

# FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## *ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE*

Interviewee: **Richard Bolden**

Interview Date: 01/30/2017

Interviewer: Karl Baumgartner

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

Comments: Richard was interviewed in Rosenberg, Texas. His brother,  
Thurman participated in the interview

36 Pages



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*Transcript*

BAUMGARTNER: Today is January 30, 2017, my name is Karl Baumgartner and I am interviewing Mr. Richard Bolden. His brother, Mr. Thurman Bolden, is participating in the interview. A second session to conclude the interview was taken February 13, 2017. This interview is being conducted for the Fort Bend County Historical Commission Oral History Project.

By way of introduction, Richard Bolden's oral history is a first-hand description of two major social changes. First was the movement from rural to urban communities, families left the farms and moved to the towns and cities, and changed to a completely different way of life. Younger generations do not realize how primitive the amenities were then for rural homesteads.

Second, Mr. Bolden's life has spanned the extraordinary period when segregation was replaced by an integrated society. It seems remarkable now that during Richard's education, from elementary school all the way through graduation from High School, never once did he attend classes with white students or teachers.

Laws and social customs have changed. This document serves to illustrate how so much has changed in the course of just one person's lifetime.

BAUMGARTNER: Richard, let's start by going back to day 1. What is your full name and your date of birth?

BOLDEN: Richard Bolden, August 9, 1939.

BAUMGARTNER: OK, with no middle initial. Thurman, the same for you?

THURMAN BOLDEN: Thurman Lee Bolden, August 16, 1949. We are ten years apart.

BAUMGARTNER: Richard, where were you born?

BOLDEN: I was born in Lavaca County, near Hallettsville and two little places, Sublime and Vienna.



*Thurman Lee Bolden, Richard's brother*

BAUMGARTNER: What were your parents' names?

BOLDEN: My father's name was Dean Bolden and my mother's name was Lillie Bolden.

BAUMGARTNER: Where did they grow up?

BOLDEN: They both grew up in the Hallettsville area.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have an extended family back in Hallettsville, a lot of aunts and uncles and family?

BOLDEN: Oh, yeah. We were basically kin to everybody; we had the Boldens and then the Herrings. My mother was a Herring. The Boldens were a good sized family and the Herrings, man, they were a large family so we were kin to almost everybody.

BAUMGARTNER: So some of them must still be there but a lot of them have moved on?

BOLDEN: Most of them are deceased except the younger generation, but a lot of them our age are gone too. There are of still a bunch of them up there, but it is just the immediate family that we know now.

BAUMGARTNER: So you grew up in the Hallettsville area?

BOLDEN: No, we moved to East Bernard when I was just a baby. What I remember is what they've told me.

BAUMGARTNER: Was there any family there?

BOLDEN: No, we didn't have family in East Bernard. All of our family was in Hallettsville, Sublime and Vienna. Daddy left Hallettsville to make him a new start and basically came to East Bernard on his own, I guess. That is a pretty good distance back in those days driving those old model vehicles.

BAUMGARTNER: That was a bold decision, to pull up stakes and leave your family and friends behind. Do you remember how your mom and dad decided to go to East Bernard?

BOLDEN: When we moved to East Bernard, my daddy took on share cropping, which was basically what they were doing back there.

BAUMGARTNER: That is different farming country. It is sandy and a lot of post oaks in Lavaca County. It is completely different from this black land around here.

BOLDEN: Black land is what we were after. You can't grow much cotton up there around Hallettsville. If you do it was just little stuff. Watermelons and peanuts and stuff like that. He wanted to come down where the big stuff was.

BAUMGARTNER: Taking a chance for better opportunity for his family.

BOLDEN: So Daddy came down here and met up with this landowner and made a deal to farm the land and started off small, like 50 acres.

BAUMGARTNER: Now, share cropping is where a man farms the land that is owned by another person, and they have an arrangement to share the income. The man working the land makes a profit for farming the land and the landowner gets a share because of his land ownership. It's like being self-employed the man farming the land must have confidence that he will bring in the crop.

Do you remember who the landowner was?

BOLDEN: W. L. Harbin was the overseer. He was married to one of the Westmorelands from Eagle Lake.

BAUMGARTNER: Where did you stay at first?

BOLDEN: When we came to East Bernard, I am sure Daddy would have to know someone. He couldn't just come down blind.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Don't forget about the folks in Boone's Bend on mother's side. Uncle Frank....

BOLDEN: Yeah, that's right.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have siblings?

BOLDEN: Not then, I was the oldest. I was just almost like a newborn baby. The others were all born in East Bernard.

BAUMGARTNER: What were your brothers and sisters' names?

BOLDEN: The one right behind me is Joe Dean Bolden, and the next one would be my sister, Jessie Mae, and the next one would be Daniel Nathan Bolden, and the next one would be Sherman Bolden, and the next one would be Thurman Bolden, and the next one would be Bobby Ray Bolden, and the baby was a girl and her name was Glory Jean Bolden.

BAUMGARTNER: So mostly boys, and two girls. Thurman, you were darn near the baby, weren't you?

THURMAN BOLDEN: I am the baby now.

BOLDEN: We lost our baby sister. She was only 36.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Then Joe and then Bobby.

#### FARM LIFE

BAUMGARTNER: Where was the house you ended up living in?

BOLDEN: The first house or the second one?

BAUMGARTNER: The one you lived in over the years.

BOLDEN: That was the last house. We didn't live in but two houses. Daddy didn't do a lot of moving. We lived six miles out of town, not too far from the Tennessee Gas, a mile off the road in the blackland. It was a farm house, if you worked the land, you lived there in that house.

BAUMGARTNER: The houses weren't very big in those days.

BOLDEN: We were in the biggest one in that area. You still see a few houses today out in the country like it, it was considered as a two story. It had closed in stairs, but the upstairs wasn't nothing but a straight room with a window on each end. The boys, we all slept upstairs.

BAUMGARTNER: So you slept upstairs, and the girls slept downstairs. In those days, did they have electricity?

BOLDEN: The first old house we were in, I remember those kerosene lamps, no electricity. But we finally got electricity when we moved into the other house.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have running water?

