

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Lawrence Alaminsky**

Interview Date: 08/30/2007

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill, Bruce Kelly

Transcriber: Jane Goodsill

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24 Pages



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Transcript

GOODSILL: I am Jane Goodsill. Today is August 30, 2007. I am interviewing Mr. Lawrence Alaminsky for the first time. The interview is taking place in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Alaminsky at 414 South Belknap, Sugar Land, Texas 77478. This interview is being conducted by the Fort Bend County Historical Commission, Richmond, Texas, and is part of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission Oral History Project. Working the equipment and helping with the interview, is Bruce Kelly.

GOODSILL: So--good morning.

ALAMINSKY: Good morning.

GOODSILL: First I want to ask you where you were born.

ALAMINSKY: Where I was born? In Washington County, in Burton Texas.

GOODSILL: I'm curious to know when you first came to Sugar Land.

ALAMINSKY: I came to Sugar Land after I got out of the service in World War II in 1946.

GOODSILL: What was Sugar Land like then?

ALAMINSKY: There wasn't much Sugar Land. There was mostly a farming community, farming and ranching. There was a store called Country Store. And then you had your refinery which made the sugar. Texaco and Exxon had stations here and that's about all we had.

GOODSILL: Why did you come to Sugar Land? -pause- (laughter) [he makes the sign for money] (laughter) You figured this was a place you could get a job?

ALAMINSKY: No, I knew I was gonna get a job here. I'd gotten out of the service. My folks was farmin' and farmed all their lives and everything, and I wasn't cut out to be a farmer. So I had a brother and law and a sister who lived here. And they asked me to come over. If I wanted to work, they were hiring. This happened a Saturday and on the Monday mornin' I come over and I went ahead and applied at the engineering department and they hired me.

GOODSILL: What was your first job?

ALAMINSKY: Repairing these houses, mostly the company owned houses and the farm houses and such as that. This is most of the work I did straight-out.

GOODSILL: This is what you did your entire career?

ALAMINSKY: Yes Ma'am, we built a few houses out on the farm. Ranch barns and such as that. But mostly it was a repair and remodel project.

GOODSILL: Tell me about the houses in Sugar Land at the time

ALAMINSKY: They were very country-style homes. There wasn't much and most homes that were here were for refinery personnel. The Industry personnel, they lived around different places and come to work here, so to speak.

GOODSILL: So there was refinery work and the Industries. Which one did you work for?

ALAMINSKY: Sugarland Industries.

GOODSILL: Your job was taking care of the houses?

ALAMINSKY: Yes ma'am

GOODSILL: What position did you start at?

ALAMINSKY: I was just a lowly carpenter on the job. (laughter) I spent 3 years in the service and when I got out I why I come over here and went to work as more or less a carpenter a little bit of everything. After many years I did make foreman on the crew and stayed with it until it dissolved.

GOODSILL: How many years did you work for SugarLand Industries.

ALAMINSKY: 27 years

GOODSILL: Wow. You already knew your carpentry skills when you got here?

ALAMINSKY: No ma'am. It was on the job training.

KELLY: Who taught you?

ALAMINSKY: It was some elderly people on the job, and you know what I mean, you kind of learned from them. There was 3 people ahead, older than I was, who were here during the war and you just kind of picked up from there.

GOODSILL: It was my understanding that people couldn't live in Sugar Land unless they worked for the industries or the refinery.

ALAMINSKY: They were all company houses, all owned by the company.

GOODSILL: Can you give us an idea of a typical day?

ALAMINSKY: Paint, if something went haywire with the plumbing go in and redo the plumbing, such as this. Just general maintenance, more or less. It was something that if you do it one time you do it the next time. Like I said, lots of painting, we'd paint the inside, paint the outside put roofs on them, such as this.

KELLY: When you would work on plumbing in those days was there a city sewer system or were there septic tanks?

ALAMINSKY: There were septic tanks that went into a city sewer system. For instance this house here it had a septic tank that flowed into the city lines and went into the main system then.

KELLY: My understanding growing up is that there were two sets of houses. There were houses owned by the Sugar Company and those by the Industries.

ALAMINSKY: Everything to the north of the railroad tracks was owned by the Sugar Company and everything south of the railroad tracks was owned by Sugarland industries.

KELLY: I knew Mr. Otis Enquist. Did you work for him?

ALAMINSKY: No, sir, no, he taken care of the north side.

KELLY: Who was your boss?

ALAMINSKY: Mr. Jess Pirtle

GOODSILL: You were responsible for the houses south of the railroad tracks?

ALAMINSKY: Well that and all the farm houses, the tenant houses on the farm. Farm houses. They had another farm that is still there, Foster Farms, north of Rosenberg up on the Brazos River. It's a big farming plantation. But it's sold also. We done all the work out there.

GOODSILL: You'd go all the way out to the farms?

ALAMINSKY: Oh yes ma'am, rain or shine, dark or daylight (laughter)

GOODSILL: What if there were emergencies? Did you ever get calls in the middle of the night? Plumbing leaking...

ALAMINSKY: Oh yeah, sure, turn the water off and go fix the plumbing the next morning. (laughter)

GOODSILL: So sometimes there were emergency calls at night?

