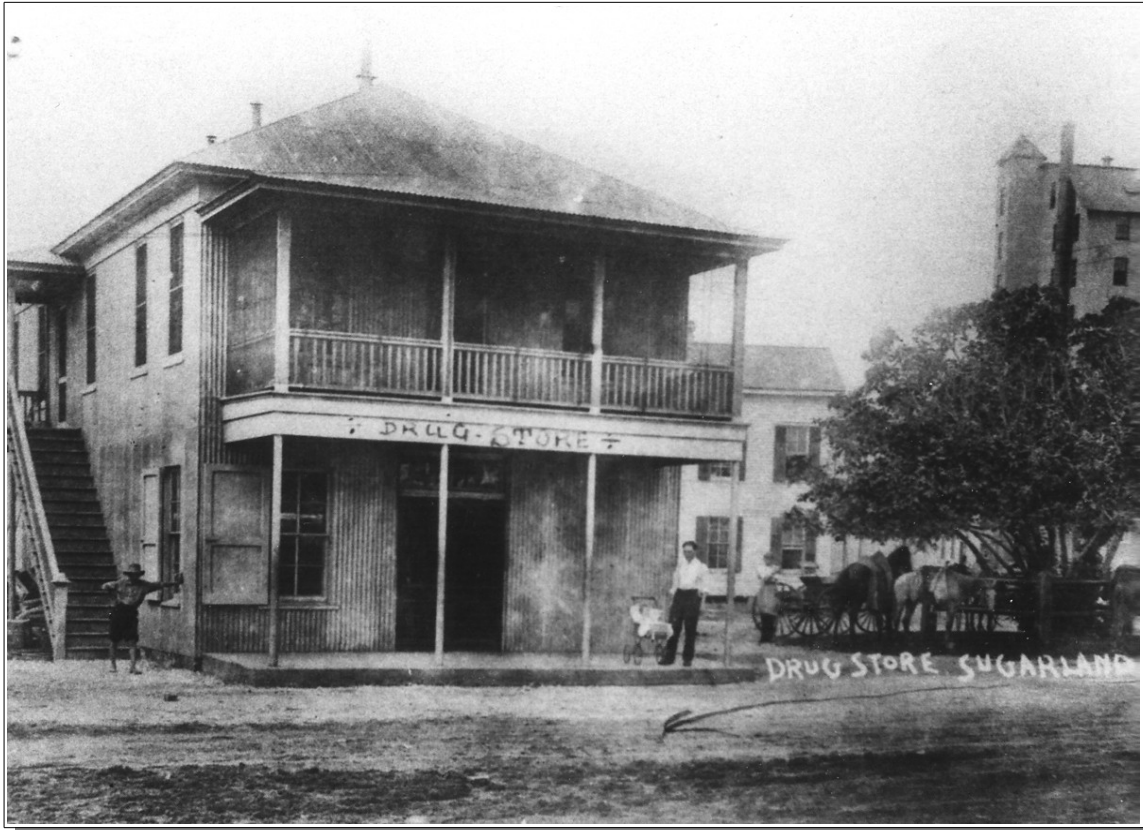
KELLY: And Mr. Matlage instantly became a pharmacist! (laughs)

ROUSE: He became the pharmacist in charge. (all laugh)

KELLY: Did he ever work again as a sugar chemist?

ROUSE: No, solely as a pharmacist. He had that store and that is the oldest continuing operating store and pharmacy in the state of Texas. It was across the street, where all the stores were at that time. [Along Kempner Street to the west of the Char house] You've seen pictures of the stores. In fact you have a picture of the drug store.

KELLY: Right, we think Mr. Matlage is standing in the front with a baby carriage.



ROUSE: I'll bet that is one of his children. He looks like Mr. Matlage. It sure does look like him. He worked until he was, 65. I think they looked for a pharmacist for four to six years. They started looking for him two years before he was 65. I came in 1959.

KELLY: There were three pharmacists when you came here. That's a lot of pharmacists for such a small town, isn't it?

ROUSE: Yes, there's only one store in Houston that did more business than we did because we operated 24 hours a day.

GOODSILL: Why was there such a need for pharmaceuticals in this community?

ROUSE: We were the only store east of the Brazos River that was in operation. We had people in here from Katy and Alvin, going to see the doctors here. We would fill their prescriptions. And then we would fill the prescriptions at night. One of us was always on call at night.

KELLY: Was it unusual in those days to have a 24 hour pharmacy?

ROUSE: Yeah. We were one of very few. You could count them almost on your hand in the state of Texas that would get up and go fill a prescription.

40:30

KELLY: Was your pharmacy used by the two doctors here or were there other doctors in the area that would use your pharmacy?

ROUSE: There were only two doctors in East Fort Bend County. All the way until you get to the Shamrock Hotel in Houston. There were no doctors, not that many doctors around. Probably there were four or five doctors in Rosenberg/Richmond. And Dr. Slaughter and Dr. Kuykendall practiced medicine 24 hours a day.

KELLY: And you would fill prescriptions for the little local hospital here as well? How did that work, did you take the drugs up to the hospital?

ROUSE: I was the hospital pharmacist up there. I would order the medicine for them. They would put it in the pharmacy and the nurses would dispense it. They had one nurse that was in charge of medication.

KELLY: What can you tell us about Dr. Slaughter?

ROUSE: Oh, he was a card! Dr. Slaughter had more stories than anybody. Dr. Slaughter could have made it at anything! He was the most talented man I've ever seen. He had tuberculosis. They sent him to a sanitarium.

KELLY: Really?

ROUSE: And they couldn't keep him in bed. (laughs) So they enrolled him as a trainee in the chest department. And he got a degree in chest surgery and everything there was to do with tuberculosis or being a chest man. He had seen everything as far as chests were concerned. He was an American Fellow in chest surgery. They could not keep him in bed, he was running around diagnosing everybody's problem in the whole sanitarium.

GOODSILL: He was smart, obviously?

ROUSE: He graduated from medical school when he was 20 years old and they wouldn't let him take the board, he was too young.

GOODSILL: And he was energetic as well as smart?

ROUSE: Oh, you bet he was. He had more energy than anybody else. He went to UT Med School in Galveston?

KELLY: He was a well known surgeon in the area, is that right?

ROUSE: Right. He would do brain surgery if somebody would let him. (laughs)

GOODSILL: He was a confident guy?

ROUSE: You didn't find them any more confident. (all laugh) I'll tell you a little story. Dr. Slaughter always wanted me to bring the stuff to the clinic, if he needed drugs. "Bring me 100 vials of penicillin." I'd take 100 vials of penicillin over. "Hugh, I want to talk to you, go back there and sit down in the office. I'll be right back there." So I went back and sat in the office. And there was a boy back there, a teenaged boy. I said, "Excuse me, excuse me, are you going to see Dr. Slaughter?" "Yeah, I'm sitting back here waiting." He had people everywhere, in every nook and cranny he'd have a patient waiting (laughs) I said "Doc, there's somebody back in your office. I have to go back to the store, I'm busy!" He said, "Go on back there; I want to talk to you." So I went on back and sat back. He said, "Don't worry about the boy, I'll take care of the boy."

So he came in and he said to the boy, "I'm not signing any papers!" He said, "Doctor, I just got my order to come in and take a physical for the Army. If you sign these papers saying I shouldn't go, you know Dr. Wheeler pulled all my teeth." He opened his mouth and he didn't have a tooth in his head. He said, "I can't go because I don't have any teeth and I have high blood pressure and I'm not going to be able to pass a physical and I don't have to take the physical if you will just sign these papers." He's almost in tears. The Korean War was going on hot and heavy. Doc says, "I'm not signing these papers." He said, "But doc, I don't have any teeth. I don't know how I'm gonna chew." He says, "Son, let me give you a word of advice. You go on over there and take the physical. They want you to shoot 'em not bite 'em." (all laugh) He was like that. Didn't matter what it was, he could have been on stage. He could come up with things like that and keep you roaring.