BOLDEN: No, you had to pump water from the well. Then we updated a little bit. We had a little open well with a cover on it and a pump and that was good water and then we finally went to an electric well.

THURMAN BOLDEN: We froze upstairs. No insulation then; I don't think they had sheet rock back in those days because upstairs we were looking directly at the shingles.

BOLDEN: We didn't have any sheet rock in any of the houses. I remember that when I got big enough to help mother put up wallpaper.

BAUMGARTNER: It is amazing how much things have changed. I remember when I was a little boy, we lived out in the country and for the first several years we had an outhouse. In northern Oklahoma it got cold in the winter and I was a little boy, about four years old and we would have to walk back there, maybe fifty yards from the house.

THURMAN BOLDEN: That's what those old Sears Roebuck catalogs came in handy for us because we did not go buy any toilet paper; Sears Roebuck, and Montgomery Ward catalogs.

BAUMGARTNER: So how old do you think you were when you were helping with the cotton?

BOLDEN: I was about seven years old. We started early.

BAUMGARTNER: That is what I mean on how much has changed.

BOLDEN: At seven years old I was chopping cotton. Picking cotton, they would fix you a little sack and you were about six or seven picking cotton and putting it in your sack.

BAUMGARTNER: What is the difference between chopping cotton and picking cotton?

BOLDEN: It is completely different. Chopping you just have a hoe and keep it sharp and you go down cultivated rows cutting all the grass the cultivator does not get. So you got to be twisting and turning and you got to be getting the grass out.

Actually that is easier than picking. Everybody thinks that picking is easier but chopping is easier because you are standing up. When you are picking you are bent over and man when you try to stand up you can't stand up. I think that is the reason I am bent over today.

BAUMGARTNER: What do you mean, "They would fix you a little sack."

BOLDEN: My mother would make all of us a little sack out of the same mesh material they used for potato sacks, that we would use to put the cotton in.

THURMAN BOLDEN: You would get a design and it had a sling over your shoulders. You could pick and throw your cotton back there.

BOLDEN: Mother used to make all the sacks. Different sacks. Every man that came out and helped us. Daddy liked the long sacks, she made them some long sacks.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Ten and twelve feet.

BAUMGARTNER: So you were a little fellow out there picking your cotton?

BOLDEN: Right. My brother, Joe Dean, would be next, my sister would be next and it would not take us long. You would do little sacks every year.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Spring was chopping time. Fall was harvest time, and we would get pulled out of school to help bring in the crop. We would be “scrapping.” Picking up every last little bit of cotton from the field. When you got big enough to start walking around there was something to do. Feeding chickens, chopping grass in the yard.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have a garden?

BOLDEN: We had a pretty good sized garden.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Close to a half-acre.

BOLDEN: My mother was the one who took care of the garden. My mother had to take care of the young kids so she didn't get to chop or pick any cotton unless she wanted to come out there when we were close to the house. While we were out there chopping you would see her over there in the garden.

We had tomatoes, okra, cucumbers, and squash, plenty of squash, carrots, and green beans. We had a special field for potatoes, two rows of them. We would not do all the potatoes at one time. We would take a sod buster and put it on the tractor and would just do one row at a time. We didn't try to get them all at one time because we ate them all year round.

When I think about my mother, I think of her taking care of the kids, being a good housewife, cooking dinner. We would all be at school and she would already be cooking. Starting to cook some good old beans, cornbread and whatever else.

We would not make it home until four thirty or five because we got off the bus and we had to walk if Daddy or somebody else did not pick us up.

She had a wood stove and it wasn't like turning on the gas. It was a wood stove and you had to get it all fired up to make her cornbread. Sometimes I think about all that stuff now. It is a whole lot easier today. By the time she got your wood in and then waited for that bottom to get heated enough to cook cornbread or biscuits...

BAUMGARTNER: Did she have an ice box?

BOLDEN: Yes, we started with an ice box way back and then we got a refrigerator.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have a milk cow?

BOLDEN: Off and on, when we lived in our first house, I don't know how Daddy ended up with that cow but he did and then took her somewhere, she was bred and then she came back and had a calf. We milked off of her. I never learned how to milk, but Mother did.

BAUMGARTNER: It reminds me, my first job when I was a little boy, I guess I was about five, was to go pick up the milk from the neighbor's farm. Our closest neighbor lived about a quarter mile away. It was one of the kids' chores each night to walk over to his farm; he had cows and he would milk us a gallon of milk every night. My mom would warm it up to pasteurize it, and overnight about one-third would rise to the top and be cream the next day.

Did you sell the potatoes or anything from the garden commercially?

BOLDEN: We didn't sell anything out of the garden because we were six miles out of East Bernard and it was too far. I will tell you who used to come out there: the insurance man, and he would get some stuff from Daddy.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Probably for payment.

BOLDEN: For payment, and he even took him some chickens because he owned a restaurant. But I would mention that in the wintertime and certain times of the year, mother would sell eggs. We had a bunch of eggs and she would take them to the store and sell those eggs.

BAUMGARTNER: White or brown eggs?

THURMAN BOLDEN: Brown eggs, white eggs, we had plenty of chickens.

BAUMGARTNER: Did y'all have a tractor?



BOLDEN: Oh, yes. Daddy was just on his own when he came here and he had an old iron wheel tractor with those lugs on it. We did not have a mule. That is one thing we bypassed.

THURMAN BOLDEN: And later you had a John Deere A and went on up to a John Deere 60.

BAUMGARTNER: So over the next years your daddy had a growing family to help farm?

BOLDEN: He actually farmed better crops than anybody around. He was getting two-and-a-half bales per acre when the average rate was a bale and a half. Everybody wanted to know how he did it. People from various colleges came out to try to study what he was doing.

BAUMGARTNER: Really!

THURMAN BOLDEN: Another thing I would like to inject is the chopping part we were talking about, it wasn't just getting the grass. You also had to thin the cotton. Because if it was too thick your yield would not be there.

BOLDEN: Thinning it out was essential. Daddy would show me when I started how to thin it. You would pluck it out.

