FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Jewell Jenkins, Jr.**

Interview Date: 03/02/2013

Interviewers: Pat Pollicoff and Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Carlos Rubalcaba

Comment: Interviewing Jewell Jenkins, Jr. at the Sugar Land Heritage Foundation offices in Sugar Land, Texas. This is part of the Sugar Land Series of Interviews. 30 Pages

Transcript

POLLICOFF: Welcome, Jewel. We are delighted that you could join us.

JENKINS: Thank you.

POLLICOFF: Can you please tell me your whole name?

JENKINS: Jewell Jenkins, Junior

POLLICOFF: Where were you born?

JENKINS: At home here in Sugar Land, out there near that prison area. I was born out there near Mr. Allison's place. Mom had a midwife from what I understand.

POLLICOFF: What is the date of your birth?

JENKINS: March 3, 1934.

POLLICOFF: Happy Birthday!

JENKINS: That's right tomorrow.

POLLICOFF: What brought your family to Fort Bend County, and when did they come?

JENKINS: My dad was born in Houston, Texas. Mother was born in Stafford, Texas. He came to Sugar Land to find work. It had to be in late twenties. He worked on Highway 6, helped to construct that highway. He worked for the Highway Department. He started working for Mr. Voss. You see Voss road out there, he started working for him, we moved out there. He stayed there awhile, and from there he went to Mr. Watley's place to work. From there to Mr. Gaffney's place over around Old Richmond Road. It's near the lake.

POLLICOFF: What kind of work he did for Mr. Voss, Mr. Watley and Mr. Gaffney.

JENKINS: What ever they told him to do, apparently, because I'd see him sometimes cutting the Huisache bushes. I would see him sometimes carrying stuff here and there. Mr. Simpson bought from Mr. Gaffney who used to own Simpson Gilman Cadillac Company. He passed away and Gilman's is still going. From there we moved to the Quarters ([now called Mayfield Park]. They called it the Quarters, at that time.

POLLICOFF: So your father took a job with Imperial Sugar at that time? How old were you?

JENKINS: I can remember his walking home to Mr. Gaffney's place with a sack full of apples on his back, because they were giving them out; I guess it was during the depression. I was very small. He would walk to Sugar Land and he would walk home, out to Mr. Gaffney's place. I would always run to the door and I called him Jewell. I was small. "Here comes Jewell with a whole lot of 'opples.' 'Opples Jewell Opples!'" That's the way I used to say it. Shows you I was very small. So that had to be, what? 1939 or 1938. About that time is when he switched over to Imperial.

POLLICOFF: What did he do with Imperial?

JENKINS: At Imperial he worked outside and in the refinery, and then he went to work for Sugar Land Industries. That's when he got with the store. That happened in the early '40s. We moved into the Quarters during World War II if my memory serves me correctly. My mother worked in the refinery. The men were being taken into the war. I remember all the ladies got to go to work. My dad didn't go to war but other men went. My mother and other women worked right here in the refinery during World War II.

POLLICOFF: How many children did your mother and father have? Tell me your father's and mother's names also.

JENKINS: Three, just three. Ella B. Jenkins is her name. His was Jewell Jenkins, Senior.

POLLICOFF: Do you have any idea when they were born?

JENKINS: On his tombstone it says November 3rd 1911 for my dad. April 13th 1913 was Mama. I have one sister, Ella Patterson and one brother Willie Lee Jenkins. I am the oldest. My brother was two years younger and my sister is fourteen years younger (chuckling).

POLLICOFF: Tell me a little about your father. How do you remember him?

JENKINS: He was a strict disciplinarian (laughing). He kept us in line I'll admit that. Mama was a nurturer, but she would also put the belt on us if necessary. Daddy was more of a teacher; lots of things he told me I relate to my children. He told me things and they have come to pass so I take him as a philosopher, the teacher of the family. In front of God he became a minister in the early 50's and when he died he was a reverend.

POLLICOFF: How old was he when he died?

JENKINS: I think he was 76 he died in 1987. Mama was 88 when she died in 1992.

GOODSILL: Did he do any preaching when he was a Minister? What kind of preaching style did he have?

JENKINS: Well, he was more of a teacher than the old grinder. We called them the old grinder; you've heard them where they speak real fast and all that stuff? He was more of a teacher. When he spoke you could understand him clearly and he didn't mind telling you how the cow ate the cabbage. Tell the truth, I admired him for that. Sometimes I wanted him to get like some of the others where they would get to grinding it out with rapid repeating of the words, you know? But he wouldn't do it.

GOODSILL: Where did he preach?

JENKINS: Over here in Sugar Land, well everywhere, but he started preaching at Pleasant Spring Missionary Baptist Church here in Sugar Land, Texas. Which was in the Quarters, Avenue C and Guyer Street. Pleasant Spring Baptist Church, under the senior pastor Reverend R. L. Robinson.

GOODSILL: He did this in addition to his job, obviously. Why do you think he decided to go into the preaching?

JENKINS: I'll say it that way, when we were small kids we would hear him preaching, we'd listen to him and he would be in there preaching. Have the chair there for his pulpit and we'd peep in there on him. It was something that, I don't know, he just had to do it, I guess.

GOODSILL: It just came naturally to him?

JENKINS: It came naturally to him. That was just him, I guess. They say I'm supposed to be, but I'm not so far.

POLLICOFF: Not so far what?

JENKINS: Preaching. (chuckling). They all say I should be preaching. My dad came from Houston. My mother's dad came from Alexandria, Louisiana. My mother's mother came from Mississippi, she didn't tell me the city, but Mississippi, those two came and they moved down here. Lord, I don't know, back in the late 1800's or something I guess. They had a boy that she told me about. One of her brothers died in 1900 so it had to be in the 1800's when they moved to this area. They went to Four Corners; they called it Four Corners High School out there on Gaines Road and Boss Gaston. The teacher who taught them taught me, and she's gone.

GOODSILL: Taught you in elementary school?

JENKINS: Taught me period, high school, Eva Jane Barlow. She died after I finished school. She taught my mother, she taught me and my oldest daughter also.

GOODSILL: Wow, that's a long time teacher!

JENKINS: She was an older lady when she died quite naturally; Eva Jane Barlow was her name.

GOODSILL: You describe your father kind of as a serious, strict man.

JENKINS: Yes, he was, he didn't believe in what I would call foolishness. He believed we should observe that which is right; observe that which is right. He always warned us, "Anybody can get in trouble, anybody can, but it is very difficult to get out of trouble!" He would tell us that often. He would say, "Use your head for more than a hat rack." He was strict, you know, but it was good, I mean it helped me. It helped us all, it really did, it helped us all. I carried some of those principles that he instilled in me, that helped me go through life.

My mom was more of a nurturer. She would whip, she would beat if you didn't act right. She would threaten you. Lady folks are usually a little bit more considerate, maybe more than the man. Anyway she would say, "I told you to do so and so and so, and if you don't do it I'm going to tell your daddy." We didn't want Daddy to be involved. So she would use that whenever it was necessary.