ALAMINSKY: Down here on the Oyster Creek where the Oyster Creek Drive goes across, that water fall that is there? I spent many a night down there 2 or 3 in the morning pulling flood gates so the water could go through.

KELLY: So did you do more than carpentry work ?

ALAMINSKY: The maintenance end of it, that's what I am saying, yes sir.

GOODSILL: To keep the town from flooding you would pull up the gates so the water could get out?

ALAMINSKY: Oh yeah, and then something else... "Hey, Lawrence, cows out down on highway six, (laughter)

GOODSILL: Cows and flood water and house and plumbing? (laughter)

ALAMINSKY: Get up and get the cows back in and the next morning either the farm manager would send someone down to fix the fence or we'd fix the fence

GOODSILL: Whatever needed to be done? Were you busy all the time or was there lag time?

ALAMINSKY: There wasn't much lag time, there wasn't much lag time

GOODSILL: Was it pretty much the houses that are here now?

ALAMINSKY: ... That are right here. It was from right down the street here and from here on back around to the creek up on the end up here there were a bunch built that weren't company houses

GOODSILL: We are talking about Guenther?

ALAMINSKY: Yes, right in this line here, [South Belknap] it's what 5 or 7, these were brought in from where the shopping center was built. In 1950 they moved these big homes in here. Fellow by the name of Rinn, out of Bellville, moved them in here. They had long beams that they'd slide under the house and jack the thing up, put wheels and tires under it and hook onto it and take out...

GOODSILL: In two parts?

ALAMINSKY: NO, one whole house would be moved

GOODSILL: On South Belknap there were vacant lots?

ALAMINSKY: This was all vacant at one time... Back up the street here, it was vacant all the way up to where it makes the circle.. That's when these houses started coming in. And then they opened it up and people, individuals started buying and built their own homes in here.

KELLY: When you came to Sugar Land was the highway 4 lanes or was it 2 lanes? Why I am asking is that originally there were houses on the highway where the Texaco and the car wash were. Pictures show there were houses that faced the highway. Do you remember that?

ALAMINSKY: No, not in my time, lets put it that way.

GOODSILL: When you got here were there any homes along Brooks street?

ALAMINSKY: This was all just as you see it now. Little brick homes all along there. And this side, it wasn't until just past I think Mr. Guenther was the first one to build on this side (east side) of Brooks. But then right across here there were 3 or 4, maybe 5 or 6 that was brought in here and they were company homes also.

GOODSILL: Do you know where they were brought from?

ALAMINSKY: Well usually from another location somewhere on the place. They weren't outright bought someplace else and brought in. They used to move, or we did, after they went to mechanized farming, machinery tractors so to speak, they moved some of the bigger farm homes in and put them in across the tracks into the quarters over there. We put in one a day and had a caterpillar pulling the house on skids

GOODSILL: From where to where

ALAMINSKY: Oh, from down on the farm about 3 miles off of the highway

KELLY: Called First Colony now?

ALAMINSKY: Used to be called ...

KELLY: Alcorn?

ALAMINSKY: It could have been Alcorn Farm, Mr. Tarver was the manager of that farm down in there. Because every unit had a manager, so to speak. And he was the manager down there. Mr. Colbern was in charge of cattle division, and such as this.

GOODSILL: So you are saying you moved the houses from the farm one at a time?

ALAMINSKY: One at a time.

GOODSILL: One a day?

ALAMINSKY: One a day.

KELLY: On skids

ALAMINSKY: On big timbers, 8 x 10, scoot, caterpillars pulled them

GOODSILL: Are those homes still there, in Mayfield?

ALAMINSKY: Yes and some was repaired. And some was in pretty good shape and they rented them out right away. Sugar Land was growing and they needed homes, you know.

GOODSILL: Were the farms closing down

ALAMINSKY: No, oh no, the farm was really bombing. But see, they went into mechanized farming and they didn't need the labor or the people on the farms so to speak. As the farms went into more ranching, it wasn't all cotton and corn and maze, they went into ranching of cattle, such as this, so the houses were vacant and they moved them over here.

GOODSILL: Everything was used and reused?

ALAMINSKY: Well, it was all owned by the same man, and the same person, such as this.

GOODSILL: Meaning the company?

ALAMINSKY: yes, ummhummm

KELLY: Where was your work shop?

ALAMINSKY: It was connected with the salvage building and the company truck garage was there also, where the company trucks went for servicing.

KELLY: The north east corner of main and Kempner street.

ALAMINSKY: Near the pecan orchard over to main street that was big buildings that the cannery used.

GOODSILL: Do you have any stories about home repair?

ALAMINSKY: (laughter) No, there are stories, but I wouldn't want to tell them on that tape (all laugh)

GOODSILL: There was a story about bullet – Bruce's grandparent house. 214 Brooks.