KELLY: He was an imposing figure?

ROUSE: Yes, he would overpower you if you let him. He was a diabetic. He'd come into the drug store, look all around, and steal 10 candy bars. Run out to the car to eat them. (laughs) Then probably take more insulin.

KELLY: He lived to a pretty old age though?

ROUSE: Yeah, he lived up into his 70's; he might even have hit 80. He probably did more for this county than any man has ever done. Nobody would walk out of that clinic that didn't get to see the doctor, whether you had money or had none. And you got just exactly the same treatment as you had from the richest man in Fort Bend County who came in to see him. Paul Carson told me he had several hundred thousand dollars on the books that he never even tried to collect. And nobody ever knew about it. He never advertised it. He never advertised that you were a paying customer but I have Sam Jones down the street that is not a paying customer.

KELLY: I've heard that Dr. Slaughter sponsored young men from Sugar Land to go to medical school. Do you know anything about that?

ROUSE: Chuzzy Jenkins. He loved the school that Chuzzy went to because that's the same school he went to college at. Austin College. Dr. Slaughter paid for Chuzzy's education.

KELLY: Chuzzy had an older brother called Dubbo, who became a doctor as well and I think Slaughter may have sponsored him too.

ROUSE: Dubbo, yeah, he did him too. Dubbo, and there was Fats, he was the one that was in the oil field business. I knew all of them.

KELLY: And Bud.

ROUSE: Bud Jenkins. He used to live just the other side of Jack Ulrich [on Venice Street.]

KELLY: There was another doctor in town at that time, Dr. Kuykendall. What can you tell us about him?

ROUSE: Dr. Kuykendall. He was one of the nicest guys you've ever met. He worked 24 hours a day too.

KELLY: He was kind of the opposite of Dr. Slaughter, wasn't he, in personality?

ROUSE: He was a recluse. The only thing he did was play poker. That was the only entertainment he had. He wasn't like the rest of us that went out to dance and things like that. Only things he had were medicine and poker. He loved to play poker.

KELLY: Was he a surgeon like Dr. Slaughter?

ROUSE: Yes he was. He also went to medical school in Galveston. They were in partnership. They were partners over here at the clinic. Dr. Kuykendall was more serious than Dr. Slaughter.

KELLY: Tell us about Mr. McJunkin.

ROUSE: Mr. McJunkin – nice. The word nice is Mr. McJunkin. Nice pharmacist and a good pharmacist. I was really fortunate that I had good pharmacists here. Mr. McJunkin didn't want the hassle of trying to run that drug store. And Mr. Williams said, "I'm within about 5 or 6 years of retirement." I talked to them; I took each of them out individually to eat and said, "Why don't you want this job yourself? What's wrong?" There was a difference in pay scale between the jobs; I knew all the pay scales. He said, "I don't want the hassle." "What kind of hassle?" "Just running the place." Mr. Williams told me the same thing. They just wanted to be the pharmacist.

KELLY: What was Mr. Williams like? I kind of remember him.

ROUSE: Mr. Williams was a cut up. He's the biggest cut up you've ever seen. He's an old German boy who came out of Brenham. He spoke Czech, he spoke Spanish.

KELLY: He would cut up with the customers?

ROUSE: Not so much with the customers, with me and Mr. McJunkin. I hired Kathy Boulte. She was the first pharmacist I hired here. People would slip around before they got to know Kathy and they'd say: "Would you fill that prescription?" (all laugh)

KELLY: They didn't trust her?

ROUSE: Kathy got the Merck award as being the smartest student in the whole pharmacy school at the University of Houston. (laughs) Give her a year and they were: "Here Kathy, here's my prescription." That was great. I knew what was going to happen because we had a black pharmacist in Corsicana when I was jerking sodas. The pharmacist would try to get the black folks to take their prescription down and get Mo to fill it because Mo was going out of business. "Why don't you do down to Mo?" "No, I don't trust him."

KELLY: It's hard for small town people to change.

ROUSE: It's not only in small towns. It's the big towns too. When you say woman doctor, boy, back in the 50, and 40's and 30's and 20's and all the way back ... Now they have 85% women in medical school and 15% men. That's how things have changed.

GOODSILL: You didn't mind the hassle of running the place.

ROUSE: That was my stock in trade.

KELLY: I want to ask you about a couple of other employees that I believe you had under you. One is a man whose name comes up occasionally when I'm talking to old Sugar Landers, and that's I. W. Harper.

ROUSE: (laughs) I. W. He was a clerk.

KELLY: I want to ask you about Curly Thomas. Did he work for you?

ROUSE: Curly worked for me until the day he retired. Mr. Matlage hired him. I don't know how many years Curly had in but it was well over fifty years. Curly was a good man—and his whole family—they all went to college and got degrees. His son, Charlie, taught high school and was a coach.

KELLY: That's right, and later a principal. Curly had a daughter named Eunice who worked in the Western Auto.

ROUSE: Yeah. He had some other boys that went to school. I think the girls didn't go to school but I believe the boys all went to college.

KELLY: What I remember about Charlie is when my brother and I were pre-school, that age; we would come into the drug store. My older brother was named Chuck and we'd be Big Chuck, Little Chuck. I didn't have a name – I was Little Chuck. And he always greeted us. He was a very friendly man.

ROUSE: He always greeted everybody. He knew everybody in town.

KELLY: He was an asset, actually, I think, at the drug store.

ROUSE: Oh YEAH. He kept everything clean. He was a porter. He'd make deliveries he'd do anything. Anything you asked him.

KELLY: There was a fountain in the drug store, before you had it remodeled and changed it.

ROUSE: Sue Smith was the fountain manager. Sue was a nice, nice—her name could be Nice too, just like Mr. McJunkin.

KELLY: Yeah. She was very friendly. The people who worked for you were very nice to the children in Sugar Land.

ROUSE: They better be!

KELLY: Well, you know, we had free reign of everything in the whole town. Children would come in. You had a toy case and we would play with the toys and not buy them (laughing). I never was tempted to steal any, but I'm sure there were children who wanted to take things.

ROUSE: I've been stolen from every way it could be stolen. When I was talking with the designer about the new store, he says, 'You don't want booths that are plush'. He says, 'You want wooden booths'. Because he said the children will cut them with a knife.

Noooo, I want plush booths. He said you're making a bad mistake. And I was here for well over twenty years in the store and we had one booth cut, right here, and it was a mechanic who came up and told me. He says, 'I cut your booth with a screwdriver', it was in his back pocket. And I had that repaired. That's the only one. Of all those kids that were in that drug store, I bet I haven't called kids down more than five times.

KELLY: That says a lot for Sugar Land, doesn't it?

ROUSE: Yes, it does. Kids were great. They'd steal things. I've caught them stealing. I really worked them over. This is really a bad thing you've done. And I should call the police. But we'll see what Mama and Daddy want to do."

KELLY: That usually took care of it, I supposed.

ROUSE: That cured things.

KELLY: There was another employee that you had that worked in your fountain and that was Mary Lou Anderson—

ROUSE: Durnell. She was Anderson and then she was Durnell. And then she came back to Anderson.

KELLY: She was an interesting character.

ROUSE: Yeah. People used to come in from far and wide (laughs).