I'll give you a story. She used to make us wash, I guess ten years old, 11, 12. She would make us wash and hang things on the clothesline. You had what was called bluing water, this is back before we got the washer. We would get angry about it and we called it girly work. (chuckling) She heard us one time…we didn't say it anymore. (chuckling). One time she told us, "I'm going to the store and I want you all to stay here at the house. Don't leave this house." She left, we left. A friend came by and said, "Come on go with me to my aunt's house." We went with him. We were in the back yard playing ball. (laughing) I don't know how she got the message but after awhile we heard a voice. I can't say it, you know when you're born without a daddy or out of wedlock? That's what she called us. "Come here." (chuckle) She whipped us all the way back home. We couldn't outrun her we were so small. I will say this, she didn't play around but Dad was the one who was really strict.

Mom used to sing. Dad used to sing also before he started preaching. She had a little singing group and he had a little singing group. That's when I was reaaaal small. I can just barely remember. That's what started me to singing…my mother did. That's who started my brother and I to singing.

GOODSILL: How old were you when you started singing?

JENKINS: About eleven, I guess. She came one Sunday when we were singing and she asked us, "Boys do you all want to sing?" And I said, "Yes Mother." She went ahead and gave us our voices, had a group, four of us were out there. She said, "You're going to sing base, you're going to sing tenor, you're going to sing the baritone." She called me Junior. "Junior, your going to do the lead singing." That's the way we started, she started us. I tell that story with pride because my Mother started us to singing. She started us to singing other than blues.

GOODSILL: Not the blues?

JENKINS: Not the blues. That's what I got into in the Army (chuckling). Did a little blues singing with a group called The Crusaders, but my parents didn't know I did it. You know we sometimes get off on the wrong track, but we come back if we are well trained, the Bible says that. Train up a child the way he should go. When he gets old he won't depart. If you train him up right he'll come back and I did. I am in the church and I intend to stay.

GOODSILL: What church did you go to?

JENKINS: Mount Pleasant. Now what happened, Mount Pleasant Spring is on Guyer and Avenue C and Mount Calvary was where the church is located now on Avenue E. They both were in need of repair so Mr. Armstrong and one of the other gentlemen over here at the Sugar Company recommended, "It's a small community, why not combine the congregation?" That made sense, so finally they said, "Okay, we will." The ministers both agreed.

So with Imperial Sugar aiding money-wise in the construction they agreed to it. When they had the meeting about it there were some people who disagreed so they moved on. Everybody is not going to agree so they moved on. Those who stayed around got together. I won't say me because I was too small to make decisions, too young. They called the meetings and they said what we are going to do is pick a place to build the edifice. Behind Avenue C and Guyer Street was the creek. On each side of it were homes. Right in front of it was Guyer so you had very little space.

Mount Calvary where the Mount Pleasant is now, had lots of room so they said, "Looks as if we should build it over there, where Mount Calvary is." Before they tore it down they said, "Let us get a name." So the Deacon H. L. Smith Cora Fisher, a long time resident of Sugar Land, decided that to satisfy both of the groups they'd take part of a name from each of the Churches. From Pleasant Spring and Mount Calvary they named the new church Mount Pleasant. They agreed on it.

Now we have got to pick a pastor. Once that happened the other pastors were [makes a TOOT sound] gone. So they chose the Reverend R. L. Robinson who had been there before at Pleasant Springs, to be the first pastor. Reverend R. L. Robinson came in and he was our pastor for about four years and then he moved on and the Reverend Grace came in. He was the pastor a few months and then the Reverend Eddie Thomas came in. He's still there 51 years later. That's how long he has been there, 51 years, Eddie Thomas.

Rev. Eddie Thomas pastor's anniversary at Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church – Photo circa 1980. From left to right, Rev. C. G. Wilkins (speaker), Sister Ella B. Jenkins, Rev. Eddie Thomas (pastor), Sister Mae Esther Thomas (pastor's wife), Rev. Jewell Jenkins Sr. Brenda Robinson is seated at the piano. NOTE: September 2010 was Pastor Thomas' 49th anniversary with the church.

GOODSILL: How many members of the congregation do you think there were?

JENKINS: You mean at that time? Oh boy, it's hard to say. I'll say it this way there were more then than there are now. Because so many people past on, just a bunch of people gone.

GOODSILL: Was it the church that most of the black families went to?

JENKINS: Oh, yes, yes. Now what happened after they got together, well the Church of Christ came in and built an edifice right behind us. We could walk out and walk into their church if we wanted to. That sort of split up the people in the Quarters a little bit there. That church stayed there awhile and after a few years they moved out and now they are out on Voss Road near Old Richmond.

We bought their building. Then the Hispanic people had built a church on Avenue F. We bought that building and then after awhile the Hispanic people came back and they bought it from us. (chuckling) Again. We still own the Church of Christ building we own that property. The membership is not as large as it used to be. People who didn't lay the groundwork, you know how that goes; they are not quite as dedicated to the cause.

GOODSILL: But you came back, you stayed?

JENKINS: Oh, yes ,because that's home to me. So many people it is not home. On Eldridge Road a little black church went up. Fort Bend has a humongous church. That doesn't help membership over here either. Then you've got Friendship right there on what we call The Hill on Lakeview.

That didn't help the membership because you've got people here and there; however, we won't let that stop us. We are still going to try and expand and make things go. Let me say it this way, the Quarters is different than from what it used to be. Avenue D and Avenue E, all that was empty. It was just hedges and fields. Miss Green would come each year and pitch her tent. When she would pitch her tent she would show old movies to us. They were new, I guess, at that time, but they are old now. Showed movies to the Hispanic and the blacks because they both lived in the Quarters together.

GOODSILL: So was this a traveling entertainment or a tent revival?

JENKINS: She was just constantly going with her tent show from town to town. It would take about a year, I guess. I don't know where she'd go, but she'd come back and when she'd come back we were right there with Miss Green.

GOODSILL: So once a year she would come in and how long would she stay?

JENKINS: Oh, about a week. We'd see the movies and Tex Ritter and all those boys. I can't forget them.

GOODSILL: I recall you said you used to help Mrs. Green setup.

JENKINS: Oh, yea. We'd want to get some free tickets and we'd run over there and try (chuckle) and try, you know how that goes. Then after her, I can't think of his name now. They went to Stafford after they left Sugar Land. They came in and they setup for about a year of two and they quit because they built the Palms Theater.

When they built the Palms Theater that killed all that tent show stuff. We were uptown then. We were going into a well-constructed building! The Palms Theater came in and was in business about three years when it burned down. So they had to redo it and reopen it.

GOODSILL: Do you remember your father's father's [grandfather] and father's mother's [grandmother] names?

JENKINS: I don't know where they came from but I know my grandfather was Johnson Jenkins. My mother's mother's name was Ella Jenkins. Houston is where he came from. Maybe she came from Houston, too. They never did say that she was from anywhere else.

GOODSILL: Then your mother's side is from Louisiana, your mother's parents?

JENKINS: Robert Webster and Emma Webster. I never saw her. I saw him because he died around 1984. She died when I was a baby. They said I was crawling around her casket so you know I don't remember. Died on a Christmas day my mother said. Born in Alexandria, Louisiana. She came from Mississippi, but we don't know where. They never did say what town. They just said Mississippi to us.

GOODSILL: What kind of work did your grandparents do?

JENKINS: Farming, as far as I can remember.