ALAMINSKY: Oh yes'm, I got a work order on the house. Ms. Kelly got to telling me that they had a leak. So I went back to the shop and got a big ol' long step ladder and went up on the roof. And the front bedroom that faced the street and, man, that slug [makes signal with hand showing slug about the size of the first joint of his baby finger] stuck in that metal roof and you could barely see it. I just reached in and pulled that slug up and I put it in my pocket and I come back down off that ladder and Mr. Kelly was there. And he had the couch that he'd lay on to nap. At nap time, he wouldn't go to bed, so to speak. He'd lay on the couch. (laughter) He was laying on that couch (laughter) and I came in and told him "Here's your problem. It's a pistol slug. I'm going to have to go the shop and get me some patch and patch that hole." "My god I lay on that couch and sleep all the time, that thing could have come down through!!!" (laughter)

KELLY: (laughter) So do you think the slug came from outside down?

ALAMINSKY: It was shot up. Man, Christmas and New Year around here it sounded like a war zone. That's before we got into a good police department and such as this. No, he [Mr. Kelly] was a wonderful guy, he got kind of comical at time. I don't know if she was giving him some static or not – but I would hear some of the stuff, cuz like I said, we done a lot of work over there.

What I learned right quick that if you went in people's houses and done work, a lady come up and say, for instance in the kitchen somewhere in the corner, she say: "I could sure use a little shelf rack here for seasoning and stuff like this." "No problem, we're here." So we build a shelf rack and, put it in there and it have three tier in it and Man, And it wouldn't be long before you hear "You done it over at Ms. Kelly, I want one too." (laughter)

GOODSILL: Did you used to keep a log book of repairs?

ALAMINSKY: Oh, work orders.

GOODSILL: Were you pretty quick?

ALAMINSKY: Usually the following morning because as the day was laid out, I wouldn't take, unless it was an emergency. If it was a problem in the plumbing , yeah we would get it. But if it was a deal and you could get in with the crew the next morning and send two or three over there and that was the way it was taken care of.

GOODSILL: So you had your whole day laid out first come first serve, unless it was an emergency.

ALAMINSKY: Yes, umm humm, because if you didn't your work orders would build up on you.

KELLY: Without mentioning any names, what where some of the strangest work orders you received?

ALAMINSKY: You gonna have to shut that thing off and then I'll tell you (laughter)
[meaning recorder]

KELLY: You don't have to name names

ALAMINSKY: - long pause - ... no, I ain't goin' t' mention that (all laugh)

GOODSILL: Did you ever find anything unusual in the walls or foundations?

ALAMINSKY: Under the bath tub? Yeah, you bet! (laughter) I got a work order, actually, on one of the little brick homes on Brooks Street. Very foul odor. I grabbed one of the guys and we go down there. The house was vacant and it was locked. I had the keys and when I opened that house up, and when I did, Boy, it like to knock my head off!

So I went and unlocked the back door too and leave the doors open for a while. And then we took out in there and the party that lived in there was young people. They had a baby and when she changed diapers, the diaper went back up under the bathtub. [to astounded expressions he replies:] REALLY!! (laughter)

KELLY: Did you ever work on the Imperial Inn?

ALAMINSKY: Oh yeah, that old building was tore down. That thing has the most beautiful cypress. One inch by 12 inch and 1 inch thick walls. It was the most beautiful lumber in there you ever saw. They demolished the building and salvaged it, so to speak.

KELLY: Didn't it burn down?

ALAMINSKY: It burned at one time, partially burned and it was rebuilt, see, it was repaired. A lot of charred lumber in that thing.

GOODSILL: What was the salvaged lumber used for?

ALAMINSKY: We used it back in the homes again. All that cypress lumber and all, I built me a 15 foot fishing boat out of some of it, 12" sides. And then we used the boat to, oh these water lilies in these creeks and so, we maintain all of those. We sprayed those lilies and killed them. It wasn't like you see them now, that's for sure! If I gonna' be truthful with ya' we done it for years and years and years. And I couldn't tell you the name of that spray we uses 'cuz all I would do is go up north of Richmond, up there on the Brazos river, that pumpin' station. And I would have a work order. They would give me a black 5 gallon can and set it in the back of my truck. I'd come back and to this day I can't tell you what we used. The formula was a Quart into 15 gallon of water, that's the way it was diluted. 3 guys and I'd run the boat and 2 guys in the back spraying. Like I say, it's not like what you see now.

GOODSILL: People could change houses when they got a promotion? What was your job to prepare a house for the new occupant?

ALAMINSKY: It depended if they changed up the structure. Added on a bedroom or something such as this. Most of the time we'd hit it from one end and walk out the other end, complete paint job. Oak floors and all this and that. This home right here, it's got the beautiful grade A select Oak floors in it you ever saw. Of course we got 'em covered with carpet and all. A lot of these old houses have oak floors in them

KELLY: You tore into a lot of these houses to remodel them... at one time there were wood burning stoves cuz you can see chimneys.

ALAMINSKY: Oh Yeah. We had heaters, wood heaters and wood burning cook stoves. For instance like over here in that kitchen, back in that corner where that refrigerator is sittin' the fire place was built in that corner wall and the pipe stuck through into the kitchen where the cook stove was over there.

KELLY: And there would have been another stove on this side and they would all go to the same wooden flue.

ALAMINSKY: Yeah, yeah most of it was brick. You see brick was built up past the ceiling of the house and they had a cap on it with a pipe, a galvanized pipe stove. Some of them was built up all the way over the roof. You had a variation. Well, this is what they had. They didn't have the conveniences we have now.