BAUMGARTNER: What was a good crop? How many bales?

BOLDEN: We had to make at least a hundred bales. Normally we would make a hundred or a little over a hundred and that is a good crop.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Another thing, there was more than just cotton grown there. You had to have a section of corn, because we ate corn and fed corn to the chickens and hogs and animals.

BOLDEN: We also had milo, not every year, but corn was every year.

BAUMGARTNER: Would you use milo for the animals or would you sell it?

BOLDEN: The animals would eat it if we didn't have a good corn crop, but it was mostly for sale. I know a bale of cotton and I will never forget that. It takes about twenty two hundred pounds to make a bale. Once it is ginned out it would weigh no more than five hundred because they just had dollies we had to carry them on.

They hadn't got fork lifts yet. When it got to be about twenty one and fifty pounds, Daddy would say, "Put the wagon sheet over it." He was going in with it.

BAUMGARTNER: That has gone by the wayside now. The farms are so big. Of course, the equipment is so expensive.

BOLDEN: The little fellow is not able to go out and get that four, five or eight row John Deere cotton picker now.

BAUMGARTNER: Your daddy must have been quite a worker.

BOLDEN: We need to talk about that. Daddy used to cut a cord of wood a day. He was supposed to be in school. I think he went just to the third grade because he had to take care of his grandmother, Grandmother Jenny, and he was cutting a cord of wood a day by himself. I guess he must have been about ten or twelve years old and he had been working ever since.

He had to take a job during the winter. Starting from March through September he had to stay strictly on the farm. You have to prepare the land, you have to plant, you have the upkeep of everything and then when all the cotton is picked up, you would have to break the land up. The land had to be broken up, disked, that was the law. You can't just leave the land after picking the cotton.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, yes. Cotton, it could spread a disease.

BOLDEN: Boll weevils. Then he would have about three months or maybe a little longer to get with the guys that did construction work. Then he would have to get back in the field again.

Daddy was pretty popular. You wouldn't think it ,but Daddy was actually the president of the lodge at that time for years. The Masonic Lodge, they met out in Eagle Lake.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Dad was remembered in East Bernard. They named a road after him that we lived on years ago. I went back out there five or six years ago and they had turned it into a county road.

BAUMGARTNER: With a number?

THURMAN BOLDEN: Yeah.

BAUMGARTNER: They did that on all of those roads in Wharton County and it was disappointing. They used to have peoples' names for roads and now it is County Road 172 and there is no history to it anymore.

You know when you think about it, look at the work ethic that we were exposed to in those days. Can you imagine any kids doing work like that now? Not necessarily picking cotton but just doing work and doing chores at that age. Letting kids know while they are still little that they have to do work.

BOLDEN: I don't know what you have to do today to get a kid out there.

THURMAN BOLDEN: I begged mine. [all laughing]

BAUMGARTNER: Now you are too smart.

BOLDEN: I know what you are talking about Karl, you are talking about the kids this day and time, they have no eggs, no chickens because there are no chickens raised in town unless you do live in the country, no chores, and they just don't have anything to do.

THURMAN BOLDEN: I know Richard went through the same thing that I went through. We had things we had to do. We had to make sure there was wood. We had to make sure there were chips and in the wintertime if the fire was out and we had to be the first to get up and make the fire before everybody got up. The house needed to be warm. When we got off the bus in the evening and ate our little meal and the next thing we would do was chop wood, gathering chips and feeding the chickens and turkeys.

BOLDEN: As soon as we ate, we had to roll. There was a certain amount that Daddy was expecting to see out there.

BAUMGARTNER: It probably benefited you all your life.

BOLDEN: It helped. We would not be the people we are today.

#### RECREATION TIME

BAUMGARTNER: What did you do when your chores were done?

BOLDEN: We used to fish in the San Bernard River or West Bernard Creek, which ran about a mile from our house. That's where we spent our Saturday evening and Sunday. We caught some good stuff out of there. We found some deep holes and some shallow ones. We learned where the big fish were and we used to really catch them.

BAUMGARTNER: What did you use for bait?

BOLDEN: Earthworms and then we would dig our tails off to get those big grub worms.

BAUMGARTNER: The white ones.

BOLDEN: You just didn't find them everywhere. You had to be around some rotten trees. Another good one, grasshoppers. A grasshopper won't live too long in the water. You would be looking at your cork and we knew that we had something.

BAUMGARTNER: Mostly catfish?

BOLDEN: Catfish and we ate gars too. They are just hard to skin and their meat is coarse but it is good. You just go and fry it; it is just a tad away from catfish.

THURMAN BOLDEN: We had hogs to feed, turkeys and chickens. We had tons of turkeys and chickens.

BAUMGARTNER: Domesticated turkeys, or wild turkeys?

BOLDEN: Domesticated until they ran off into the wild in the West Bernard.

That was another one of our big jobs, searching down turkey nests. The turkeys would go out among the wild rose bushes and lay their eggs. Then their babies would be born. We would be going down that way fishing and then we look and there is a momma with about 12 little turkeys. Then we can't get them home. We had to try to usher them home some kind of way.

BAUMGARTNER: What would happen? They would scatter in the wild?

BOLDEN: They would scatter and they knew to be quiet. The momma, you would have had to shoot her to get her and that wouldn't be doing any good because she has about 12 little babies out there. So she hides from us and that's how they came up wild. We would go down there a year or two later after they were grown, and see turkeys all over the place.

BAUMGARTNER: How did you catch them? Did you shoot them?

BOLDEN: We would get the ones down by the creek. Once they get wild that is all you can do.

BAUMGARTNER: What did you use, a 22 rifle?

BOLDEN: I shot them with a shotgun. Daddy could go down there and hit them with a 22.

BAUMGARTNER: Shotgun shells were pretty costly then.

BOLDEN: Yep, they were.

BAUMGARTNER: I used to go rabbit hunting practically every day when I was about ten years old. I would get off the school bus, I had a little dog and we headed to the pasture with my 22. My momma would cook them in the frying pan like fried chicken.