GOODSILL: One of the things you talked about was the men going to WWII and the women working in the refinery. Tell me what your mother did?

JENKINS: She was working in the 10-10 room. That's all I know she said. She would come home and talking about the 10-10 room. To me it was ten-pound sugar bags, bagged to ten pounds.

GOODSILL: So bagging the sugar? What do you think she was doing?

JENKINS: I remember when I was there during the 1950's, working over here. They had it set up so the sugar bags would came underneath the little spigot and the sugar would go down in the bag and then they would sew it up. Then they would send it down the line and someone would grab them on the assembly line and stack them up.

GOODSILL: Those ten pound bags probably added up after awhile.

JENKINS: They did, they did add up, they sure did. They would put us over there sometimes with the one hundred pound bags and we couldn't hold them. We held it under the big hopper and that sugar would drop and being little weak boys sometime that bag would [crumple] and the sugar would [motions in a spilling manner] (laughter). You know they used a little French when they talked to you about that. (laughing). You couldn't blame them.

I never will forget it. Mr. Pense (said), "Take those boys away from there and put them on the stack." Now let me explain the stack. You had a conveyor belt and it would run across the top. We had a big stack of sugar and we'd go out to the boxcar and the men would catch it and [makes sound: “chooop"] stack it in the car. But you had to load it on the conveyor belt and you would get wet, and this is a fact, from head to toe, I mean WET [from perspiration]. They would always have us some salt pills. They'd make us take salt pills, because we would get wet. OH, it was hot.

GOODSILL: Tell me again what your dad did with the refinery, because it sounds like he had a couple of different jobs.

JENKINS: Well, when my dad was over there he said he worked on the dump. He worked in the packing room, too. I didn't ever work the packing room; I don't know what that meant. But he worked in the packing room over there, before they took him out. They took him out of the refinery and put him with Sugar Land Industries. [Imperial Sugar refined the sugar; Sugar Land Industries ran the town.] With Sugar Land Industries he was a stocker at the store. They called him a stock boy at that time in the store, under Mr. Rucker then later Mr. Page. Then he retired. Mother had quit work already, she had quit working at the sugar refinery and she went to work in a hotel down there on Main Street. (chuckling) It's probably not there anymore. I don't remember the name of it. Then she just quit altogether. Then Dad retired. He got a little retirement.

I had to go to college, so then he went to work at Visco, it used to be Visco not Nalco. At Visco he wasn't doing heavy work anymore. He sent me to school. School was cheap then $34 a month. Believe or not, that was not easy to get ahold of at that time. My Dad said he used to work for fifty cents a day. I helped myself by working during the summer, for Bill Williams. I came to work for the Sugar Land Industries and the refinery when they would switch me over. Mr. Curtis Hall would throw us and bring us back out. That sounds a little cruel but he wasn't cruel. He would say, "You boys are going into the refinery and work for a week or two." After that, “Well, now we are going to send you back to Mr. Hall."And we'd go back to Mr. Curtis Hall to work outside.

In those days people respected each other a little bit more. We could leave home and not lock our door. We could drive our cars and not lock our car [in a whisper] and nobody bothered it, nobody bothered you. You didn't have to look around and somebody would hurt you. I share this with my family, with my kids and they look at me funny, but I tell them it's the truth. It was different then, people respected each other's property more. Oh, there were people who were crooked. There's always been people who are crooked, but not nearly as many as we have now. I will tell anybody it's my home and I am not ashamed, wherever I go. In 1956 I grabbed hold to a young lady in Phoenix City, Alabama by the name of Mary Francis Horace.

GOODSILL: You grabbed hold, meaning…?

JENKINS: (laughing) Meaning that I grabbed stole her and stole her from them. I was in the service at the time at Fort Benning, Georgia. (laughing). Ever since that day, we've been together.

GOODSILL: I'll ask you about that in a bit. You say you have wonderful memories of growing up in Sugar Land. Can you describe what it was like? Tell me where you lived, what your house was like and friends you played with.

JENKINS: Okay, we moved, from Mr. Edison's place into what we call the Quarters. That was in 1942. I was really young when we moved in on Avenue C, 240 Avenue C. That's one I will never forget, it was a three room; shotgun (laughing). You had a bedroom on each end and the kitchen in the middle. Or you could trade it and put the kitchen on the end, put one bedroom in the middle and one bedroom on the other end. When I left for service we were still living there, when I left for college in 1954 we were still living there. I went to Prairie View but I didn't finish because I got sick and the army called me. I became ill. Dr. Curtis Slaughter had to cut me. I still have the scar. He called it cellulitis. I never thought I'd pray to die but I did because that's how miserable I was all night long. He said I can not do a thing until it comes to a head. When it did come to a head, oh, I was so grateful and he cut me.

What happened is Uncle Sam was drafting people at that time. I was well for a few months and the Uncle Sam grabbed me and I had to go in the service. I had no other choice, but to go into the United States Army, the first place was Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. That same year they sent me to Fort Benning, Georgia, 1957. I went through basic training and some schooling. They schooled in me in clerk typist school. I was a training NCO at Fort Benning, Georgia.

GOODSILL: How long were you in the Army?

JENKINS: Six years total, because they called me back in when I got out (chuckling). I had to leave my wife and everything and go back in. They called me back, they sure did.

GOODSILL: Did you have to go overseas for any reason?

JENKINS: No. I did not, because I got with Captain Gamaia. [Gahameey - phonetic spelling] He was American Indian. They wanted to send me to Korea and I said, "Do I have to go to Korea?" He said, "No, you really don't have to go to Korea." I said I'd rather stay right here. He checked my records, you see, if you are not acting right they are going to ship you out. He came back, he said. "Well you can stay, you're clean."

BUT, let me tell you what happened. When I went to Prairie View, Major Christmas gave me a test and I passed it and he said, "Okay, you're qualified to be an officer, why don't you go ahead and take officers training?" I said, "No." He said, "You don't have to, but you are going to pay for it. Every time you came up for a promotion it will be on your record." You come in and all these big shots, looking mean…you know how the Army is, to discipline you. I would come in and I'd look at all these Majors and Captains and things looking mean. "COME IN SOLDIER," and you come in saluting and all that stuff. "AT EASE. SIT DOWN'. They'd say, "Let me see…" and they'd start flipping and they'd look at each other. "WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT HIM? LET ME SEE." They already know that was the game they played on you. And every time they'd say the same thing to me. "You don't like this mans army in the first place. You had a chance to be an officer. You're excused, soldier." I'd jump up, "YES SIR," almost crying, it hurt me, it hurt me. I remember Major Christmas putting that on my record! If I could catch him... (chuckle). I know he's dead now because he's and older man then I and I am an old man now. But if I could get him…because he did me like that!

POLLICOFF: Why did you refuse to go to Officer Training School?

JENKINS: Because I didn't like it.

GOODSILL: So they were right?

JENKINS: Yes, I didn't like it, I didn't like it…sure they were right. I didn't like it, I might as well admit I did not like it and I refused to go officers training. They said, "You don't like this man's army, do you?" This MAN'S army, that's the terminology used. They were right I didn't like it! But while I was there I did what I was supposed to do.

GOODSILL: Did you do pretty well as a clerk typist?