KELLY: You came in 1946 and many of these houses were built in the early 1920's...

ALAMINSKY: This one [414 S. Belknap] was built in the early 1930's. I don't know if that is true or not. The appraisal district, I think they have got it appraised - built in the early 30's.

KELLY: Did you ever hear who lived in it originally?

ALAMINSKY: No

GOODSILL: This house was relocated to Belknap. Do you know where it was moved from?

ALAMINSKY: Yeah, back up across over there from Guenther Street back to the highway where the circle is in back over there. Where the Post office used to be and the police station and then where the shopping center was built in the 50's. That's when these houses were moved over here.

KELLY: So these came from the Shopping Center side?

ALAMINSKY: Some of them did and some of them come from across the street.

KELLY: This house came from the West side of Brooks Street between Highway 90 and Guenther. And there were more that came from the east side. Did you ever work on the coffee house, the Eldridge house that sat next to the Char house?

ALAMINSKY: No, Sugar Company handled that. For some reason or another they had it cut off right at the tracks. They had their own crews, and everything. Mr. Enquist was the manager of the Sugar Company Side. Mr. Pirtle was my boss, boss of the Industries side.

KELLY: Can you give us your impressions of Mr. Pirtle?

GOODSILL: [Mr. Alaminsky draws his hand across his mouth]

KELLY: What about Mr. Enquist, I know you didn't work for him, but what did you think of him?

ALAMINSKY: They were a fixture here. They were here so long, you know what I mean? What they said went.

KELLY: Mr. Eldridge died in the early 30s I've heard that Mr. Eldridge recycled everything, even made people straighten old nails and use them over again.

ALAMINSKY: Not under my rein! (laughter) But they were pretty strict one thing and another. If ever a house was tore down, all the salvageable lumber, it went back and it was reused again.

KELLY: What is your impression of the construction of these houses?

ALAMINSKY: Oh, man, these are really built! I'll give you an example. Allstate carried my insurance. After the big hurricane in Louisiana, I got a notice that Allstate was dropping my insurance. It irked me to no end. I went ahead and found some insurance people I could live with. And they came through, all through the house and the guy said "I can't believe this. This thing is really built."... They came though here with a fine tooth comb and they knew what they were insuring. These houses are well constructed! Years ago, I don't know if you recall, we had a hale storm come through here. And that following day we had to replace 23 window lights. I split the crew up, mind you and we had to put a quick call into Houston to get more glass so we could get these windows closed in.

KELLY: What kind of wood are these houses made of?

ALAMINSKY: Most of these is that rough cut two by fours, not sanded slicked off. Most of those these days has been replaced. Like most of the stuff in my attic has been replaced. It was pine, kind of a red pine. And every once in a while you'd run into some oak

KELLY: In the 1950's I recall that Industries started to put siding on some the houses, did you install it?

ALAMINSKY: We installed a lot of it, most of these big houses here, some of 'em were done already, but I still got the cutter and it was used quite a bit. Because the asbestos siding you buy now is not like what's on these houses it looks more like a concrete asbestos than it does like the slick finish.

GOODSILL: Did you spend any time in the Teacherage or repairing it?

ALAMINSKY: Not any big stuff. They apparently didn't have that many problems, because we didn't get in there much. Those people had their jobs and they did it, but we done the plumbing and broken glass, and such as this. You know Ms. Ulrich's? It was in that area. They called up one night and got a water leak under the house. I went over there and looked, and sure enough there was water running down to the street. And they called at 2 o'clock at night and tellin' me that this thing just started leaking.

I went over to the cut off and, man, I cut that things off, threw the tools in the truck and come back home and get some sleep. Next day I went over there and had to put boards laid under the house, 'cuz the way that the water was under there, you couldn't have fixed it no way because everything was saturated. No this town has lots of history behind it. No I've enjoyed my stay here. We've made lots of friends over here, and one thing and another.

GOODSILL: How did you buy this house ?

ALAMINSKY: We were living out here on Alcorn Road off of oilfield road not quite this big. It was a farm owner's house at one time. When Eileen and I married and we come over here we were living over there on what would be Dulles Ave now, in one of them little 'ol farm shacks down in there. Mr. Colbern, the cattle manager, he come by one day and he told me, he said: "I want you to get down on the south end of the property, that great big house, they call it Steck House, because there used to be a Mr. Steck who was farm manager. I want you to rent that house." So Eileen and I went down that afternoon and looked at it. It was a real nice house. It needed some work done on it. I said to Mr. C. we'll take it but it will need some work done on it before we can move into it. He looked me straight in the eye and said "that is your department, you take care of it." (laughter) So anyway, I didn't say more about it for I guess two weeks or more and we finished a job that we were on and went into the office and I asked Mr. Pirtle, "What's the next job?"

“Well, haven’t they told you? You rented the Steck place, didn’t you?” “Yes Sir, we sure did”. “Well fix it up.” “How far can I go? “Fix it up the way you want.” He shouldn’t have said that, I did! (laughter) We made a beautiful home out of it, the bus come right in front of the house like right here.