BOLDEN: Every rabbit we were able to kill, we ate. I always used a shotgun and I had a place to shoot them. I always blew their head off if I could. Daddy would go with a 22. I could shoot with a 22, too, but we didn't have no scope at that time, just an open sight. When jack rabbits were running, we had dogs that would run and try to catch them.

THURMAN BOLDEN: At night we did a lot of hunting and trapping for coons. We hunted for miles and we had to stay up with them, carrying the gear and stuff.

BOLDEN: We had dogs, too, and guns and those carbon lights to tree them. We didn't use no shotgun then, nothing but a 22.

BAUMGARTNER: You ate the raccoons, right?

BOLDEN: Oh, yes. Just the old people eat them today and there ain't many old people around anymore.

#### SCHOOL

BAUMGARTNER: So where did you go to school? What was East Bernard like then?

BOLDEN: East Bernard was a fairly small town then, and it is nice now. Growing up we went to Muldoon School.

BAUMGARTNER: Is that in East Bernard or Kendleton?

BOLDEN: All in East Bernard. It was first through sixth grade to go on to Kendleton. So we went to Muldoon and they later started another school but thank goodness I was past the sixth grade then, so I started going to Powell Point High School in Kendleton.

BAUMGARTNER: How would you get to school?

THURMAN BOLDEN: Muldoon School was about two miles from our house and we had to walk to it.

BOLDEN: We did not have a bus coming for us then. We had to walk to it and get wet or whatever.

BAUMGARTNER: If it was raining your momma made you go to school?

BOLDEN: If it was lightning and thundering, no. But a lot of time we would be on our way to school and it would start raining and you were going to get wet. Daddy kept a car but we lived a mile off the road on the black land. An old mud road, and if it rained and he was not on top of it, well there we were, we just had to go to school soaking wet. The teachers would give us a little break or whatever but that is what we had to do.

Then later they got old school buses going and that helped out a lot. They closed Muldoon down and they moved the elementary first grade out to what they called the Prairie. Muldoon was just a small church house but younger kids went off to East Bernard Prairie, which I did not get to go to, but Thurman did. That was a little bit bigger.

BAUMGARTNER: These were like one room schoolhouses where all grades were in one room?

BOLDEN: Yes, exactly.

THURMAN BOLDEN: We lucked out over there at East Bernard Prairie; they had two rooms. They had one for the younger ones and one for the bigger ones. Two teachers, too, and we had a bathroom and everything. We were stepping up!

BAUMGARTNER: Did you have the same teacher for several years?

BOLDEN: Yes, we had the same teacher. When I was going to Muldoon, Ms. Mitchell was our teacher. I am never going to forget her. She was teacher for at least three or four years. Brother, let me tell you, if you didn't get that lesson she was going to put that switch on you.

BAUMGARTNER: Really?

BOLDEN: I mean she was going to put it on you.

BAUMGARTNER: It is amazing how much a teacher can impact kids. A good teacher can help.

BOLDEN: Oh, yes they can help.

The other thing that helped was the parents back then. They get the credit, too. When we were raised up back then we didn't know a thing about robbing and killing or stealing or whatever. No way we would ever do that because our momma and daddy wouldn't stand for it. We didn't ever have it on our mind.

THURMAN BOLDEN: That would disrespect our parents.

BOLDEN: When school was about to let out in the summer, that was cotton field chopping time. About three weeks before school was out, Daddy would come to school and get us. He would let us go half a day sometimes. In the Fall the first day of school was during harvest time and we never got a chance to go to school. Daddy would take us to get our books when school started and you would look outside and there he was sitting out in the car. He would tell the teacher to let the Boldens have their books and he would sit out there in the car waiting until we came out with our books. We would not see school no more unless it came a rain and we couldn't harvest. We sometimes missed about a month of school.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow. Pulled out of elementary school to work in the field at harvest time.

BOLDEN: Of course we were not the only ones. The only ones in class were the ones not raised on the farm and that was not very many.

THURMAN BOLDEN: You kept up with your studies too!

#### CHURCH

BAUMGARTNER: Richard, did you say Muldoon school looked like a little church house to start with?

BOLDEN: Muldoon I am sure at one time was an old church house because that is what it looked like. We had to go to church over into the Kendleton area where the black churches were. We didn't have a black church right in East Bernard.

BAUMGARTNER: With the teachers, would you have a lot of prayers? Was it like a church school?

THURMAN BOLDEN: Oh, no. We said the Pledge of Allegiance and the Lord's Prayer every day.

BAUMGARTNER: You went to church, I suppose?

BOLDEN: Yes. My mother was very religious.

BAUMGARTNER: Did the women tend to be more religious than the men?

BOLDEN: Most of them.

BAUMGARTNER: Some things never change.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Here is the part that Daddy played in it. He didn't go to church that often but he would go and sit out in the car and wait for mother to get out of the service. Just about every Sunday morning he would get his bible and go sit out on the back porch and cross his legs and he had a different way, I guess it was the old African way, something else we need to talk about too. He would just sit there and rock and meditate. That is the way he did his reading and meditation. He knew a few church songs and he would be humming on the back porch and you just went by and he didn't say anything.

BOLDEN: Daddy also had an African name. His name was Dean Bolden but his African name sounded like Kathadus.

BAUMGARTNER: That's interesting. That was probably a carryover from way back.

BOLDEN: I remember older people would come and they would be out there talking and you know me, I always tried to listen as much as I could because I didn't have much to do and I would be around the corner and I wouldn't let them know I was around the corner. They'd be talking and bull corning having their fun, and they would go somewhere at that time with their vests on. They called it a yoke.

BAUMGARTNER: So the religious activity wasn't a big part of your life, would you say?

THURMAN BOLDEN: It was every two weeks for us.

BOLDEN: Me, it was more than that because mother she had to go all the way to Boone's Bend to go to her church during the time that I was able to start driving. She had family that lived there

BAUMGARTNER: Boone's Bend, where is that?



BOLDEN: Right out of Kendleton when you cross the bridge heading for Hungerford, back on the left hand side. Basically everything back there used to be owned by the Scotts and the Pines. They are all relatives.