JENKINS: Oh, I did very well. Then I was able to get out of that. If you were obedient, nice, you never got in trouble. They were lenient with you, so I went to Captain Jones, New York, and said, "I'd like to be relieved of duty." He said, "What duty?" I said, "Clerk Typist, I don't type fast enough." He said, "You type fast enough to satisfy the company commander." I said, "But not to satisfy me." I looked at him and he said. "You know what, boy, I could court martial you for those words. But you're so nice I'm going to relieve you. Would you like to be a training NCO?' I said. "I'd love that!" So he made me training NCO.

GOODSILL: What do you do in that job?

JENKINS: Well, in NCO training different groups, you'd come out and say, "COMPANY A FALL OUT". You know I'm big stuff. They (chuckle) fall to attention I'd call out, "SERGEANT, COME HERE. MARCH THOSE MEN DOWN TO SO AND SO." I liked that I might as well admit it. Everybody likes a little authority.

The things they would show us! We could not talk about because it would scare the daylights out of people; how close we come to being annihilated by Russia. They showed us how the A-bomb worked. They'd set up a make shift city and they'd drop the bomb in a parachute cause they wanted the plane to get high and away before it hit the ground. When it hit the ground they would take a picture and you'd see smoke rise and spread out. We were looking at that and all of a sudden, where there had been a bridge or something, you'd see [gestures nothingness]. That's exactly how powerful it is. Everything just [gestures] evaporated. Now the rays are coming that will really destroy you. They said the gamma rays destroy the people. Like they did in Japan. After they showed us that they said you may NOT talk about this when you go home. If you do, you will be court-martialed. If you had known that they stopped just in time before that button was pushed to start a nuclear war. Just in time! They kept order.

GOODSILL: So you were there during one of those threats?

JENKINS: Yes. I remember President Eisenhower rode through the campus. We are all waving at him. He was a great general. He and General MacArthur, they were great in World War II. We are happy that he was the president cause he knew about war. They said we are going to have some problems here and they weren't lying about that. It won't be right away, but they could see some problems brewing in Germany.

They were talking about that when we got out. I got home, guess what, they called me back. They called it the Berlin Crisis. There's a lot people don't know about the situation but we have a great country. They are protecting us a great deal more than we think. They're not perfect but they're protecting us a lot.

GOODSILL: Clearly I have let this drift way far from Sugar Land; we are already (chuckle) to the Berlin Crisis.

JENKINS: We were in the Berlin Crisis. I'm in Sugar Land now. I am back in Sugar Land. In Sugar Land we had the Quarter Crisis. (laughing enthusiastically)

GOODSILL: Tell me what life was like when you went to school.

JENKINS: Okay, I went to M. R. Wood School from elementary school onward. M. R. Wood School was three rooms and we had a cafeteria when I first started school there. Mrs. Mayfield was the principle. That's where you get the Mayfield Park name. Charlotte Mayfield was her name. Mr. Randall was principle before that, but I was too young, I guess. He went on to Prairie View and I met him in Prairie View years later. Grades one through six were in one room and seven through ten were in the next room. It didn't go any further than that. The third room was a little make shift library, then right to the west of the building we had our cafeteria.

GOODSILL: Which was not connected?

JENKINS: No, it was a free standing building to the west. When we had our morning assembly we had to draw the curtains, which separated the two rooms. You'd draw them back and we had the stage. Miss Charlotte Mayfield would lead us in singing Oh, Beautiful for Spacious Skies. We would sing it and then we would say a little prayer and then we'd start singing, My Darling Clementine. WE DID! After that we'd draw the curtain and get down to business. The teacher would say, "Okay first grade reading, second grade get ready for spelling"...same room! That's the way they did it. There was one teacher in each room. We had Miss Zalia. I don't know how to spell Miss Zalia, I was too small (chuckle). Mrs. Mayfield left there in 1940's. I am telling my age. I was there when she left (chuckle) and Miss A. M. Scott took over.

GOODSILL: Did you have any trouble learning in a classroom with that much noise and activity?

JENKINS: No, no you didn't. You know why? Because we were scared to death they were going to paddle us. They would paddle you. You're sitting there and all of a sudden BAM! It's different today. Miss A. M. Scott; let me tell you this story. I can tell you it's the truth. When I got into high school if you didn't learn her lesson there was a closet back there. She had a strap with a wooden handle on it, and it was about this wide and about that long and she'd line you up and bring it down on you one by one. "Close the door you are your going to get MY lesson. You all hear what I'm saying"' I'm serious, if you didn't get HER lesson she used the paddle. They don't do that anymore. The mothers and the fathers were right with the teacher; they didn't come in wanting to fight them. My son is in the school system now, he's telling me how it is. Mothers come down, ragh, ragh, ragh. There wasn't any of that stuff. If the teacher said so and so then that was it. No, no, no we didn't have any problem studying with all those people in that room, because they were quiet. They were scared, that's why. I was scared too. (laughing)

GOODSILL: But you learned?

JENKINS: But I learned, and that's the reason we didn't have any problems. Today you would because they will curse their teacher, they'll fight them…today the kids are different.

GOODSILL: Were you in a school with black and Hispanic kids?

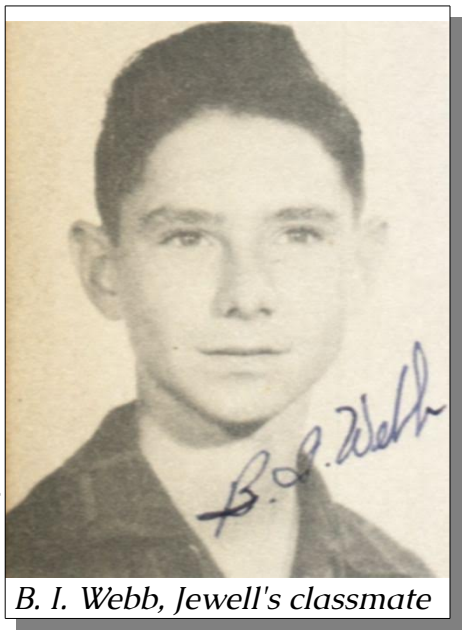
JENKINS: NO, it was all black. The Hispanics had their separate school, it was still in the Quarters but they were separated from us. Of course, all the Caucasians were over there on the Hill; we called it the Hill then. No, we weren't together. We'd play together in the evening after school, play ball together but we didn't go to school together. M. R. Wood is named after Mr. Milton R. Wood, a sugar engineer. I think it was Colonel Cunningham who brought him here in 1918 or about that time from Chicago, Illinois.

GOODSILL: Did they ever expand the school?

JENKINS: In 1950 they decided to expand the school. They built it and that "looooong" brick building that was over there. They still had the three-room building there but it was built in front of the three-room building. Now we were uptown, quite naturally we had classrooms all the way down. The Principle had his nice office. We still had the cafeteria, but it wasn't a cafeteria any longer, it was where we studied commercial science. That's typing and shorthand, Miss Sally Mae Carr was the teacher. Now that's getting on up into the 1950's, my time to leave because I was a big boy then. Of course, you know what happened after that.

GOODSILL: Tell me.

JENKINS: They integrated the school. When they integrated the school then the children went and the school went (chuckle). They turned M. R. Wood into an alternative school. They improved and built the big nice building that is there now. When I was going it was segregated. During that time and we never did have any problems. I remember a (white) guy named B. I.