KELLY: To visit her? To be served by Mary Lou?

ROUSE: Yeah. She was beautiful! I mean, without any make-up on or anything, she was prettier than any gal that was in the movie magazines. She really was. Just a beautiful girl. And smart! It's a shame that she turned out the way she did.

KELLY: Yeah, it's public knowledge that she was involved in a murder here.

ROUSE: Well, she was involved in prostitution. Not when she was working for me, but later on, she was involved with the Chicken Ranch, if you know the Chicken Ranch in Louisiana. That's where she came from, to kill her mama, from Louisiana.

KELLY: She came, and evidently killed her mama and her step-father for insurance pay-off. And got caught!

ROUSE: After the trial they sent her to that woman's penitentiary in Huntsville, Goree. And I had the warden from Goree here. And he came by the drug store and said, 'I understand you had Mary Lou'. I said, 'Yes, I did'. He said, 'You know, she's the most cooperative inmate I have and she can do as much work as ten other people'. I said, 'You're telling me that? She could wait on ten customers and never make a mistake'.

KELLY: Sounds like she didn't get to use her abilities and ended up going the wrong way.

ROUSE: As far as bookwork was concerned [Mr. Rouse shakes his head no], common sense, you know, [nods to indicate she had common sense] she was just a wonderful person.

KELLY: I remember her waiting on me as a child and she had an energy about her that made you feel good.

ROUSE: She had a little aura about her, you know. And men would come from miles around and sit there and watch Mary Lou. [Everyone laughing – Jane giggling!!] Because, boy, she was well built! And she was pretty.

KELLY: I often meet people, and men who didn't live in Sugar Land, but in Houston or somewhere else, and they'd say, 'Oh, I remember Rouse's Drugs. We used to get the best chicken and dumplings at Rouse's Drugs'. Who made your chicken and dumplings?

ROUSE: Okay. That was Katie. Katie Robinson. Her husband, Woody Robinson, worked for the Marshall Canning Company. They had a sugar chemist here named Guenther [pronounced Ginther]. And Katie was an orphan. Her mother and daddy had gotten killed in—I think—a car wreck. So they took Katie in, to raise her. And the Gunther's taught her how to cook German food, because he was German. And a lot of the chemists we had in this country came from Germany. She made a pie crust, dumpling, about 'yay' thick and she rolled it out and she had a table, bigger'n this, that she'd roll that thing out. And then she'd cut it in strips and cooked the chicken and dumplings. And that was the best chicken and dumplings I've ever eaten! And the guys from Humble Oil Company, which is now Exxon, some of the guys that were out in the crews, stopped by here and eat. And they always came on Wednesday because that was chicken and dumpling day. So they would tell the bosses up in the building, 'Boy, you ought to go out to Sugar Land and eat some of those chicken and dumplings'. So we had three or four cars every Wednesday that came from the Humble Building. And they would eat chicken and dumplings. The managers—the presidents, and vice-presidents—

KELLY: BIG guys!

ROUSE: They were the only ones that could leave that long, you know! And then they had a car that they used in the oil fields that had a trunk in it that was lined. So it was like a refrigerator, I mean a heating unit - it could be it would go either way, you know, because it was insulated. And they'd come out there and get maybe two-dozen lunches. They'd feed their secretaries and the girls up at the building. Every Wednesday, here'd they come! They'd drive all the way from the Humble Building, downtown.

GOODSILL: That was GREAT business for you.

ROUSE: Yes! Boy, we used to feed'em. Before I left here, we were feeding 250-300 people a day.

KELLY: Tell us a little bit about Katie. What was she like?

ROUSE: Katie was a very religious woman. She had one boy. Unfortunately he got into trouble with narcotics and went to the penitentiary. She'd lived a life trying to straighten her boy out. And he straightened out for a while, but he just couldn't stand it. He had to get back in trouble.

KELLY: That was a heartbreak for her. She cooked at a lot of different establishments in the area before she cooked for you.

ROUSE: Well, I got Tommy Davis out of the old Crown Café. I owned part of that store.

KELLY: Did you!

ROUSE: Yeah. I owned part of Crown.

KELLY: Who were you in partnership with?

ROUSE: Poker players! Let's see—Cookie Rome. You remember Cookie? And the president of the Marshall Canning, McFadden. And Dr. Kuykendall.

KELLY: Who ran it? Sweet Pea Gandy?

ROUSE: No, we bought it from Sweet Pea.

KELLY: Okay. Andy Anderson?

ROUSE: Andy Anderson bought it from us. We bought it when we'd had too much beer and turned too many cards. We bought it from Sweet Pea and he walked out the front door! (laughs) Tommy Davis ran it for a while, until we hired a man—we told him we'd give him \$400 a month to run it, and he said, 'I'll take \$400', and that's what he did. [laughs] He was making \$800 a month before it was over with. We paid him \$400 and he took \$400. [all laugh]

KELLY: I remember as a little boy the Crown Café was segregated. There was a part in the back where black people would come in. You could kind of see through a window back there, to their little area. By the time you bought it, I suppose that was gone.

ROUSE: That was all gone. Yeah. That had been removed. It was there when I first came here, but it was gone. You know, Dr. Slaughter used to have separate waiting rooms.

KELLY: I remember that. Everything was segregated. The Palms Theater was segregated.

ROUSE: I had to really talk to my employees about serving people at the fountain. I said, "Now, look, you're going to have to serve them. If you don't, you're going to have to find another job. There is nothing I can do but serve them." If you'd think about it, that's just RIGHT. It's the right thing to do.

KELLY: I remember even in the shopping center, there were segregated restrooms at the end on the other side of the grocery store.

ROUSE: Yep. Even in the 50s.

KELLY: You came here as a manager of the drug store. When did you purchase the drug store from Sugarland Industries?

ROUSE: Well, the Kempner's had the farming operation and the cattle operation, and a retail operation, and a ginning operation, a lumberyard, and all these various and sundry companies, under the mantle of Sugarland Industries. The farming operation was losing money, the gin operation was losing money, the retail operation was so-so. Everything was on the borderline here. So the Internal Revenue came in and said, "Hey, this isn't a company that's making any money. You're a land company. You're essentially a land company. You're a land holding company and we're going to give you time to sell off this land or you're going to have to pay a tax rate on it, what it's worth today. You're not going to be able to sell this stuff off." They'd never sold any of the land, except to Missouri City, where they sold the Frost Ranch. That used to be part of Sugarland Industries back in the early days.

"And so, what you're going to have to do is—we're going to say this land today is worth \$500 an acre. Then you're going to have to pay regular income tax on anything you sell it for, above \$500. We're going to establish a price of this land". And the Industries could see that was going to REALLY mess up their playhouse. Because they were sitting there holding this land and it's going up and up and up. So they put it on the market. They were having ALL this trouble back here with the water company and the Brazos River. Every time it'd rain, you could go down Oilfield Road in a motorboat. In fact, me and Otto Schindler have BEEN down that road in a motorboat! And the fence posts – all you could see was the top of the fence posts.

KELLY: The water would back up all the way to the levee, wouldn't it?

ROUSE: Yeah! And they had to move all those cattle out of all those places back there, because it would get up over their heads and drown them. And, so, they were going to have to build levees. They called in Exxon. Exxon had just gotten through building Clear Lake, if you remember.

KELLY: Around NASA.

ROUSE: Well, I got to know those guys at Exxon, when they were in here [meaning in town or in his shop]. They were civil engineers and architects, and the whole bit. And levee people. And they were going to have to build levees if they want to buy this place. So one day the Exxon man (he'd been here for a year), he said, "Hugh, we're leaving'. This place is going to cost so much money to build these levees we're not going to be able to make any money". So they checked out. Then they finally found a person to buy it. It was Shell Credit Union, they bought all that property back there in one fell swoop. They bought the whole thing. And they never dreamed that they'd ever be able to sell that thing. And one group bought everything, both sides of the road.