I told Eileen one day “You know something, they are going to start selling them big houses over there in town. I said, we better make our move.” I said if anything ever happens then I tell them to shove it or they can me and then you and me and three kids, we can’t live in a little ol’ shack no more. She come up and she said: “I’m gonna’ leave that up to you.” So I dealt most of my dealings with SugarLand Industries with Mr. [Bill] Little, when he come over here. And that’s a wonderful man, and that. So I went in one day and I told him one day, Mr. Little they are selling those houses over on Belknap. I’d like to get my name in the hat for one of them. I don’t know if he said go over and look at them or which one do you want, something to that effect. But anyhow, and we ended up with this one.

No more was said, and next thing I knew, why several weeks later ... he couldn’t say Alaminsky, he’d rattle that up, so he called me Mr. A. ... he said: “Mr. A. come into my office” or “Meet me in the office”, I don’t know how it phrased out. So anyway I went up there. He said: “Are you still interested in that house?” “Yeah.” “Its yourn.” So I say, “Mr. Little, I might need some way of financing it, I might need some help on that thing.” “Come on in!” I never talked back to a man but that day I told him: “I can’t, I need to get down to that locker, the crew is coming in and I need to find out what is happening today and what’s going to take place tomorrow so I can keep this bunch busy. I says, “I’ll be in after I get through down at the tool room, cuz we got off at 4:30 and they got of at 5:00. And anyway why, I went in there then and he told me they had reduced this house in price to \$5000, and he told me “if you need any help let me know.” I says: “Yep, I want to finance \$3000 on that house.” And next morning I come in and it’s all layin’ out on the desk. He done called Gulf Coast Savings and Loan in Richmond and all Eileen and I had to do is drive over there and we walked out of there with this home. [motioning to the home we are sitting in]

By that time Sugar Land went in to police chief Findley. Joe Mladinka lived next door [to the Steck house], the Highway petrol sergeant and he said.: ”What you gonna do with that house?” I said, I’m gonna stay down here where I am cuz, Man, I had 250 caged layers down dere, these are chickens mind you, I had two gurnseys and one Holstein cow that I raised 9 calves a year off down there and I had a big garden there and stuff.

So anyway, Jo said, you know he said, "You know, Company's going into police chief and that and they hired Findlay. He's gonna need a place to stay. Would you rent it? To Findley". I said, "Yeah, you go ahead and take care of it. He can have it for all I'm concerned. Only thing I want him to know is that I am gonna be doing some work down there from time to time." Oh, it was a long time I had a renter in this thing. (laughter)

And then Findley brought onto Lakeview. This house was too big for two people and him and her both they were elderly people already. So anyway, Mr. Findley said "I can get you another reliable renter in there." And I said, "No, Mr. Findley, I says, you go ahead and do your own thing and when the house is vacant, Eileen and I are going to move into it. And this is what we done.

GOODSILL: What year was that?

ALAMINSKY: I can't tell you that, this is too long ago. There's too many wrinkles between these two ears! (laughter)

KELLY: Do you remember the year you bought the house? In the 1970's?

ALAMINSKY: No, I'd have to go back to the records.

ALAMINSKY: Anyway, why all this bunch through here then, the people that lived in them and that they bought them and other than that some of the outsiders picked up and bought them. Mladinka bought that one next door. Although he was a highway patrol man, he was a wonderful guy. He would work with the young boy/people, like my son Russell. He had three boys, one of them was a little bitty guy. But the other two were pretty good size like my son. Once day he opened up the trunk of the car for some reason or another and back there sat a bag of Marijuana and a court case wrote on there. He got his son Russell and his two boys over there and they got marijuana school right there. Meanwhile I got in the house and went to the toilet and got me a block of toilet tissue and I walked out and I grabbed that bag of marijuana and I had that thing folded like that and he pulled a pistol (laughter) and he said "when it hits the paper I'm gonna shoot your damned hand off!" (laughter) He went from here to midland and we visited him up in Midland. And then he transferred, made promotion again and he come to oh, just out of Houston headed toward Dallas and last we heard he was over there. He went from Sergeant to Major and I don't know if he went any further or not. He was a wonderful neighbor.

GOODSILL: Speaking of law enforcement, we heard there was not much criminal mischief in Sugar Land back in the day

ALAMINSKY: Well see, you had Curtis hall. He taken care of everything across the river. we had very little problems here. The only problem that we did have here every once in a while was peddlers and we let them know right away that we have a peddling ordinance here and they get the heck out of here. When Mr. Tilman Lewis was elected dog catcher here, we had little a problem. We had a black dog here. And if you had a galvanized trash sittin' out there he'd have it turned over before you got out of here. Not only mine, but everyone else in the neighborhood. Not my dog, it was a stray. Mr. Bartlett lived across Brooks Street there in one of them little brick homes and that dog give him a lot of trouble. One day Mr. Bartlett, when he turned that trash can over, he cut loose on him and shot him right here. And that dog got away and run up there back of the shopping center where Western Auto had their little repair building up there – office machines, oh Mr. Scanlin ran that thing, refrigerators and everything. Well, that dog get under that building (laughter) and that dog died up there! They called the dog catcher and he thought he was too good to go under there to get that dog. (laughter) But he went under there and got him. Things like that happened over here, and it was kind of comical.