B. I. Webb, Jewell's classmate

POLLICOFF: Mr. Webb? B. I. Webb, is that who you are talking about?

JENKINS: You know him? Where is he now? Is he dead?

GOODSILL: No, he is not, we have an interview of him.

JENKINS: OOOH! Really? Well, I wish he'd remember me, probably don't remember me anymore. That was a long time ago. Anyway, we didn't have any problems we really didn't. It was just different, so much of a difference. I won't say that segregation is the best thing. No, it was just a different period. People had a different mind set.

GOODSILL: Was there a time that you realized that the color of your skin mattered?

JENKINS: Let me tell you how that went. We had the meat market, we had the fruit strand over here on this side of Highway 90. We had the old mercantile store over here. Drug store, post office; I'll start with the drug store. You'd come in the drug store and of course you had the little counter there and with seats. Now we couldn't sit there, you'd have to go to the end and it had a board separating it (chuckling). And you go to the end you had about this much space on the end and you ordered your milkshake, your soda or whatever it was. You got it and you left. That was the drug store at that time, okay? Fruit stand, meat market and others. I used to come in and as long as there was Miss so and so or Mr. so and so coming I had to wait. Now after "allllll" the Caucasian people had come and gone, "WHAT DO YOU WANT, BOY?" I didn't like that, no I didn't! 'WHAT DO YOU WANT BOY?' So I would come and say, "Me mama sent me so and so." "OKAY, BOY."

I hope your not kin to anybody, because it got to a point when they moved up across the street over there, we used to go in the drug store and I don't remember his name anymore, but he would always call anybody black Sambo. If it was a black lady he called her Gertrude. (laughing) I've forgotten his name. I'm looking at his face, but I've forgotten his name now. But that's a fact, so you want me to give you the negative? I'm giving you some negative.

GOODSILL: You always had to wait for the white families?

JENKINS: Yes, you had to and you had to go in the back/side door. You go to Mr. Hass's café, or you go over to Mr. White's café and you had to go around the back and order your hamburger. As a child I also worked in the kitchen of Mr. White's café. You weren't allowed to go out front. At Bill Williams' you had to work in the kitchen. When you went out front, you went out to pick the dishes up, bus boy. That was fine, but you don't go out and sit down. Those are the negatives I'm talking about. However, what I'm trying to say is that there were always negatives in life. We sing a song about my good days outweigh my bad days. So I won't complain. It's a fact; my good days outweigh the bad days. I won't complain, because it's a fact. No, I didn't like that.

I don't have any regrets saying Sugar Land is my home. I understand now since I'm older that it could have been a lot worst than it was. I could understand that there were things that were done by people who were of a different color to help. When I was working over there at Mr. Hass's café, I can remember that a gentleman came in one time. I was out front putting beer in the case. They had that beer case out there. He sort of spoke about the fact that I was out front, but I was out front working, so Mr. Hass let him know. "I told him to come out here and put this in here, because I'm not going to put it there and I'm paying somebody to do it." You are always going to have somebody, whether black or white, that's going to be a smart-alec like that. So yea there were some negatives in that respect, I'll admit it. I've been insulted, I'll have to admit it. I am being honest with you; you asked me so I'm being honest.

GOODSILL: We appreciate your candidness.

JENKINS: However, overall my good days outweigh my bad and that's a fact.

GOODSILL: We keep hearing the train outside here. Does that bring back any special memories of growing up here?

JENKINS: Yes, of the Depot that used to be over there. We used to catch that. There it goes again. (chuckle). You have quite a few come through here. I have to always dodge them coming to church. My dad used to catch what's called the Dinky and go into Houston. I was really small but Dad was from Houston so we'd ride over there to see his sisters or brothers on the Dinky. We'd usually catch the Dinky on a Sunday afternoon, after church, at that old Depot. Ya'll might remember, it used to be right over there [on Kempner Street] right in front of the medical clinic.

Now, let me go from there to Visco. I'm married and I had children, and I was just out of service, before I was recalled. I've got to get a job that pays more. When I started to work for the Visco Company they called it skilled labor and I was making $117 and I thought I was in hog heaven. That's a fact; that was lots of money in 1963. I worked there until 1968. I quit there and I went to manage a Firestone store.

When I left there I went to Bellaire Kirby Company and I became an outside sales person. I became a field counselor and I took a test one day. They test you and you pay them for getting a job. I went there and I took a test and they start telling me, "You can go to W. T. Grant and work if you want to. You want to work in finance? You want to work as sales consultant? You can go to Firestone." When they said Firestone I said, "Stop. That's where I want to go."

So I went to Firestone after I left Bellaire and I stayed 10 years 6 months. I managed two stores; one in North Line and one in Harrisburg. I left there and one of the gentlemen who used to work for Firestone wanted me to work at Goodyear, so he stole me. I went to Goodyear and worked as Assistant Manager and I said, "Well, okay I can make more money still if I go to Helfman Ford and sell tires to them." "You are a good sales person. Do you want to work for us?" So I went to Helfman and retired from there in 2006 after 21 years. It was a very good place to work. Mr. Jack Helfman is gone, Nason Feldman, his son-in-law, he's gone. They gave me a chance and I will never forget it. You know they are Jewish people.

GOODSILL: Did you experience very much discrimination when you were working in that field?

JENKINS: Let me tell you about that now you've got me going. Yes, I did. I even had it at Firestone. I had a buddy who was Caucasian. We worked together. Sometimes I would say, "Gene, go sell those people something, they don't want to talk to me." He would go and sell them. People have ignored me.

"Welcome to Helfman Ford. How may I assist you today?" It's just like I'm speaking to myself, as though I'm not there. I'd say to another salesman, "Listen, those people over there, I don't think they want me help them." So and so would go out and help those people and say, "Don't worry about it. You're going to get credit for the sale." They were fair, that's why I said it's my other home.

I had one come in one time and he sat ON my desk and he was giving me the third degree. (chuckles) The manager of the floor was a man by the name of Sonny Gadell. Sonny Gadell heard him and came over and he said, "Sir, my name is Sonny Gadell. What is yours?" He told him. "I'm going to ask you to do something and I want you to do it quick. GET OFF THAT SO AND SO DESK, RIGHT NOW" (LAUGHTER) That guy got up and said, "Oh, so you're a smart alec." He said, "Yes, I'm smart! Why do you want to do him that way? You are disrespecting him." You know what he did though? He turned around and said, "I'm sorry, son." He called me "son." "I'll buy a car from you, but not today." I said, "Thank you for coming, sir."

You don't get smart with people. That isn't the way you sell anything. That isn't the way you build your reputation. That isn't the way you build your business. You build your business by being smarter that the ones raising sand with you. That's exactly what I did. Many times I met people calling me names, really. But hey, I was cool, call me the name if you want to. I wouldn't say, "WHO YOU TALKING TO, YOU SO AND SO." I just turned and walked away and go tell somebody and the customer wouldn't know I got the credit.

GOODSILL: I'm loving these stories! You told me you had several different summer jobs, tell me about some of them.