KELLY: What is now First Colony?

ROUSE: Yeah. They went in there and built the levees. I was on the levee board. Bill Little was on the levee board and Logene Foster. All three of us were on the levee board. And we built the levees. And so, they [Sugarland Industries] got out from under that, they sold everything. They did the same thing with the drug store, Western Auto. Everything --"We're [meaning the IRS] going to do the whole thing, establish a price - what it's worth at today's prices. And if you sell it for anything above that..."

Well, Denny Kempner came to me and said, "I'll sell this store to you at what they have as the price of the store. We don't want any money. We're paying enough taxes now. And we know you, and you've done us a good job, and if you'll take it, it'll just be a reward for what we haven't paid you. Because we've worked you a long time for a lot less than you could have gotten some place else". I said,

"I know that." But they were always grateful for everything that I did. Mr. Kempner, I. H. Kempner, was the FINEST man you've ever met. He was just a prince of a fellow. He used to come in here every Wednesday, from Galveston.

GOODSILL: For the chicken and dumplings! (laughs)

ROUSE: (laughs) No, he didn't eat chicken and dumplings. He was the only one of the Kempner's that ever really took an interest in Sugar Land. He was the only one who ever DID anything for the people of Sugar Land. The rest of them would make a lot of money here, but they would jerk it all out and take it to Galveston.

KELLY: The only other Kempner that might have had his [I.H.'s] vision would have been his son, [Herbert] who was here in the 30s and 40s and died early.

KELLY: What was Mr. Kempner like? Just your impressions, personality-wise.

ROUSE: If Mr. Kempner met you today and he saw you two weeks from now, he'd say, 'Howdy, Bruce. How are you?'

KELLY: So he remembered people's names?

ROUSE: He would remember people's names and he never did give you the idea that he was better than you. If you were a mechanic, he'd talk to you in mechanic's language. If you were a professional, he'd talk to you... He never saw anybody that he couldn't talk to.

KELLY: Would he literally come into your drug store and have coffee, sit down and talk to you.

ROUSE: Yeah. And he would always compliment me. Some way, like, 'Hugh, I like what you're doing'. Or, 'You know, I REALLY like the way you run my drug store'. He was always complimentary. And THEN if you DIDN'T do it, you KNEW that the clouds are coming in! (chuckles) He's gonna rain on you! But if you did a good job, he always told you. Which I tried to do in my business.

KELLY: When he would come to visit, did he tell any stories? Was he a story teller?

ROUSE: No. He was reserved, a very reserved man.

KELLY: Who would sit with him, if he came in for coffee?

ROUSE: Oh, Bob Armstrong or he'd bring one of the people from upstairs. One or two - Hugh Williams. Did you know Hugh?

KELLY: Hugh was president of Imperial Sugar for a while.

ROUSE: Hugh was probably the smartest man Imperial Sugar Company ever had.

KELLY: Is that right? Why do you say that?

ROUSE: He was smart in law, and numbers. He was an actuary. Hugh had a degree in engineering but he knew all these other things. Hugh made the biggest mistake he ever made, when he went to work for Imperial Sugar Company and quit G.E.

KELLY: (laughs) Oh, he was with G.E.

ROUSE: (laughs) He was with G.E. and quit G.E. and came to work here because he wanted to live in Richmond.

KELLY: Would Mr. Kempner ever invite you to sit down and have coffee with him?

ROUSE: Yeah, we had coffee. We had coffee. I tried to stay away from them —because ALL of Imperial Sugar Company business was done in the drug store. Very little of it was done upstairs, because they were there all day. Most of the time, if somebody wanted to see somebody with Imperial they came in the drug store and looked around. ‘Well, he was down in the drug store.’

KELLY: They’d look in the drug store before they’d go upstairs to the office (laughing).

ROUSE: (laughing) Yeah.

GOODSILL: So then you purchased the drug store at that good rate and ran it independently? Sugar Land was no longer a company?

ROUSE: I ran it for fifteen years on my own, and then I had a feeling they were going to sell out. A group of doctors from Houston came in and said, ‘Hugh, we’re going to build a building in Stafford for doctors and we’d like for you to put in a pharmacy. And if you want to, you can invest in the building’. I only was out of the drug store about a year before they sold it and closed it.

KELLY: So you never bought the drug store from the Industries.

ROUSE: I bought the drug store from the Industries and leased the building. I had a ten-year lease with a five-year option. So I lived up to my part then I sold it, after the five years was up. I was there fifteen years and probably six months. And I sold out to a fellow named Renfrow.

KELLY: Oh, that’s right! Renfrow Pharmacy.

ROUSE: Renfrow ran a drug store in Missouri City. And he was there about a year before they kicked him out. Maybe two.

[ROUSE: When Buddy Wheeler was in high school, he was running with a pretty good crowd (laughs) and he was into most everything in town. Ira Harper’s house was the last building on the left up here on Main Street, out there by the Catholic Church. That was where he lived, right there by the creek. And the kids would—they didn’t have anything to do—they’d go up there and bother Harper.

They'd take rocks and throw them up there on that zinc roof. And they'd [the rocks] roll down, you know. And he'd come out, just raising Cain with them, you know, and tell them what he was going to do. They'd keep doing it and he'd come out with his shotgun and shoot up in the air, you know, and he'd fuss at them. You know, he did just exactly the thing they wanted him to do.

So one night, Buddy and his crowd went up there and he had this driveway into his garage. It was made out of iron ore, if you remember they used to make those driveways out of iron ore so they wouldn't get stuck going into the garage. And you know how hard that stuff got. Well, Buddy went up there with his crew and just outside of the garage, he dug a trench about "that" wide, more than a foot wide, and about "that" deep.

KELLY: OH MY!

ROUSE: ALL the way across. Not only did he dig it, but he hauled the dirt away. [laughs] So the next morning, I opened the store. Harper wasn't there, and that's unusual for Harper. I mean REALLY unusual. So, fifteen minutes later, still wasn't there. I began to worry about him. 'Mr. Harper, I wonder where he is, must be in trouble.' So, I said, "Frank, get in your car, and go up to Mr. Harper's house and see what's wrong." Here it is, twenty minutes after eight o'clock, and he's not here. And he's NEVER late. So Frank wasn't gone but a few minutes and here he drove up with Harper. Harper was on his way, walking to work. I say, "Harper, what in the world happened?" He told me Buddy and his bunch had dug this trench about "this" wide and about "that" deep, and said, 'I can't get my car out of the garage'. (both laugh)

KELLY: I bet he was upset about that!

ROUSE: Oh, Harper was just FIT to be tied! He reacted just exactly the way the kids wanted him to react.

KELLY: Did he ever find out who did it?

ROUSE: He KNEW who did it! He knew all of them! (laughing) He knew every one.

KELLY: You mentioned a pharmacist that we didn't talk about before, Frank Netardus.

ROUSE: Frank was my assistant manager.

KELLY: He was a nice man too.

ROUSE: Frank was. Everybody Mr. Matlage hired was nice. I mean I had a warm bed here as soon as I walked in the front door. Everything was working just fine. The only thing was that when I'd been here about two weeks and I noticed that they would write bills out for whiskey. We sold whiskey at the time. Every day, there'd be bottles of whiskey on the counter, so you could just reach over and pick it up and pick up your bill and put it in your pocket. Some of them would head to the back room as soon as they got that bottle.