KELLY: Where would you go to get your building supplies, bathroom fixtures?

ALAMINSKY: They had the SugarLand Industries hardware store and they had fixtures and the lumber yard had all the building material. We got everything right here, we didn't have to chase out. See after this thing shut down then we still traded with the hardware but in the lumber business I went to Wessendorff in Richmond.

GOODSILL: But before then, it was truly a company town, you needed it you bought it here?

ALAMINSKY: It was! Yeah.

GOODSILL: Our house has a claw foot tub. Did most of the houses have one?

ALAMINSKY: Join the crowd! (laughter) In this house the back bath had a shower, the other had the tub. When I remodeled the house I took the tub out, got help and took it out and just let that junker sit there. Mr. Vanek was back over here one day and he said "What do you want for that tub? I said "First guy that gives me \$20 and hauls it off can have it." Man, he was over here right quick and loaded the tub and gave me \$20.

GOODSILL: When we remodeled we found a hidden door in the wall.

ALAMINSKY: That was the easiest way to do it. Of course I didn't do it that way. But you run into a lot of cover ups.

KELLY: Did you take up the old floors before laying a new floor?

ALAMINSKY: All the floors we put in we put in over wood floors. The wood floor would be down and we put all of that bunch laid over the wood floors. As good as shape as the wood was you'd have tore up a lot of stuff at added expense, you know. By going over, you had to cut off your door frames your doors and such as this, but it worked out real good. This house has polished oak floors but you'd never know it because we have then covered up with carpet. – story of boy with braces scooting along.

GOODSILL: What are the [brick] houses along brooks street like?

ALAMINSKY: For two people they were ideal. The little I know about those homes out there I'm going to call it a starter home. Look at it this way, back there quite some years, when you come over here you couldn't buy any rental property and anything rental was an employee living in it.

GOODSILL: Every house that was here was used?

ALAMINSKY: umm humm

GOODSILL: Why all the switching of houses?

ALAMINSKY: If you made a promotion that old house wasn't good any more, I want that one over there (laughter) Not everyone moved but there was a lot of prestige.

GOODSILL: The higher you got up [in the Company] the better house you got!

ALAMINSKY: OH YEAAAHH!

GOODSILL: Who made the decisions about who could move where?

ALAMINSKY: I don't know

KELLY: Tom James

ALAMINSKY: Yes, Tom James, that could have been it. There was a lot of nit picking going on over here. I got so tickled - every year at the Christmas party, the industries had their Christmas party. I would get an invitation but I'd always have an excuse "We're going to be out so and so, and I just can't get away that day" and stuff like that. It wasn't long that man point his finger at me, "We're going to have a party and I want you to be in it". Mr. James, done that. And I did I come on home and I change, put on my Sunday-goin'-to-meeting-suit on and everything, come 3:30, whatever it was, 4:00 well I'd go back up there. Oh, I'd stick that pinky you there and all! (laughter)

GOODSILL: Did Mr. James have it at his house?

ALAMINSKY: No, this was upstairs at the office.

GOODSILL: Mr. James' house is an unusual house. (Corner of Guenther and Venice

ALAMINSKY: Oh Gosh, yes, that house had that built in cellar. That house was always well kept. It had board siding and asbestos siding.

KELLY: Now it has cedar shakes.

ALAMINSKY: Talking about the James and all that. They have a deal called a stud finder and all that, go up and down the walls and point out where the nails are. I had a fancy one, had it for years, she [Mrs. James] called the office, needed some pictures hung on the walls. She'd show me where she wanted them. I'd run that thing over and put a dot and find another stud and tell her, "This is the line I can hang your picture on." One day I was down there and she said "I still can't figure out how you done that." And I gave her that tool (laughter) I don't know if she ever used it but I could always buy another one.

GOODSILL: Why was a basement built?

ALAMINSKY: Ever since I come here it was that way.

KELLY: It leaked water didn't it?

ALAMINSKY: One time it leaked, cuz we did some mortaring on the inside of the joints on that thing. It was a solid built house, that is for sure. We talking about James ... I admired that man quite a bit. That little ol' deal they put up on Oyster Creek...that park, I can't see it... That man was worth more than that little ol' strip of land right there. That irks me every time I drive by it.

This is none of my business so to speak , and it is fine and dandy, but if they done anything why didn't; they go inside of the circle where it could be built up high and build a real play area, the land was there. Here about all you can do is go over there and talk to the Lord for a while if the black birds or crows don't fly over too much.

GOODSILL: Mr. James job was?

ALAMINSKY: President of SugarLand Industries. When he said jump, you said how high! (laughter) He was a wonderful person, and what I said was a joke. The thing of it is, when he told you what he wanted you didn't go and have to ask somebody else "Now is this the way he wanted it done?" Like I told him that day, I was going to get a release from the company. Meanwhile my daughters come by and get into my business "What you going to do when this thing shut down? You got anything planned? What you going to do anyway?" I told her one day: "Carol, I aint' worried. After 27 years, me and mommy going to go out and celebrate. And I'll start out from there." Lo and behold, one day I come in and right in the middle of that kitchen table spread out lay a Prudential application. So next morning well I went ahead and I taken that application with me and got everything started on this end.