JENKINS: I worked for Bill Williams as a bus boy. I worked for Sugar Land Industries and Imperial Sugar Company. They split them up for tax purposes, I heard. Same man, Mr. Ike Kempner, owned everything.

I worked on the stack and the dump. The easiest job I had was when I was working for Morrow laying sacks out and letting them dry and I worked in this red building right here. That was my easy job, but it was hard work when I worked on the dump.

GOODSILL: Tell me about the dump.

JENKINS: Okay you had to dump the sugar in there so it could get purified. It would come in on the boxcars stacked and we'd roll it right to the door. One big man but two small people like us would load it on. Then you'd go back to the dump. Don't fall in it because you wouldn't live; it was constantly grinding. Then you'd go there and you'd tip the sack like that and it would fall then one man would cut it, then you'd hit it with your hook and dump it.

GOODSILL: This was raw sugar you were dumping?

JENKINS: Raw sugar, raw sugar is brown, it wasn't white. It was hard because after so long you got tired! Working with 100-pound sacks. Yes, it was hard. I was glad when I got away from that. I told you about laying the sacks that was easy. I told you about the stack, the stack was very hot. Mr. Pence usually was the boss working on the stack and the conveyor belt. You'd put the sacks on a conveyor belt and it would take the sacks to the boxcar and then men would stack them in the boxcar. I remember one time they put me on that end to catch one of those sacks coming in. They shouldn't have put somebody weighing a 130 pounds to catch the sacks when they came down the shoot. You have got to stand there and catch it. That thing hit me and I went on out of the boxcar! (laughing). I didn't get hurt but it scared me.

GOODSILL: It scares me hearing about it!

JENKINS: They told Mr. Pence about it and Mr. Pence said, "Boy, you know better." Well, I didn't GO there, I was PUT there. He told me I knew better (laughing). I didn't say anything. The other guys were laughing at me, when they found out I was not hurt they laughed. It tickled them.

GOODSILL: Then they moved you?

JENKINS: Oh, they moved me. Putting those bags and my hands were swollen from grabbing the hot bags for so long. It worked on my hand and my hand started swelling. That's when I went to Mr. Miller and I told him about it and he sent me to Doc Kuykendahl. I do believe he called Dr. Kuykendahl before I got there because I could tell Dr. Kuykendahl knew too much about the situation. He sent me back and put me on the broom. I had to sweep, sweep instead of catching. I stayed on the broom and they finally they sent me back out to Mr. Curtis. Now when I went to Mr. Curtis that was hard work. We used to unload gravel cars, we used to unload shell cars, we used to paint the tops of homes with tar, we used to cut in the ditches and cut trees in the ditches, clear the ditches out. That was hard work.

GOODSILL: These are jobs that you did during high school?

JENKINS: During high school and college. Right there where you see the sugar mill was a cotton field. Well, being in college my school started later than high school. I needed some shoes, some black shoes. I went and picked cotton and got my shoes right out there where the sugar mill is right out there on Burney Road.

Right there where you come out on Harmon, that was a cotton field. The stand over there, that was field until they built the Palms Theater. Of course, they always had a service station on the corner. But the home for the elderly and the Community Center, all that was field, nothing but field.

GOODSILL: What did you guys do for fun?

JENKINS: Anything for fun, play ball all day long, you had a 150 innings, (laughing) no nine inning ball games. All day long, we played ball and that's a fact. We played ball until it was too late, then we'd go study. You know you had to study. We also enjoyed the carnival they used to have here in Sugar Land. It was on the other side of the fruit stand, near the mercantile building. You'd pitch pennies, they'd guess your weight and they'd draw for a car, Sugar Land Chevrolet Company. Yea, people have won cars! We enjoyed that once a year.

GOODSILL: Was it everybody, black and white?

JENKINS: Black and white. They didn't care you just come on. That doesn't mean you were going to sit down in the restaurant together, but that meant you could be in the general area, pitching pennies. They want you to pitch pennies and spend your money. We used to enjoy that. Then we had the Imperial Tigers baseball team. That was fun.

GOODSILL: Now that was the refinery's team that they sponsored, correct? Did the High School have any sports for you?

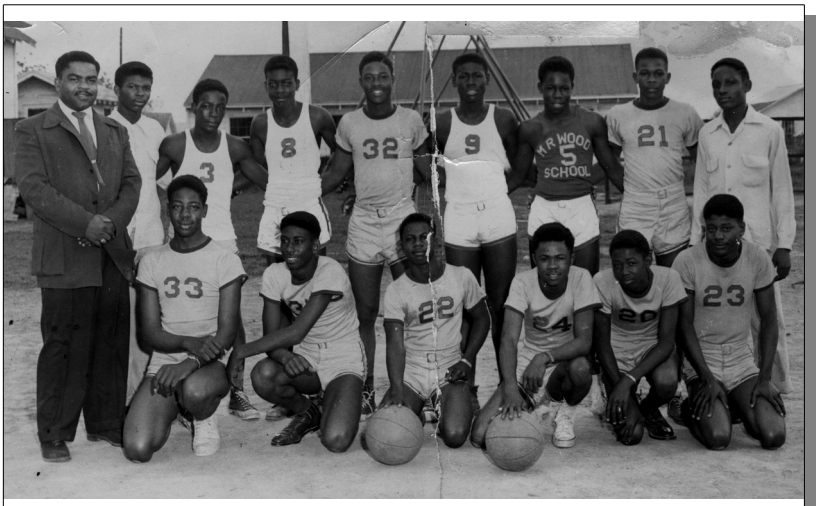
JENKINS: Yes, we had softball, basketball, and football.

GOODSILL: Did you play?

JENKINS: Yes, Ma'am. I played basketball and softball. We didn't have football right away at M. R. Wood. Basketball we always had that, softball always had that, so I played those sports more than I played football. I didn't play baseball, because my father said I wasn't going to play on Sunday and that's when they played. Dad said no.

My dad was a minister. I told you that and he said, "You're not going to play ball on Sunday." So I played with the school and we had a dirt court. We'd measure out the court and pour lime down so you could see the lines, where we would take the free throw and all that stuff. Then in and out of bounds was cut with a hoe and then we poured lime. We had a garden in the school campus and every evening they'd get you out there and make you work in the garden.

GOODSILL: Okay we are looking at the Sugar Land history book, the picture of some of the basketball players? This is called the M. R. Wood Panthers, page eighty-one of the Arcadia Images of Sugar Land Book.



Coach Cornelius with the M. R. Wood Panthers basketball team, circa 1950s.

JENKINS: 1950s. That's Robert Tillman he's dead. I see D. C. Pickett, John Rushing, Mr. Cornelius, David Lewis. That's James Gorman, that's Emit Nation, hard for me to see.

POLLICOFF: It says here the coach was Hollas Felder and the assistant was Leon Loring.

JENKINS: Felder and Loring and Mr. Cornelius, who was the main guy. Leon Loring became coach when I was gone.

GOODSILL: So this was a little after your time.

JENKINS: Yea, a little after my time.

GOODSILL: And all that was done on dirt courts?

JENKINS: Dirt court, all right now. What happened is, dirt court and so Rosenberg, A. W. Jackson built a gymnasium in Rosenberg. Mr. Bob Rafert who used to teach for us and went to Prairie View (we saw him when we went to college) got with Mr. Jackson and asked him if we would be able to play our home games in the gymnasium rather than on the dirt court. He said yes.