I kept watching that operation and I says, "Frank, what's all this whiskey doing up here?" He says, 'Well, people down at the refinery, they have a standing order that they want half a pint of this, half a pint of that, every day. We just write this out and put it up there, and they come by. They don't want to sign the bill, they just want the receipt. So they pick up the receipt, pick up the bottle and they either go out the front door or they go back to the toilet. At night the gal would come over with the porter from the refinery—used to be two of them come in. And they'd pick up pint bottles or half pints and take them in to the refinery. This went on about two or three weeks. Nobody ever told me that this was happening I just happened to stumble into it.

Frank said, 'These people come over and get it, and take it into the refinery in the evening for the late shift'. And I said, "As of today, this ceases. In fact, as of right now, take ALL that whiskey down put it in the back room back there." We had a wire cage in the back room, to keep the whiskey. "Because that's all going back or it's going someplace else. Take it ALL down. ALL of it. We're not selling any more whiskey to anybody." And so it got all over town that they got a new manager over at the drug store and he's a Baptist, and he says there's no more whiskey.

KELLY: (Laughing)

ROUSE: So, I told Tom James, "We're discontinuing the sale the whiskey." He says, 'Why are you discontinuing the sale of the whiskey?' I said, "Well, some of it's ended up in the refinery in the evening, and I'm just concerned about people driving home after they drink half a pint of whiskey." They'd come out of the back room (makes smacking and AAAHH noises). And the half pint of whiskey would be sitting there in the trash.

KELLY: They'd down a whole half pint before they left the drug store.

ROUSE: Yeah. All it would take to ruin you is, say, 'He drank that half pint of whiskey before he left the drug store'. I didn't want that.

GOODSILL: Did Mr. James agree with you?

ROUSE: [nods] I told him it was going to the refinery. There was a liquor store in town, so we transferred it all up there to Preston Means. He continued to sell it, because I saw the porters going in there, about five o'clock in the evening to pick up (laughing).

KELLY: I wonder how many years that had been going on. I bet from way, way back. Probably from the inception of the company (laughing).

ROUSE: Sugar Land had more alcoholics per capita than any other place I've ever seen. Nalco. The Sugar Company. The railroads. I mean, it was unbelievable! I was SHOCKED!

GOODSILL: I see how that could happen.

KELLY: Yeah. It was readily available. Well, let's get back to the drug store. It was kind of the nerve center of town. That's where people met to exchange business. They would come down from the offices.

ROUSE: I'll tell you a little story about that. I got a notice from the Internal

Revenue Service that they were going to send a man out. He would be with me for a week or weeks and stay in the drug store all day, and check the balances on the cash registers. And then he wanted to talk to a Bloomstrom, a local CPA. And so the IRA man came in and introduced himself. Nice guy. And he checked everything. At certain times of the day, he'd pull the register and see how much money we had taken in, write it down in his log and do the same thing, every day. And he talked to me about how we took care of this money, and how we made sure that all the money was funneled through the register.

He was there almost two weeks with me, and every afternoon, he'd quit at five o'clock and would meet the CPA with my books. They'd go over my books and compare what we'd taken in that day to a day—other days. And so, the guy says, "Well, I'm going to leave this afternoon. I won't be back, I hope". "Well, what did you find?" He says, "I can't find anything wrong!"

GOODSILL & KELLY: (laughing)

ROUSE: He says, "I can't find ANYTHING wrong". He said, "These things are just belched out up in Colorado. This is different from all the rest of the drug stores". He said, "The only thing is you know you give an awful lot of money to charitable organizations". He says, "You REALLY give a lot of money to charity". I said, "I know." He said, "Is there a reason?"

I says, "Yeah. Let me tell you. I'm on one of the committees to raise money for a charity, say for the Methodist Church. Eight of us are going to go out this morning and we're going to talk to the sugar company, and we're going to talk to Nalco, and we're going to talk to everybody, up and down the street. All through east Fort Bend County."

"Where are you going to meet?" "We're going to meet at the drug store." And guess what, every one of them is a customer. And I'm the first one that gets tapped for a contribution." (all laugh) That's the reason my contributions are so high! He says, "I'm going to put that in my report!" That's the last I heard from them.

GOODSILL: Were they questioning you because your income was higher than most other drug stores?

ROUSE: Nope. My contributions were too high. That's the only thing that spit it out, I would imagine. Because that's the only thing he could find that was different. My contributions were about four or five times as high as a normal drug store. "Where are we going to meet?" "At the drug store".

KELLY: Well, I want to run some names by you. Albert Grumman – did you know Albert? Did he come into your store?

ROUSE: Yeah, Albert hauled my trash for the drug store, for a long time. Then he got somebody else to haul it.

KELLY: No. His wife was Lillian, did she come in?

ROUSE: Lillian Grumman. Yeah.

KELLY: A lot of the ladies from upstairs in the offices—the Industries office and the Imperial office—would come down for coffee. Do you remember Lily Mae Hickey?

ROUSE: Lily Mae Hickey! Lily Mae was the best organizer I've ever seen. Lily Mae could organize anything. She should have been in the Army! She could organize it. In fact, I was up here at the Senior Citizens Bureau. We were looking to put my mother-in-law in there for a time. And Lily Mae Hickey was sitting at the door. And I was with the gal that was managing the Senior Citizen place. I says, "Hey. There's a person I know – Lily Mae. Has she got this place organized yet?"

"Not quite, but she's working on it!" (everyone laughs)

KELLY: Lily Mae worked in the sales department [at Imperial].

ROUSE: She was the secretary of the sales manager.

KELLY: So she managed the sales department, is that right? (chuckling)

ROUSE: That's it!

KELLY: She liked to talk, didn't she?

ROUSE: Oh, Lily Mae was—she liked to impress you, too. "I just got through talking to the president of Chrysler".

KELLY: Well, she probably did, though.

ROUSE: Yeah. I mean she wouldn't tell you a story – she was telling you the truth!

KELLY: Well, I remember, as a little boy, she would talk about something in the drug store and EVERYBODY heard it. She wasn't quiet. She didn't whisper. You knew everything that was going on.

ROUSE: You know where she lived, don't you? She lived at Mr. Matlage's upstairs garage apartment.

KELLY: She never married.

ROUSE: No, not to my knowledge.

KELLY: Did you know Myrtle Stabler?

ROUSE: Oh yeah, I knew Myrtle. Gus Stabler was the one who ran the motor company. And he was related to Minnie Ulrich. Gus was Minnie's brother.

KELLY: Is that right! I never knew that. Myrtle was a Friend [family name]. She was Leo Friend's sister.

ROUSE: The Friends were related to Gus. Everybody in Sugar Land that he hired was related to Gus! (laughs)

KELLY: Well, he hired people from Schulenburg where he was from and I'm sure there were relatives.

ROUSE: From Schulenburg, yes. They were all good workers. They were German people that just put their nose to the grindstone, like Frank. Frank Netardus.

KELLY: Did he come from Schulenburg?

ROUSE: No, he came from Hallettsville.

KELLY: Hallettsville, which is close. The same area.

ROUSE: The same area. They all spoke Czech down there.

GOODSILL: Did you and Francis have children?

ROUSE: Yes, they grew up in Sugar Land. Oh, they just had the run of the place! [spoken affectionately] Had two boys and a girl.

KELLY: At that time, the area here, at the back of these houses front, we called it the Alley, and there was a big grass area, much bigger than it is now. [Referring to the area at 90-A and Brooks Street near the houses.] And I'm sure your children played out there. And you could just send them out there and not worry about them, right?