#### HEALTH CARE

BAUMGARTNER: Who did you use for a doctor? Did you have a family doctor?

BOLDEN: Reason I got these dark shades on, Karl, I don't have but one eye. It is gone.

BAUMGARTNER: You told me that you could not see out of one eye.

BOLDEN: This one. I can hardly see out of this other one.

BAUMGARTNER: You look good with glasses [all laughing]. What was the deal on it?

BOLDEN: Shingles got my eye. If I could have caught it in time and knew what it was I might be able to see out of it.

BAUMGARTNER: It wasn't cataracts or something?

BOLDEN: No, cataracts are going to be in this other one. I am hoping that's what it is. I am getting ready to get to work on that real quick.

BAUMGARTNER: What pays for that, does Medicare insurance?

BOLDEN: Blue Cross and Blue Shield. I did have to have an operation on this eye to keep it from falling out. That is from my wife's insurance from the Richmond State School where she used to work and I'm really not sure how that works.

BAUMGARTNER: In the old days there wasn't any insurance. So if people got sick, then what?

BOLDEN: If you got sick some people had life insurance and that is the only thing I remember my mother had, life insurance for us. That's what that man was selling when he got him a few vegetables out of the garden.

If you got sick, we went up there to Dr. Schumann in East Bernard. He was alone, just one doctor and he was a doctor for everything, a cold, flu, got cut, car wreck or whatever.

BAUMGARTNER: A family doctor. That's the way it used to be.

BOLDEN: That was it.

BAUMGARTNER: He would try to treat people even if people could not pay that day?

BOLDEN: I guess he made enough money from all the customers put together because he knew with some of them he wasn't going to get paid any money. He could tell that right off the bat.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you know Dr. Stanley Thompson from Richmond? I was talking to him about Medicare and all the programs and how things have changed and he said, "When I was a doctor, the doctor was supposed to take care of people whether they could afford it or not. If they were sick, that was part of the deal."

THURMAN BOLDEN: That's the way Dr. Schumann was.

BOLDEN: Yes, that is the way Dr. Schumann was; he was not going to turn you loose if you were sick.

BAUMGARTNER: I said to Dr. Thompson, "Did that ever bother you, to take care of people and provide services to them and you knew that you were not going to get compensated?" And he said, "No, that's the way it was and that was part of being a doctor". Of course it has all changed now.

BOLDEN: If you went in there and you had something he didn't treat like cancer, then he would refer you. My daddy had cancer and messed around for about a year and was getting treated for a cold, they didn't know. Finally Dr. Schumann realized that this was not no cold and he referred him to M. D. Anderson Hospital, but it was too late then.

THURMAN BOLDEN: My main doctor was my mother and I had some tough wounds from time to time. She always used spider webs and kerosene and sugar. I stepped on a rusty nail once; she used kerosene. They really didn't have any tetanus shots back then.

BAUMGARTNER: Really! Looks like you made it pretty well.

#### HIGH SCHOOL – POWELL POINT

BAUMGARTNER: Richard, you went on to High School?

BOLDEN: Powell Point. I finished sixth grade and then I started at Powell Point. We were bused in. We had to drop all off the elementary kids up at Prairie and then the bus would have only eight or nine starting off and would take us on to Powell Point High. It was a college at one time. That was the first black college in Texas

BAUMGARTNER: That is on that highway going north out of town? They closed it a few years ago?

BOLDEN: They closed it down. Anyway, it was a college a long time ago and the kids did not have to go to Prairie View A & M.

BAUMGARTNER: So there were six grades going to it?

BOLDEN: Seventh through twelfth. They had a coach, an Ag teacher, and economics.

THURMAN BOLDEN: They had a nursing school when it was a college.

BOLDEN: Homemaking, mathematics, English...

BAUMGARTNER: The coach taught all of the sports, right?

BOLDEN: Yes. He taught all the sports.

.BAUMGARTNER: Do you have any teachers that you can think of?

BOLDEN: I can think of all their names. Every last one of them.

BAUMGARTNER: That's cool. Who was your math teacher?

BOLDEN: My math teacher was Aaron Weaver. He was the coach also. The English teacher was Ms. Mitchell. She was a crippled lady and her husband was the superintendent. Before he was deceased he was the superintendent. Ira Foster, you are not going to believe this but I can't think what she taught. Charles Taylor was the history teacher.

THURMAN BOLDEN: I remember Ms. Foster too. She might have been social studies.

BOLDEN: That was Ms. Brickett. Mr. Charles Howard Snell was the Ag teacher.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow, that is impressive to remember all your teachers names! It was over 50 years ago.

BOLDEN: I still remember them even though all of them are gone but I can remember them. Remember their classrooms and everything.

BAUMGARTNER: That speaks well of them as teachers and you as a student. Was Ms. Mitchell a good teacher?

BOLDEN: She was a good teacher.

BAUMGARTNER: And Mr. Weaver?

BOLDEN: He was good. He was the coach, too.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you guys play other schools in sports?

BOLDEN: Yes. I started out, but Daddy talked so bad about football to me. You gonna get your neck broken and he just didn't go for it so I backed out. But my younger brothers, I know he told them the same thing but they went on anyway.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you play ball, Thurman?

THURMAN BOLDEN: Yeah.

BAUMGARTNER: You look like a ball player to me.

THURMAN BOLDEN: I made All-District down here.

BAUMGARTNER: Cool!

#### RETURNING HOME TO HALLETTSVILLE

BOLDEN: Back in those days that's the way it was.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you guys get a chance to stay connected to the rest of the family in Lavaca County, see your grandparents or whatever?

BOLDEN: We went to Hallettsville and Sublime basically twice a year. See, Daddy had a car, and he was a decent mechanic, kind of like a Jack of All Trades. He helped other people fix their cars too, those old cars back then.