GOODSILL: Perfect.

JENKINS: Now we played in a gymnasium there in Rosenberg, we didn't have gymnasium here at that time.

GOODSILL: I wanted to ask you about your home. You said you lived in kind of a shotgun home. Did it have electricity?

JENKINS: Had electricity, we had no inside running, we had a hydrant on the outside. We had what they called an icebox. Not a refrigerator. We got a refrigerator later. We had a washing machine first, the kind that we hand cranked to wring. We had no inside toilet facilities whatsoever then, at that time. We'd go outside to the outhouse. They would bring men over there and they would change out the outhouse after so long. (laughing) They would move them and cover up things after so long.

GOODSILL: How often did that happen?

JENKINS: Well, they'd watch and see. You'd go back and tell them, "Hey, I'm getting filled up." (laughing) That changed when they started selling property. They built Mayfield Park and we were still the Quarters. Mayfield Park was from Avenue F back and the rest of it was still the Quarters back toward A., B.

GOODSILL: When did this happen?

JENKINS: Mr. Ike Kempner did not allow anything in here. He was all him or none at all, but his son started selling the property when Mr. Ike passed. When they started selling property, I bought a house at 410 Guyer Street in 1967. I moved out in 1977.

GOODSILL: You were in the Army and you met Mary Francis.

JENKINS: I met Mary Francis back in 1957. She was born and raised in Phoenix City, Alabama.

GOODSILL: How did you meet her?

JENKINS: Well, my friends and I went out to her cousin's place one night not knowing it was her cousin's place. We had a drink or two (laughing) and she came in with her friend. When I saw this beautiful young lady I jumped up. She's sitting there with her friend and I went over and asked her, "Would you like to dance with me?" She looked at me and said, "No." She sure did. I said, "Would you like me to buy you a drink?" She said, "No." "Well, before you leave will you come over and tell me goodbye?"

She looked at me and said, "Maybe." So I went on back and sat down and everybody at my table was laughing, you know how people will do, they laugh at you Ah-ha, ah-ha okay, Casanova and all that old stuff. Believe it or not when she got ready to go her friend came over first, she passed away a few years ago, came over and said, "We want to know your name." "They call me Jerry Jenkins." (They call me that in her hometown and she calls me Jerry right now, lots.) "Now what is your name?" She said, "My name is Anna Anderson and that's Mary Francis Horace." I said, "I wonder why she won't tell me?" She said, "I don't know, maybe she doesn't like you." I said, "I don't want her to like me, I just want her to tell me her name." So she went back to her.

She told her what I said and she looked over at me and frowned. You know how lady folk are auh- oh! So I sat there and my friends were laughing at me again. "Tell you what fellas, I am going back to that table!" Chris Mauldings from New York City said, "You're going to make yourself look like a fool if you go back." I said, "I'm going back." I went back. I was a little bit leery, I'll admit it. I asked her name. "Didn't Anna tell you?" "She did but I sure would like to hear from you." She looked at me and started smiling then she said, "Fool, my name is Mary Francis Horace. Is that good enough?" And I said, "Yes ma'am, a beautiful name that is." And I turned and I said, "Fellas this is Mary Francis Horace, such a nice lady." She started smiling again. I didn't push her, I just went back and sat down, every once in awhile I'd look over at her. She never would look my way. If she did, she looked when I wasn't looking, but I'd try to catch her looking.

After awhile she and Anna walked to the door and she stopped at the door and looked back. I got up and went to the door. I said. "Let me open this door for you ladies." When I opened the door for her she said, "Thank you so much. "You're a gentleman." I said, "I try to be. I tell you what, I'd like to call you tomorrow. What is your number?" She looked at Anna and what do you think Anna said? "Give it to him."

GOODSILL: It was history.

JENKINS: That was history, and I met her people. They are fine people. I met them and they liked me. When I got out of the service I stole her (laughing) and brought her back to Texas. We've been together fifty-one years.

GOODSILL: Wow, that's great. Tell me how about your children.

JENKINS: We've got three girls, two boys. My youngest girl lives out in L. A. She worked for Fox awhile. She is now working for Warner Brothers at CBS. Her name is Sanita Channel Carmen, that's her married name. My oldest boy is Vincent Voltaire Jenkins.

GOODSILL: That's a very distinguished name.

JENKINS: Yea. Voltaire came from his aunt. She wanted him to be named... had some French, you know. Because I took French in college (chuckling). He lives in Richmond. Andre Bernard Jenkins works at Fundale Hendry, an Alternative School in Arcola. Lana Roco, Vincent, Andre, Velasco, and Sanita Channel. They were all born here expect Velasco who was born in Alabama. She's been working at Herman Memorial for about twenty-eight years.

GOODSILL: Earlier you mentioned the Palms Theater. You were all so excited because you got to go to the Palms Theater. [Insert photo of Palms]

The Palms Theater in Sugar Land, Texas opened in 1950

JENKINS: Yes we would go upstairs to the very top. The next section down was for the Hispanics and the next section was for the Caucasian people. That's the way it was; three sections like that on up to top. We'd go in the side door and go up. We couldn't even buy a ticket in the front; we had to go to the side.

GOODSILL: Then you went up to the balcony.

JENKINS: Up the stairs to the balcony so to speak and that's where we sat. But we enjoyed the movies, good movies. We enjoyed those movies. I'll admit it, we enjoyed them and they showed us black actors. They showed black entertainers; Nat King Cole, Billy Eckstine, people like that.

GOODSILL: How much was the ticket in the old days?

JENKINS: Lord, thirty-five cents! (laughing) That was lots of money.

GOODSILL: Was that THE place to take a date?

JENKINS: Well, that was a good place, but not THE place.

GOODSILL: Well, what was THE place?

JENKINS: THE place, was Double Bar Ranch out around the Stafford area. (laughing)

GOODSILL: So I take it there was dancing and other stuff?

JENKINS: Dancing and other stuff going on there. Went to Richmond, Texas, too. We'd go there to dance. We'd go to Rosenberg to the Fair Grounds when ever they'd bring in Ray Charles or BB King or some of them. Of course, you could take your date downtown to the Coliseum when they brought big shots to sing there. I remember Billy Eckstine came; the ladies were all over him. Knocking folks over trying to get to Billy Eckstine, he's a nice looking gentleman. Nat King Cole, Sara Vaughan, Ralph Materie and all them would come, and Frank Sinatra. All those folks came and you could go. Now you had to sit where we can sit NOW, but you could go (chuckling) and enjoy them. I liked that kind of music and I still like that kind of music.

GOODSILL: You told me you sang but your mama didn't approve of Blues music.

JENKINS: She didn't approve but that's what I was doing when I was in Service. You've heard of the Drifters, the Coasters? We did lots of Drifters songs. We sure did do all different songs and my Mama didn't know it. Daddy didn't either. The Persuaders is what we were called. We got on the radio and everything. We thought we were big stuff. We'd hear our names called on the radio; "The Persuaders are coming today to Club Lavana." We thought we were something.

GOODSILL: Did you play any instruments?

JENKINS: No, I just sang.

GOODSILL: Did you write music or any of the songs?