I went into Mr. James office and I said "I'd like to take off a while this morning and go into to Houston to Prudential and see what they got to offer. I got a job offer from them: "Oh, by all means do." I started out of his office and just about the time I reached to grab for the doorknob he said: "Touch base with me when you get back!" (laughter) "Yes sir!" (laughter) I went in and they put me through the mill and I had a job. Prudential wanted me to work for them right quick. I walked back in there and I told him, "I got a job with Prudential." I told him what date they wanted me to start working for them. He said "OK." See, that vesting fund, I was involved in that thing greatly, and there was SOME money in that thing. He said "We'll give you your release on so and so date." I said: "release with honors?" And he knew right away what I was talking about. "Yep," he said, "a release with honors." I worked there [Prudential] for 11 years. I didn't want to move to Jacksonville, Florida. I'm glad I didn't.

GOODSILL: You had a very long working career

ALAMINSKY: 27 years for SugarLand Industries, 11 years for Prudential and I am still 83 years old. (laughter)

GOODSILL: What is a really good day that you can remember at Sugar land Industries?

ALAMINSKY: I'm gonna' put it back at you this way: there weren't many bad days I had. Most of the days I enjoyed all of them. I got along good with everybody and everybody got along good with me. I had a vehicle at my disposal. Any time day and night that I got called out, I didn't have to use my transportation, such as this. I had no ill feelings toward anybody. Course a lot of times when somebody call in and say "down here on highway 6 there's a bunch of cattle out on the road – somebody done went through the fence with an automobile! (laughter) We didn't' get too many of those kinds of calls because the farm managers would get them. In a way it was lots of fun.

KELLY: When you would get a call in the middle of the night, did Mr. Pirtle call you or did one of the operators get the call and then call you?

ALAMINSKY: No, it wasn't Pirtle. Very seldom Pirtle call me. One time Pirtle did call me, you know where that waterfall is down near Oyster Creek Drive (Guenther Street spillway)? The canal company maintained the spillway. After that we maintained it. There was many of a time Mr. Pirtle would call me "Meet me over at the spillway, we got to open up them gates, this thing gonna flood!" (laughter) I'd get over there and we'd start pulling gates, first thing I know Pirtle's Stetson hat floating down that water and I thought he was under the damned thing. (laughter) I ain't lying. The only opportunities I had to learn how to swim – I can't swim. I wasn't about to jump into that swirl over there to try to save a hat! (all laugh)

KELLY: The houses with tin roofs, was the tin applied to the houses when you came here, or were they already here?

ALAMINSKY: No, they were on the houses. When they moved these houses from the location up here they were on them. 'Cuz we went and repaired some of them. Where the chimney went through, and such as this, yeah, we had to repair them. I still got about 8 or 10 of those galvanized metal sheets

KELLY: Is a cedar shake roof generally underneath them?

ALAMINSKY: Yeah, it was a cedar shingle roof so to speak under them cuz there was a few that had decking nailed down and they was on top of the decking. And that was the majority of them like you said with the wood shingles under them. And a fairly thick felt rolled, put under them and the metal shingle put on top.

KELLY: Mr. James house was different.

ALAMINSKY: It was slate!

KELLY: He must have ordered that himself! (laughter)

ALAMINSKY: I don't know (laughter) but there were several . (Said confidentially): that stuff is a bugger to work on. You can't walk on that stuff cuz it will crack on you. That is a bad one to work on.

KELLY: In some of the houses, the wife would want to redo the bathroom and you'd just move the tub over against a different wall or move the toilet to another wall. Did you do much of that?

ALAMINSKY: No, as long as Fort Bend Utilities was in business, and you see, the plumber, Charlie Vavrecka and them they did that work. We worked in the back alright but they did the plumbing fixtures. This was now Sugar Company employees, so to speak. See at one time they maintained all the houses here in town, on the Hill, and everything. I don't know when that change was made that the Industries would take care of the houses south of the tracks, and such as that.

GOODSILL: Here's a picture Mr. Patterson gave me to show you. (Aerial view of Belknap Brookside, engineering map from Fort Bend County, date uncertain)

ALAMINSKY: Mine is the first big one, from Terry. There's five of them in here.

KELLY: The garages weren't very large

ALAMINSKY: Most of them was just a one vehicle garage to begin with.

KELLY: You took care of the houses where SL Telephone is and Frost Bank.

ALAMINSKY: Yes, but those are torn out. We maintained them. Some of them we moved, some of them we junked.

KELLY: At one point Oyster Creek drive ran close to the bank of the shore.

ALAMINSKY: Yeah, yeah, yeah, sure did.

KELLY: And all of this was hay.

ALAMINSKY: I don't know if you all recall or not, but at one time from Venice on through all that over there to the creek and on to Brooks Lake was Teas Nursery. Shrubs, Flowers and trees.

KELLY: I always heard that was really fertile soil because the soil that was dredged out from the creek and put in that area.

ALAMINSKY: Yeah, that true.