Boy, I would just hate when I would hear him say that we were going. All the kids had to go and Mom and Dad weren't going to leave none of us by ourselves. There weren't any roads there, no paved roads. They had nothing but those sandy roads with a fence on each side and a little ditch. No bridges. That is what I didn't like. You drove down in those red looking gullies. Your cars back then rode high. Fforget about what these new cars look like now. The old cars had big old wheels on them. Sometimes you would get a little bit stuck but Daddy knew what to do and every now and then we would have to get out and push. Every now and then we would have to get out and help someone else push because they were stuck and we can't get by.

BAUMGARTNER: Did they have culverts at the bottom between hills?

BOLDEN: No, just washed out gullies, a bunch of them. Are you familiar with that territory? It started around Altair, from Altair all through Sheridan. You can still look over in those pastures and see the gullies, but now you have paved roads with bridges. You cross the Colorado River and that is when you started.

BAUMGARTNER: The Colorado River is right before you get to Altair.

BOLDEN: Right.

BAUMGARTNER: So you said there were little towns outside of Hallettsville.

BOLDEN: Yes. They were not even towns really. Communities.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Little residences with one type of little store where you could go and get kerosene and things from that store.

BAUMGARTNER: Your grandparents were there and other family. What were your grandparents' names?

BOLDEN: My dad's father was Jesse Bolden and mother Roxie Miller. There's a little hang-up with her name, they didn't get married.

BAUMGARTNER: That wasn't so unusual in those days. Or today.

BOLDEN: No, it wasn't. Roxie's mother was Jenny. She was blind and couldn't see. None of y'all were there to see this, you don't know anything about this.

THURMAN BOLDEN: I knew Grandma Jenny.

BOLDEN: You knew Grandma Jenny?

THURMAN BOLDEN: Yeah, Grandma Jenny, Uncle Bud and all of them. She was Grandma Roxie's mother.

BAUMGARTNER: So that was your great-grandmother, on your Dad's side? Who were your grandparents on your momma's side?

BOLDEN: My grandmother on mom's side, her name was Laura Scott before she married and then she married Nathan Herring.

BAUMGARTNER: So the Boldens and the Herrings were your mom and dad's folks. When were your parents born?

BOLDEN: My dad, 1915. Mom, 1923.

THURMAN BOLDEN: I want this to be mentioned, because we have an uncle who is a few years older than Richard who lived with us most of our lives, Uncle Curtis. He is living in a nursing home in Hallettsville.

BOLDEN: That was my mother's brother. He stayed with us about 20 years or so. He chopped cotton and picked cotton and that is the reason that daddy didn't mind it. He was a real mechanic. He kept daddy's car up if anything went wrong with. Then I and my brothers finally got our cars and the same thing.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Sublime has two stores right now that I know of and the newest store has been there about twenty five years. But the other store was owned by our cousin and that was the first place that we stopped.

BOLDEN: Now on the way there, Sheridan and Rock Island were bigger. They were a lot bigger because you didn't have a lot of black people living up in that area.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Rock Island, we have to mention this. When the black folks rode through there they had a sign, and I remember the sign too, Richard. It read, "Nigger Run and if you can't read, run anyway". That was in Rock Island. I would be looking for that sign and hope like hell we could make it through Rock Island.

BAUMGARTNER: I'll be darned. I remember when I first moved here I had a Spanish guy, Victor Lara, he was my only employee for a year or two. He was kind of a little, short guy.

BOLDEN: I know him. I knew him.

BAUMGARTNER: We would drive down going to Matagorda and go down a road coming out of Needville going towards Boling and we used to pass a café right there on the corner, a little bar, and every time we went by it, it would set Victor off because they never would let Mexicans go in there. Just driving by would rile him up and start some remarks.

THURMAN BOLDEN: That's how it was back in those days.

BOLDEN: Back in those days that's the way it was.

## AFTER GRADUATION

BAUMGARTNER: So Richard, when did you complete high school?

BOLDEN: 1958. When I got out of school, I helped Daddy finish up the harvest for the year. I was planning on being a farmer myself but one year we had a drought and I think we did not make 20 bales of cotton. We had two years in a row that we could not get out of debt.

BAUMGARTNER: They say that the 1950's had terrible droughts in Texas, the worst in state history.

BOLDEN: That's true. Daddy had to go out and get a job too, had to take a construction job in Houston in the wintertime. He worked on building the Shamrock Hilton for a couple years I remember.

BAUMGARTNER: When there was a real bad year like that and you don't make a crop, what kind of hardship does that impose on the family? Was there a problem getting decent meals?

BOLDEN: It was. It was a problem all the way around. We had two big grocery stores in East Bernard that we could go and get credit from but when you fail a crop, they know you failed. You can't pay them and you may not be able to pay them any, and if you do pay them a little of something they will carry you over for the next year. But you lighten up and you don't eat as much, you don't get as much, clothing, shoes.

BAUMGARTNER: I have talked with older guys who were growing up after the depression and you know the depression was the same way.

BOLDEN: We had two big grocery stores in East Bernard. Henry Sklar was one, Otto was the other one and they carried us. Then when we started picking cotton they got paid first. All we could do was keep enough money out to feed ourselves. When we got them paid off, then you could see a little bit of green money.

BAUMGARTNER: Well, that is pretty remarkable when you think about it now. Where would you go now where they would carry you?

BOLDEN: You cannot go nowhere now.

BAUMGARTNER: What was Mr. Sklar like? The guy that owned the store.

BOLDEN: Henry Sklar. He was a rancher too. He was a heavy set, little gentleman, cowboy boots and Stetson hat all the time and everything he got into, it was Put the Pedal to the Metal. He would get a brand new car, pedal to the metal. Daddy was saying "Mr. Henry got a brand new Hudson" [laughing] and he would be coming down that road and dust would be flying. He owned ranches in all different places down in Ganado, East Bernard and just many places.

BAUMGARTNER: Was he a decent guy to work with?

BOLDEN: Yes, he was. Daddy worked for him some in wintertime too. He also had a brother you may know here in Richmond, Adolph.

THURMAN BOLDEN: There were actually two cotton buyers in East Bernard then; Henry Sklar bought cotton and Otto bought cotton and whoever had the best price is who got the cotton.

BOLDEN: But first of all you would get your winter food account and get it paid off!