ROUSE: We never did worry about anything. We worried about the lakes, but other than that—If they did something and somebody saw them, they'd call me on the phone and say, "Hey, Bill's over here doing so & so & so & so" and that was the end of that!

KELLY: And they could cross Brooks Street and go to the drug store and it was safe in those days to do that sort of thing.

ROUSE: Yeah. My wife was making this turn here off 90 onto Brooks Street, and a black man hit her. He ran the red light. And there were people behind him that pulled in and people pulling up at the Texaco filling station, and over at Wayburn's. Leon Cullar was telling me this, later on, and he said, people were talking and they were pointing at him and he said every one of them had a license number. And he got on the phone and he talked to somebody. And Leon was in the station and he (the black man) said, "I don't know what I done, but I hit a woman up here and the way the people are acting, I done hit the MAYOR'S wife! And everyone of 'em's got my license number!"

KELLY: When you came to Sugar Land, the stores had [already] moved from the refinery side of town over to a new shopping center?

ROUSE: They had just moved.

KELLY: And starting on the east side, there was the drug store. Next to it was the post office. Next to it was the barber shop. And a little beauty shop behind it.

ROUSE: Behind it. And then a credit office —that’s where Rufus Phillips was.

KELLY: Right. Credit department. And then there was an insurance agency in the back, and you’d come to the front again, and there was the bank. The dry goods store. Western Auto. And the grocery store.

ROUSE: (making agreement noises after each sentence)

KELLY: Now, I’m just going to kind of go by each one. The post office was run in those days by Postmistress, Mrs. Iams. Did you know Mrs. Iams?

ROUSE: Yes. Mrs. Iams brought me back some candy from Europe.

KELLY: Did she!

ROUSE: And it had whiskey in them. First time I’d ever seen candy with whiskey in the middle. She said, “I brought you a box of candy, Mr. Rouse”. And I picked up one of the candies and I said, “WHAT have you done, Mrs. Iams!” (laughing) Oh, she was a case.

KELLY: Yeah, she was. She was strict, they say. The people that worked for her. She did it by the book. She ran a tight ship.

ROUSE: When I first got here, Mrs. Iams wouldn’t accept a package from Mr. Matlage. Mr. Matlage, when he did something, he did it right. And what he’d done, he’d taken the label off of a package and made his label and put the label on it. And you could see where another label had been underneath. [pause] She wouldn’t take it. So he was going to work and he took it back that afternoon, and she still wouldn’t take it. The next morning he took it over to mail it—he’s determined to get that thing mailed! And she wouldn’t take it. His college roommate was the Senator from north Texas, and he was speaker of the Senate.

KELLY: Speaker of the House? Not Sam Rayburn!?!?

ROUSE: Sam Rayburn. He called Sam! He says, “Sam, this is Matlage. You know, I can’t understand the post office department. I’ve got a package and I just took the label off and I put another label on top, and now they tell me they won’t take the package.” “Okay, well, I’ll try it this afternoon. All right.” She [Mrs. Iams] got a call.

GOODSILL: (laughing)

KELLY: From Sam Rayburn?

ROUSE: No. From the Postmaster General!

KELLY: (laughing)

ROUSE: “You take that package and you say you’re sorry you didn’t take it to start off with!”

KELLY: Oh WOW. What a story!

KELLY: Well, we’ll move on to the barbershop. There were Tony and Johnny Ruffino who partnered together in a little barbershop. Any impressions about the barbershop?

ROUSE: Oh yes. It was a good small-town barbershop. More stuff came out of there than you could shake a stick at!

KELLY: Gossip?

ROUSE: Gossip – yeah. And misinformation! (all laughing) Especially about the companies. Or somebody that was associated with the companies. Because people liked to talk about the guys that were –

KELLY: Blue collar would talk about white collar? Is that what you mean?

ROUSE: Yeah. Or any little tidbit that they’d get – Juicy!

KELLY: The beauty parlor with Mrs. Cheney.

ROUSE: Oh yeah. More misinformation than ever happened.

KELLY: Any stories about the credit department? You were friends with Rufus?

ROUSE: Oh, Rufus, I probably respected Rufus more than any other person in Sugarland Industries. Rufus was a fine man. I guarantee you, any place else, he would have had the top-notch job. He would have been the chairman of the board, or the president.

KELLY: Explain to us a little bit about the credit in Sugar Land.

ROUSE: Well, you could borrow money. And at one time, they gave you coins. But the federal government stopped that. Bob Armstrong had some of those coins.

KELLY: There're some pictures of them. Somebody's got 'em, somewhere, yeah.

ROUSE: They gave tickets. If you borrowed ten dollars, you'd get a ten-dollar ticket. And the only place you could spend it would be here in Sugar Land.

KELLY: That was before you came here, though, right?

ROUSE: No, they were still doing it when I came here.

KELLY: Oh, really! In the late 50s. You could also buy things on account and charge everything.

ROUSE: We wrote one check a month for everything. We paid the rent, we paid the grocery bill, and if we'd bought anything at the department store or drug store. They had the gas, lights and water on that bill. They had gasoline.

KELLY: Medical care?

ROUSE: No, they had to pay that over there. Anything that the Industries was involved in. Or the utilities. You paid that all on one bill. We wrote one check every month and that took care of everything

GOODSILL: Was that complicated running the drug store on credit? Did you keep your own books?

ROUSE: The Industries kept the books. Mabel Wooley worked in the accounting department and she took care of ALL the retail stores. She counted all the money to balance the registers, picked up the money and took it upstairs and they deposited it.

KELLY: I remember seeing her at 5:00, come down with a moneybag and put it in the night depository. Out in the open! Here was a little lady that couldn't defend herself, but she felt safe to come and stick it in the night depository.

ROUSE: J. B. Fowler. J. B. showed me his house, you know. He was the man that took care of all the houses and he had the credit department. I said, "J. B., (when I gave him a check for the rent), how about a key to the house?" He says, 'We don't have any keys'. He said, "If you want a key, go over to Rosenberg and buy one." (Everybody laughs!)

KELLY: Nobody locked up!

ROUSE: It was one of those skeleton keys. He said, "Let me tell you. You don't have to worry in Sugar Land. Everybody here is gainfully employed. They all work for the same man. If they're gonna steal something, they're not going to steal it in Sugar Land because they are stealing from the boss. And if they catch him, he's out of here, before sundown." And in those days, we didn't have a lot of traffic up and down 90.

KELLY: Sugar Land State Bank was run by Jack Merrigan. And some of his tellers were Mr. Ushery and Ray Anhaizer and Mr. Krehmeier. Elsie Schumann, do you remember her?

ROUSE: Yeah, sure do.

KELLY: And then there was the Dry Goods Store. Johnny Barta was the manager, right? Actually, Mr. Ted Harmon ran it first, and retired. Johnny Barta was his assistant. And he became manager. Then Leo—Frank Netardus's brother-in-law—he married— Satsky. Yeah, he was assistant manager.

KELLY: And Helen Rozelle worked in there.

ROUSE: Yeah, she worked in there for years.

KELLY: And Luther Brock's wife, Agnes. They sold a lot of clothes, I guess and ladies patterns and material and shoes—children's clothes, everything. Then there was the Western Auto. Jimmy Couvillion. Tell me about Jimmy Couvillion.

ROUSE: Jimmy Couvillion should have been in the entertainment business. He was one of the most gracious people I've ever met. He should have been in hotels or an entertainer of some kind.

KELLY: Hospitality type.

ROUSE: Hospitality – you're right! Because as soon as you met Jimmy, you knew—it was instant. "I like that guy."