GOODSILL: Are you a fisherman? Do you like to fish?

ALAMINSKY: Yes ma'am!! I fished in old Oyster Creek. Then after a while I got a lot down in Sergeant and floundered down there. We'd leave out Friday afternoon with Anthony Scanlin, Anthony got a place down there. We would flounder up until daylight. The most we ever got down there was 68 (fish) one night. The biggest ones I ever got into was one night on Friday I was running my gig into 8 1.4 pounds. We stayed together when we flounder. I caught this thing and when we got back to the camp I cleaned that thing and I got to braggin' and a-lying. Lo and behold we go down there Saturday afternoon. I got 7 ¼ and he run his gig and took 8 ¼. Excuse the expression but he said, "Now, god damned don't start lying around here." (laughter)

ALAMINSKY: In the 50's was there a fishing club?

ALAMINSKY: We maintained some of those piers, and such as that. Old Man Sam Willeey was in charge of that thing. He was the Warden, he had rights to arrest you and stuff. He'd bring me a boat that somebody run up on the rocks. I'd repair it for him. He's give me fishing club rights for a year. I'd keep them boats in fairly good shape and stuff like that.

KELLY: You had to pay money to belong to this club?

ALAMINSKY: Yeah \$20 a year. I done the maintenance, he wanted to pay me, I said: "lets do it for letting me have fishing rights". "Okay!" (laughter)

KELLY: Did you ever catch fish in there?

ALAMINSKY: OOOOOH, gosh we caught some fish in there!

KELLY: What kind?

ALAMINSKY: The biggest one I ever helped take out of that thing was a 56 pound yellow cat. And this was right below the spillway. Do you know Aaron Morton? He fished up there below the spillway and I fished over where that Mexican cemetery was. We would get together and exchange bait. He'd take half of it and I'd take half of it, see?

It must have been a Thursday or so. He come and he said: "I'm going to have to work you for a bit today but I can't let you have any bait today" I said: "What's going on?" "My relatives, from up the country somewhere, they comin' down here and we gonna fish." "No, I said, I'll help you." We went out and we seining for bate and everything. I let him have all the bait. Anyway, Sunday afternoon. We'd gone to church and napped a while. I told Eileen I'm gonna down and run my line, see if I got anything on it. On the way back out I said "I'm gonna drive over to Brooks lake over there to the spillway and see what ol' Aaron got going. Well, I got over there, and got up to the creek, and boy he was giving it this and that (as in pulling on a fishing pole) And he saw me and he dropped the line and said "Man. I don't know what I got on there. My kin folks just left at noon today and they didn't have hardly no fish at all. I don't know what happened. But I got something on there!" So I got in the boat with him, kind of steadied the boat. He picked up that line. And Boy he fought that thing! We finally got it in the boat and it was a 56 pound yellow cat. (laughter) That's the biggest fish I ever saw in my life.

KELLY: Wow!

ALAMINSKY: I shot a 72 pound gore down there one night. That bugger was on my line. I had a brother in law, Willie with me. We had a little deal goin' between us. We'd usually get together on Saturday night to play dominos. And for some reason or another, that night around 10:00, he said "Got that line?" "Sure do." "Let's go down and run 'em!" (laughter) We had a bite to eat, had coffee whatever. We got into the middle of the creek and here we go (mimicking pulling on a line). Finally Willie worked that thing upside the boat and it was a Gar about from here to that cabinet there.

When Eileen and I got married he gave me a single shot 410 for a gift. When we'd left the house that night he told me to get it. "I said, "man, you're fixing on getting some big stuff down there!" (laughter) Fighting that thing and I had the gun in one hand like a pistol and he said "Don't shoot the line!!" (laughter)

KELLY: Did you ever have any encounters with alligators?

ALAMINSKY: Oh yeah, sure did! (laughter) I went down there one day and I had my car. It was a little bit on the wet side. I got off on the shoulder kind of like and I went out and run my line. Come back and boy, that left rear tire was squealing and spinning. I opened that door and I looked back at an alligator snapping at that car! (laughter) I like-to jump out the other side of the car. I didn't have a gun with me that day. I punched that alligator down with a big log and he went.

GOODSILL: Did you ever fish at Cook's dam?

ALAMINSKY: I never fished there but I got lots of bait over to that place.

GOODSILL: Who was the Mr. Tarver you mentioned?

ALAMINSKY: He was the farm manager. Sugar Land hired him as a prison guard, convict guard. He could talk their language. (laughter) George Moses was the other manager.

KELLY: Was Chuzzy Jenkins married to his daughter?

ALAMINSKY: Yeah, yeah. Purpose of the farms was income. Corn, maze, alfalfa. They had that alfalfa dehydrator. They'd pulverize that stuff until it was just about like flour. Then put it back into pellet form.

KELLY: Mixed dried feed.

ALAMINSKY: My brother and law, Willie, married my older sister, he was manager of that new hydrator down here. They let that stuff grow about that high and then they'd peel it right down on the ground cuz it would regrow itself, so to speak.

GOODSILL: Well we are coming to the end. Thank you so much. Your stories were wonderful stories.

ALAMINSKY: I've enjoyed this. There's a lot of history here.