BAUMGARTNER: But pretty much you would sell it locally, you wouldn't go elsewhere?

BOLDEN: Always. East Bernard, Otto or Henry Sklar. I know what you are talking about. Some people would go to Wharton, El Campo and maybe places there would be paying a little bit more. Daddy was like this, the time that you tried to drive, he was kind of from the old school.

BAUMGARTNER: Well, yeah. The other thing is that if you miss a crop and you need to have the relationship.

BOLDEN: Right.

BAUMGARTNER: So what did the Powell Point class do when they graduated from high school? What was there to do back then?

BOLDEN: The ones that were able to go to college and had the money to do it, they went. Then a good portion of them for some reason went to California. Three of my classmates, Willie Melton's son and three of his nephews, all of them went to California. They did good over there.

BAUMGARTNER: A lot of life is just accidents. It is kind of interesting when you think of the coincidences when I happened to meet you. I had just moved down here to Rosenberg when I met you guys.



I met Richard when I had a car problem one night and you were in the wrecker business and I still remember you taking control of the situation when the Highway Patrol drove up. It was 2 a.m.. You told me to stay back in the shadows. You talked to them quite a while and finally the officers drove off. Over the years I would see the wrecker truck around town, A & R Salvage, and I came to know A & R stood for Alvin Ohl and Richard Bolden.

Then about that same time I met Thurman and Chester Banks who were working right across the street and they used to come over and stop by my little mobile home office and shoot the breeze and we would solve the world's problems. Watergate, President Richard Nixon getting impeached, the Vietnam War and so on. That went on for a few months and then we went our separate ways.

So I never saw either one of you again for forty years. Then a few months ago I bumped into Thurman at Hartz Chicken and he said hello. We were catching up and I said, "Thurman, what's your last name?" He said, "Bolden." I said, "Do you know Richard Bolden?" You said, "That's my brother." One thing led to another and here we are today doing an oral history.

THURMAN BOLDEN: I was just a little later than Chester in meeting you, but you and I were so laid back and cool and I thought y'all were some of the greatest people on earth. That's another thing; when we saw each other at Hartz a few months ago, did somebody else kind of get you my phone number?

BAUMGARTNER: Rose Pickens. I called and asked her if she could look you up because I wanted to get ahold of Richard about doing an oral history. Do you know Rose? Her mother was Rosie Williams.

THURMAN BOLDEN: It would be good to see her. I haven't seen her in about twenty years or so I don't believe.

BAUMGARTNER: She has a little boy about ten years old maybe older now. She is pretty active around town,. She has her picture in the newspaper every now and then for some activity or another. She is a go-getter. She used to work for the city in Code Enforcement and I did City work with her.

Well anyway Richard about your high school classmates, I'm not a fan of California. I lived there for about six months when I was 21 and I was glad to get out of there.

BOLDEN: What part of California?

BAUMGARTNER: Long Beach, Compton.

THURMAN BOLDEN: What years when you went?

BAUMGARTNER: I went there in 1963. I was out there when President Kennedy got shot.

BOLDEN: Well, my dad died in 1963. I was at the Texaco station when Kennedy got shot and we had a little TV in there and that is all we did that evening. We almost shut the station down to keep up with the news.

BAUMGARTNER: Did the black people look up to Kennedy?

BOLDEN: Oh yes. They definitely did.

BAUMGARTNER: That was always my impression that he stood up for individual rights and civil rights, but it's interesting how different parts of the country have different viewpoints and I still remember the day exactly. Everybody from those days remembers exactly what they were doing the day President Kennedy got killed. I was working on a railroad out there in Compton. It was a Friday, they came out and told us that the President got killed and we could shut it down for the day but we had to stay there on the yard until closing time. So we just sat down in a box car and at the time I was the only white guy, it was all black guys except for me and there was one guy, Otis, who was kind of the leader and he didn't care about Kennedy one way or the other. For him, Kennedy was some dude back in Washington and he said, "Man that just leaves me old". So the rest of the crew repeated the same thing. It didn't mean nothing to them. After work everyone was watching TV to see what was going on. I still remember it.

BOLDEN: I know exactly where I was.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Different opinions, it's weird how stuff gets changed around.

BOLDEN: You don't know, it's like all sharecroppers in the field... all the big ranchers out there...

THURMAN BOLDEN: Just doing what their bosses said to do.

BOLDEN: Just doing what their bosses said to do. Most likely that is the way it was.

THURMAN BOLDEN: They didn't know what was going on outside the streets of Compton. In Compton that is some pretty rough people.

BOLDEN: You got a lot of this young generation running around now, they don't care who the president is. They just don't care, that's not in their mind. It just doesn't make any difference to them.

Karl, I am glad you went all the way back to start. I thought you just wanted to start right here in Rosenberg.

BAUMGARTNER: I wanted to talk about more than Rosenberg. I wanted to talk about what it was like back then and how things have changed over the times. Would kids back then have an opportunity to learn much about the outside world? What about famous people like say, Thurgood Marshall?

THURMAN BOLDEN: The Supreme Court Justice.

BOLDEN: You had to be just a normal kid, they really wouldn't. At that time they did not have TV's, and even when they had TV's they would be running out there playing basketball, pushing tires and running to the creek trying to catch a fish.

BAUMGARTNER: There wasn't any exposure to national events on TV or newspapers?

BOLDEN: No newspapers, we lived six miles out of town. You would get a Sears Roebuck Catalog and Montgomery Wards, but anyway you didn't start learning that until you go up into the tenth, eleventh, twelfth grades.

THURMAN BOLDEN: About the biggest thing going around here back in those days was blacks had to pay a poll tax. That is what you paid to vote. I don't think it was much, I don't think it was more than a few dollars.

BAUMGARTNER: Historically it was considered a scam intended to keep people from voting because they did not have enough money to pay.

EDITOR NOTE: For many years, Richard's parents and all Texas voters were required to pay a poll tax in order to vote. This tax was a barrier that suppressed voting among the poorer segments of society, particularly minority voters, who could not afford to pay the tax. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poll\\_taxes\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poll_taxes_in_the_United_States)

THURMAN BOLDEN: If you were black or maybe Mexican or something like that.