KELLY: He was a good solid person, wasn't he?

ROUSE: And he was on a B-24. He was a gunner on a B-24, over in Europe. I got two air medals, and he must have gotten six.

KELLY: Great man. The people that I remember that worked for him -- Gladys Brock, Ida Pokluda, Eunice Thomas – I guess she was Thomas at that time. Anthony Scanlin was the repairman. What do you know about Anthony? He was a nice man too.

ROUSE: Yeah, Anthony's nice. Jimmy wouldn't have had them if they wasn't nice.

KELLY: Anthony would come into our home to repair our TVs—in home service! And appliances. Any appliances.

ROUSE: I bought a TV from him one time, a Zenith. You know, he was STRONG on Zenith televisions. And it was such a lemon, that Anthony finally brought it back to the house one day and says, "Hugh, I think the life of your television is over, because I think I've worn it out, working on it". (everyone laughs)

KELLY: And then there was the grocery store, and probably Mr. Hal Rucker ran it.

ROUSE: Hal missed his calling. He ought to have been in the carnival business. He was always having some kind of promotion. Every week he had one. He had clowns out here, he had hayrides.

KELLY: I remember that! I remember one act that he would have often was Jeanna Claire and Don Mahoney. They were a western husband and wife team on TV, and he was blind.

ROUSE: And he was blind! (said simultaneously with KELLY.) And you'd never know it on TV. You didn't know it.

KELLY: But they would sing country songs in a kind of a kiddie show thing. And Preston Means ran the icehouse and liquor store, which later became a 7-11.

ROUSE: Me and Foster ended up with that—from that corner, back, all the way through the U-Tote-Em. We ended up with that property in there.

KELLY: Oh, you owned that with him?

ROUSE: Yeah. Me and Logene owned that property.

KELLY: Do you still own it?

ROUSE: No, we sold it.

KELLY: There was a picture show in Sugar Land, the Palms Theater. It was run by D. P. Morton. He was a character, too. (laughs)

ROUSE: Yeah. D. P. came in the drug store and we were all trying to find out—"D. P., what does D. P. stand for?" "Oh, it's just D. P., that's all it is—D. P." So Mary Trlicek—you remember Mary? Mary was a case. She could make a funny when it wasn't even funny. And D. P. came in one day, and she said, "D. P., have you found out what your name is?" And he said, "No, Mary, just D. P." She says, "Well, it must be Dirty Pants". (everybody laughs) From that day on, he was Dirty Pants Morton.

KELLY: People often said he was the best baby sitter in Sugar Land. You could send your kids to the movie theater and they would feel safe with them there.

ROUSE: We went to see Tora! Tora! Tora! Did you ever see Tora! Tora! Tora!?

KELLY: Yes.

ROUSE: Well his assistant worked in the grocery store as well and he lived behind the movie theater in a little house. He was running Tora! Tora! Tora! and they're bombing Pearl Harbor! Here comes all these planes. Well the reel needed to be changed and he put in the wrong one. He got them reversed. We beat on the wall – "We've already seen this reel! Take it off – we've seen this!"

GOODSILL: What was it like, living in this house right over here? [114 Venice, in the Flats along Oyster Creek]

ROUSE: Oh, we enjoyed living there.

GOODSILL: Your kids were little then?

ROUSE: Yeah. Walk right across the street and there was the store. Magina and Dick Loper lived there. We used to call him Mr. Loafer. He worked for the railroad.

KELLY: Did you know any of the Nalco men?

ROUSE: Oh, I knew them all. That was before Nalco bought 'em.

KELLY: Right. When you came here, it was probably called Visco.

ROUSE: My sister worked for Visco in Houston. You remember the old Woolworth Building? It was up above there, Visco had an office there.

KELLY: Was Dr. Kirkpatrick working at Visco?

ROUSE: Yeah, he was. And—gosh, it's been so many years. Robertson lived on Oyster Creek he was a salesman. He worked for the one that lived in Venetian Estates that lived in the slanted roof house. Philbun, that's almost right. I lived right around the corner from them.

KELLY: Marshall Canning. It was Mr. McFadden.

ROUSE: McFadden. Yeah. And he lived up on Lakeview. And later on moved to Venetian Estates. And Woody Robinson worked there. And I think some of the people in Margaret's [Dierks Phillips] family worked at the canning mill. Now whether it was just after school or something like that.

KELLY: The prison farm. Did you know many men who worked there?

ROUSE: Oh yeah, I knew a lot of them. Byron Frierson was one of my better friends. We used to play poker every Wednesday night. And Dr. Beto used to come in. You know the Beto College of Criminal Justice at Huntsville, at Sam Houston State, is named after him. He was a Lutheran minister and he was the head of the Texas Criminal Justice Department.

KELLY: And he had no qualms about playing poker?

ROUSE: Uh uh. In fact, if you remember the time that they had the riot up in Huntsville, we were going to play poker – it was on a Wednesday night. And I went up there – I always picked him up at the Wall Unit. I went in and saw one of the black fellows there, “Have you seen Dr. Beto?” He said, “He's ‘dat man—the BIG ‘un you're looking for.” I said, “Yeah, that's who I'm looking for.” He was in charge of all the prison system. And he says, “You know that man—he carries a Bible in one hand and a trace chain in the other, and you better not get in his way!” (laughter)

KELLY: So you and Byron and Dr. Beto—who else would play with you?

ROUSE: Cookie Rome—

KELLY: Did Carl Batten play with you?

ROUSE: Carl Batten played with us and the president of the canning company, McFadden.

GOODSILL: Where did you play?

ROUSE: At Byron Frierson's house, out on Flannigan Road. Big old house. And he had a couple of houseboys that were trusties. They were usually around making drinks for us.

KELLY: It's a nice evening of entertainment. Did you know Mr. Husbands, the warden?

ROUSE: Hal Husbands, I knew him well.

KELLY: What was he like?

ROUSE: Hal was different. Hal was a warden. I mean he was "warden". And Hal had played football for Rice.

KELLY: Did he?

ROUSE: Yeah. He was a graduate of Rice. And Hal was tough.

KELLY: But you would have to be, I would think.

ROUSE: He was tough. I was having breakfast out there one morning and Hal came in, and something had happened. They served him steak and eggs and coffee and something was wrong with it. He took that plate and he threw it halfway across that dining room. I'll tell you another little story. I was out with Byron one afternoon, and he got a call that they had caught some fellows that were stealing the tomatoes out here, on the sidetrack. You know, there's a spur that's a side track for some [railroad] cars, and then the main line comes through and they are sidetracked between Highway 6 and Central One. They used to grow tomatoes out there. They were GREAT BIG tomatoes. Acres and acres of tomatoes.

KELLY: Kind of where the airport is now.

ROUSE: Yeah. And there was one BIG area where there were no tomatoes AT all. So they got some of the policemen that they had out at Central and they said, "We want you to lay down here and if you spend all day here we want you to find out who's stealing these tomatoes." Well, here comes the train, backing in (makes 'chuffing' train noise). Backing in to the sidetrack. So Martin, who used to live up here on Main Street, you might remember him--worked for Missouri-Pacific. A bunch of them jumped off the train and they had these great big croker sacks. They'd fill those things up to where they could hardly carry them and they were putting them back on the train!

KELLY: (laughing)

ROUSE: Of course, they got arrested. And they called Byron and they said, “We’ve got these guys that are stealing.” Byron is in charge of the agricultural department and cattle operation. Said, “We’ve got these fellows here that got off the train.” Well, Byron went out — me and Byron went out there—Here’s Martin and all these—you know, good people—good people. You know, it’s kind of hard to turn down a tomato. Especially when you can sell it in Rosenberg!