JENKINS: I write poems. Let me tell you that, too. When I got in college I talked to Doctor Tollson about an ad in the papers about music. He called them music drafters and he said they were crooked. I told Doctor Tollson that I'd written several poems. A poem set to music becomes a song. He said, "That's right. Let me read them." He said, "Write to the Library of Congress and get a copyright first. If you're going to do any business with them, write there first, because grafters will steal your lyrics and make lots of money off YOUR lyrics. You have good lyrics." That's exactly what I did. They sent me the letter. I have it at home now, but I didn't follow it up.

Naaaah, I didn't do it. He scared me, (chuckle) saying, "They will steal your music and make a big... and you can't do a thing about it if you don't copyright." Then after so long after you record it they can record it again and make money.

POLLICOFF: What happened to the Persuaders?

JENKINS: One went Germany, one went there, they just split us up. I said to myself, "The Good Lord did that." (laughing)

GOODSILL: So when you came home after the service did you get back into singing?

JENKINS: Just religious. When I went to college we had fellows majoring in music who sang at prayer meetings on Tuesday night. I got with them. I was a good imitator of Sam Cook. I do him now a lot. Sam Cook sang religious songs up until 1956 when he quit. They were religious songs.

GOODSILL: I bet the girls liked that.

JENKINS: They liked that, and they like it now. I did a program out here at the church not long ago, honoring one of the older ladies. I sang Wonderful copying Sam Cook's style. I don't mean to make Sugar Land sound as though it was a terrible place because it wasn't. It was better than many places that I had gone. I've gone to places much worse than Sugar Land during my time; Alabama, Mississippi, Cincinnati, Ohio. You'd be surprised.

GOODSILL: Your dad lived in Houston and he apparently chose to stay in Sugar Land. I guess he could have gone back, right?

JENKINS: That's right, that is true. He lived in Houston. As I told you, he was the philosopher and the teacher. He told me, "Son, remember one thing, life is what you make it and don't let anybody define you. They can call you so and so and so, but don't let that be you." I've kept it in my mind, and I've said many a time, "I'm not going to let so and so define me. I know who I am and that way don't have to put a gun to my head, blow my brains out." My dad told me that, and I try to keep those things going in my family. I must say, I wish you all could have met some of them. I wish you could meet my daughter out there in California. She started here in Houston with FOX. They sent her to California, L. A. She's been out there since 1982. She quit FOX and went with Warner Brothers. Those picture making people and CBS they merged, she's with them now. When we go out there we meet all those big shot people.

GOODSILL: That's neat. It helps a lot for you to share this history.

JENKINS: It was different. We used to have groceries delivered to us. We used to have R. L. Timmer, he's gone on, to deliver groceries. Emit Willfall used to deliver the meat. He had a little, ole one-horse carriage he delivered the meat in. They used to deliver our groceries to the house. The ice man used to bring the ice for the ice boxes to the homes and you'd have a sign and it had 25, 100, 75 and like that. The top number is what the ice man would put in your box. So he would stop in front of the house, read your sign and get the ice on the hook. You open your box and he would go (chiiiiik) stick it in there and go. (laughing)

GOODSILL: What are the most dramatic changes in your time living here?

JENKINS: Well, you have no more Avenue A, you have no more Avenue B, you have no more Avenue C, you have D, E, F, G going back that way. You now have a bridge you can get out the back way. Before you had go out the front way from the Quarters and that was it. You couldn't go out the back way and if something happened you'd have to swim that creek, (laughing) because you couldn't go out the front.

GOODSILL: Because there was only one way out?

JENKINS: That's right, Visco became Nalco and that made it better. Chicago Mr. Oar, and all them, I think he's dead now. He came in and he brought up a lot of things and they changed the name of it to Nalco. That eliminated the street that was right in front of it [Imperial Blvd]. The street that went to the old ball park that was out there just on the other side of the last building of Nalco was a base ball field, Imperial Tigers Field. That's gone, no more of that. They tore all the buildings down except the refinery.

At he corner of Avenue F and Ulrich was a Mexican beer joint. It was called the Mexican Pavilion that was a big entertainment center. When you got so far, you had the city dump. You go right down Guyer and you kept going and you went right into the dump. They dumped everything over there. In the Mayfield Park area and the Quarters area at that time, they were dumping there. (Chuckles) We would go down there on Sunday and see if we could find anything good at the dump that we could get. (chuckles)

GOODSILL: Did you ever find anything good?

JENKINS: Every once in awhile people would throw something away that was pretty nice. I remember I found a rocking chair that was real nice. I don't know who threw it away but it was nice. We were boys. The Mexican Pavilion would bring in all kinds of shows. I couldn't understand Spanish, but we'd go to those shows and we'd watch them do magic tricks. September sixteenth. We called it the Mexican Sixteen, they bring out a tent show for Hispanics right in front of that beer joint that I was telling you about. We'd go there, too. We couldn't understand what they were saying but we'd go there and look at the movie. (laughing) That was entertainment for us. All that has changed, its gone.

As you enter Sugar Land, the Quarters was on the left hand side. Now you've got that entrance to Constellation Park. Just after you pass that, about sixty or seventy feet was called the Mexican's Skinners Hall. It was a "looong" building that Mexican people lived in, two rooms. Right on down from there on the other side of that was their school, right on the other side of that school was the Skinners Hall for the blacks and they lived in a "looong" building, two rooms. (chuckling) All that has changed now. All that's gone, been gone.

GOODSILL: You call it Skinners Hall, what does that mean?

JENKINS: (laughing) That was the name for it. I guess it was named after somebody. I don't know. I was so small. I'm looking at it in my mind's eye right now. I wish someone would draw the way the Quarters used to look because so many people are gone. There were two boarding houses when you came in on Avenue B. One was Mamie's and down a little further was Mattie's. Years before, my mother's aunt owned one, I heard. That was before my time. Right across from Mattie's was the pool hall owned by Mr. Willie. Right in front of Mamie's was a Mexican beer joint. If you went east down Avenue B you would see a barbershop. If you were standing by the barbershop there was another barbershop that closed and then Steve Span put his barbershop up down Ulrich. He had a liquor store there, too, before he became a deacon (chuckling) at the church.

GOODSILL: What caused that conversion?

JENKINS: I don't know what happened, but he gave it up and he became a deacon at the church.

POLLICOFF: What do you think we have to do to get your brother to make a drawing of what the area used to look like?

JENKINS: I don't know, but I'll ask him because he sure can draw!

GOODSILL: That would be great. Also do you have any photographs we could copy?

JENKINS: The only thing I have is a picture of us at the old school, back in about 1946 or 1947. I can let you see that. The old school with Mayhem Scott and Miss Audia. Just two teachers standing in front of the school.

GOODSILL: That would be fantastic to be able to have that. Anything of your family? A picture of your mother or father?

JENKINS: I think I still have my mother. I have my mother with me standing there with her. I've got a picture of my brother and I've got a picture of my sons and I are standing. I've got a picture of the family, my immediate family, my wife and my children. I have that.

GOODSILL: Anything that would help show life in Sugar Land, that's what we're really trying to show. You've been great! This has been fun. I have really enjoyed it.

JENKINS: (laughing) Yea, I have too.

Interview ends