KELLY: Good fresh ones!

GOODSILL: And the train will take it there for you!

ROUSE: Yeah, that’s true (chuckling) So I said, “Martin, what are you doing here? Stealing tomatoes off the prison farm!” He said, “Yeah. We got caught.” And Byron says, “I’ll tell you what. We’re always glad to”—you know Byron, he was a speaker [speaks slowly and ponderously] —“we’re always glad to see the people visit us, from the towns and the communities.” And of course he knew Martin and he knew three or four of them that had jumped off that train. And he said, “We’re always so glad to see you. We like to feed you when you come to the prison farm. And you see these three sacks of tomatoes, here? If you can eat those three sacks of tomatoes before you leave this prison farm, we’re not going to take you to Richmond and put you in jail.”

KELLY: (laughs)

ROUSE: “Because we don’t take anybody to go to jail for eating their meals here. But you’ll have to eat those three big sacks of tomatoes.” Well, there was no way in the world. And they started in on them. I’ll give them—they did—they tried! Let me tell you, those guys didn’t want to go to jail. They had those tomatoes running out their ears! (all laugh) Byron relented and said, “Well, you fellows just don’t take any more of our tomatoes. Now if there are any more tomatoes missing, we’re going to come see you and remember TODAY.”

KELLY: Smart man.

ROUSE: Byron was smart. I enjoyed being with Byron.

KELLY: Did you know Don Hull?

ROUSE: Doc [Don Hull] called me one day—you know he's a dentist—called me one day and said, "Hugh, I'm gonna fly down to Corpus Christi to the Naval Air Station down there". (He was a pilot in the Navy) Said, "I've got a PBY I want to fly down. It's one just like you used to fly in. Do you want to fly with me?" And I said, "Sure. Let me get out of here!" So I flew down there. We took one day off and flew down there and we flew back, in one of those old PBYs.

KELLY: I didn't know he was a dentist. But did he practice dentistry?

ROUSE: He practiced for a while. But he wasn't like me. I had enough of flying. Man I was flying those twenty and twenty-five hour days in the military. He was in pursuit planes, smaller aircraft. And he was flying four or five hours, and come in and take a shower. And then lounge around in the club and get him two or three drinks. And then the next day he was doing the same thing. But with me, it was a JOB. A job that I didn't want.

GOODSILL: Speaking of which, what ever happened to your skipper? The skipper pilot that you liked so much?

ROUSE: The last time I saw him, he was a full commander.

KELLY: Made a career out of it.

ROUSE: Oh yeah, that's what he went in for. And he was talking about how good it was when he was back being a First Class AP. He said, "I wish I was a First Class AP."

KELLY: I suppose when you first took over the drug store, your immediate boss was Tom James? Tell us about Mr. James.

ROUSE: Mr. James – he was fine. As long as you did your job, you didn't hear from him. I don't believe I ever heard—he never called me up to his office to talk to me about the drug store. If we talked about it, it would be when he came in to buy newspapers. People would come by and we'd give them their newspaper. And we would bill 'em at the end of the month for the newspaper. I used to run a bus station.

KELLY: Yes. You sold tickets. Texas Bus Line and Greyhound?

ROUSE: Yeah, Greyhound.

KELLY: Any stories there? Interesting stories about the bus?

ROUSE: Yeah. Used to have a bus driver came through here. He was the world's best comedian. You know, they had a microphone on that bus, and a speaker system. And he would keep people entertained between here and San Antonio. Then I missed him, because every time he come, he had to talk to me. And I said he must be on vacation. So the next time a bus driver came in, I said, "Is he on vacation?" He said, "No. He's serving his time." I said, "Serving his time? What

did he do?" He said, "Well, they suspended him for a month because he entered San Antonio, and he turned on the microphone and he says, 'Ladies and gentlemen, you're now entering the city of San Antonio. It's called Chili Switch. It's owned by the Jews, controlled by Catholics and enjoyed by the Mexicans.'"

KELLY & ROUSE: (laughing)

ROUSE: And somebody reported him. So they had to do something to him. But I had people tell me that they were on the bus just to ride - get a ticket there and ride back, just for entertainment!

KELLY: Did any strangers ever get off at Sugar Land and come into the drug store to wait for a bus? Or to make a connection?

ROUSE: Oh yeah. We'd connect here too. I think the funniest thing about somebody getting off—we used to have the prison farm take the immigrants back to be deported. And this one Mexican got off the bus and he went up to Edna Nulisch. He tried his best to cash a check—and they were taking him to deport him back across the river. And she wouldn't take his check so he had another check that he wanted to endorse and he wanted her to cash it. (laughing) You've never seen anybody get so upset in your life as Edna was with that Mexican.

KELLY: He was too persistent?

ROUSE: He was on that bus. They let them out with a couple of guards to buy cigarettes or get a cup of coffee or a cold drink or something.

KELLY: And he thought he could get away with—

ROUSE: He thought he could cash a check!

KELLY: And you'd kinda have to know Edna, too. She didn't take any guff from anybody, did she?

ROUSE: NO! (both laughing) “NO, I’m NOT cashing that check!” “NO, I’m not cashing THAT check either!”

KELLY: Now, not IN your drug store but on the outside of your drug store, there was probably one of just a handful of pay phones in Sugar Land. And I’m sure there were probably all kind of calls made from that phone booth.

ROUSE: Otis Enquist. He used to take care of all the houses the other side of 90A for the Sugar Company. You know Otis was always talking with his hands.

KELLY: He was a Swede.

KELLY: I liked Otis. He was an interesting guy. He was friends with my grandmother, Mrs. Rachuig in the 50s when I was a little boy. We’d spend time with him. We’d go to his house.

ROUSE: He was nice as he could be.

KELLY: Well, I’ve just about exhausted the questions that I have. Is there anything else that you can think of that you’d like to say, before we end this?

ROUSE: You remember Pirtle?

KELLY: Jess Pirtle?

ROUSE: Yes. Mrs. Charleton used to live in the third house from the corner, at Guenther and Brooks Street. Pirtle stopped there at the Charleton’s house. He was doing some measuring, you know, out in front of her house. She came out and she looked, she says, “What are you doing here, Pirtle?” “Mrs. Charleton, I’m going to put in another telephone post here. We’re gonna put it in right here.” She says, “No, you’re not.” And he says, “Yes ma’am, we’re going to put that telephone post right in here. We’re going to be here this afternoon.” She turned around and she goes back in the house. She gets a double-barreled shotgun and

she walked out the door, and she’s putting two bullets in the chamber. [Makes sound of inserting bullets in chamber.] And she said, ‘Where did you say you were going to put that telephone post, Pirtle?’ He said, “Well, I think we’re gonna ... [Mr. Rouse makes a gesture as if Mr. Pirtle had selected the neighbor’s lot] And guess who got the telephone post? Boatwright! (more laughter) And it’s still there!!

KELLY: Did Mr. Pirtle tell you that or did somebody else?

ROUSE: Pirtle came up there, a nervous wreck! He was on the telephone, trying to dial the telephone. I said, "What's the matter, Pirtle?" And he told me that story.

KELLY: Oh, there was another employee you had, a Mrs. Chaney.

ROUSE: Oh yeah. She lived right across the street, in the house, the green house. [On Brooks and Guenther]

KELLY: I would like to say thank you for this interview. It has been delightful.

ROUSE: (laughing)

KELLY: Very interesting and we really appreciate it.

ROUSE: You know, they could have stretched the biggest circus tent in the world over this town and they would have had more than three rings!

(more laughter)

Interview ends.