BAUMGARTNER: Just like a way to enforce segregation. In order to vote you had to give somebody some money. Isn't that Hell you have to pay to vote?

BOLDEN: I heard about the poll tax, but I did not deal with it.

THURMAN BOLDEN: My dad wanted to vote so he would go in there, I do remember that he would pay his poll tax and he made a big deal of it at election day. All the black folks would do that. They would be sitting around Henry Sklar's. He had a big barbecue pit in the back and the black folks would sit out there around the barbecue pit.

1927 POLL TAX RECEIPT STATE OF TEXAS COUNTY OF FORT BEND

WARD NO. \_\_\_\_\_ RECEIVED OF *Lina Johnson* DATE *Jan. 28* 19 *28* N<sup>o</sup> *3228*

ADDRESS *East Bernard* R. F. D. \_\_\_\_\_ BOX \_\_\_\_\_

PRECINCT No. *11* AGE *37* YEARS *37* OCCUPATION *School Teacher* RACE:  COLORED  WHITE SEX:  MALE  FEMALE

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ PAID BY \_\_\_\_\_

BY *W. Boggs* DEPUTY *Louise Minkwitz* TAX COLLECTOR OF ABOVE SAID COUNTY

*Poll Tax Receipt from Fort Bend County, Texas, dated January 28, 1928*

BAUMGARTNER: Martin Luther King, was he like a hero back then or was that before he had become so prominent?

BOLDEN: That was before. We never heard anything of him back at that time and when I came into Rosenberg, and I was here quite a few years, too, before I started hearing about him. My daddy died in 1963 the same year that President Kennedy passed and that is about when Martin Luther King was killed.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Actually for us we had to walk light at that time. We had a little freedom but if you said something against somebody you were...

BAUMGARTNER: The schools didn't start getting integrated?

THURMAN BOLDEN: It was in 1965 and 1966.

BOLDEN: I finished before they even thought about integrating.

BAUMGARTNER: So you never went to school with a white kid?

BOLDEN: No, sir. Never did.

BAUMGARTNER: Isn't that amazing.

BOLDEN: That time has changed right there, and once it started y'all got a taste of it.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Oh, yes. It was a few years before, back in 1964 and 1965. I went to East Bernard for a year. I knew quite a few of the folks I was going to go to school with and we had a wonderful relationship. There was a few hard knockers that you would have fun with them one minute and have a fight with them the next minute but no one was out to kill each other. We were just doing things that was livable.

BAUMGARTNER: How important was it that Obama became president?

BOLDEN: How important it was to the black history? It changed the world.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you expect it would ever happen in your lifetime?

BOLDEN: I just didn't know. I am not really into politics. I make sure that I vote but I just didn't know.

BAUMGARTNER: What did you think Thurman?

THURMAN BOLDEN: I didn't expect to see a black president during my lifetime. But once he became president I was sure that he was going to do his best job. He doesn't get the credit that he deserves. I think about how the economy was and how Wall Street was and how manufacturing was when he got in and he had to make some decisions that were not going to be popular with almost anybody but to pull them back up out of the red and get them back on good footing and balance the budget or whatever they call balancing the budget because we never know how balanced the budget is at my level anyway. We saw the ugly side of some people because they just didn't like certain things.

BOLDEN: There is no way in the world you can satisfy everybody. You are going to have almost half that likes what you are doing and the other half is not. Maybe you can go overboard a little bit.

BAUMGARTNER: I never thought that a black person would become president then because there is so much prejudice out there. I will tell you a story. A good friend of mine was the manager of our football team and he and I have stayed in touch after all these years. He went into investment banking in London and he has made a substantial amount of money, retired early, got into politics on a real high level. In 2006 he emailed me and said, "Keep your eye on the next presidential election for an up and coming politician from Chicago, Barack Obama." I emailed him back and said, "Peter you have been out of the United States for too many years. There is no way that Barack Obama from Chicago is going to become president." It just didn't seem plausible to me that it was going to happen. The rest is history. The way I look at it, history is going to judge that Obama was one of the most important presidents in United States history.

Richard, after high school did you get drafted?

BOLDEN: I got an induction notice right here in Wharton, that is the county seat, and I went the day I was supposed to. I had my little grip pack with me and daddy had already told me everything I needed to be ready to roll. They had a bunch of guys lined up and a bunch more lined up behind them and a bunch more to come in and they never told me what my problem was. By golly, they never told me what the deal was. I went back to Rosenberg.

BAUMGARTNER: You know, that was probably pretty good timing because around then in the late fifties there wasn't much going on. World War II was over and the Korean War was over and Vietnam hadn't started yet.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Vietnam started a few years after that.

BAUMGARTNER: This is the kind of stuff Thurman and I were talking about back in the seventies, solving the world's problems. Chester Banks was a good guy; he had good insight into things.

#### CAREER

BAUMGARTNER: When you guys graduated from Powell Point in 1958, was it pretty hard to find a job?

BOLDEN: Yes. We could have stayed there and worked for those rice farmers. Some of them back at that time were straight rice farmers but the one we worked for was a rancher too, rice farmer and rancher. Sure they wanted me to work for them, you can work for them and live comfortable but no future and I had enough of that.

I had a cousin looking for me down here and she helped me find a job at Post Office Pharmacy Drug Store in Richmond. I was only making \$60 a week, but you were not going to make \$60 a week on the farm.

Then I applied to WKM Foundry. One day I was making a delivery for the Pharmacy and I was pretty sharp then, and I went in and filled out an application with the pharmacy car sitting right out there in the front of WKM. I think I filled out two pages, turned them in and went on back to work. About a week and a half later my boss, Mr. Owens, came to me and said, "Richard, I want to talk to you." I thought, "Dang, what in the world is going on?" He said WKM Foundry just called me and they asked about you and I gave them one of the best recommendations. He said there is only one thing I want you to do before you leave here – find me another man just as half as good as you are.

BAUMGARTNER: So you went to work for WKM. What was that like? It was almost as if it was your first big job out on your own.

BOLDEN: I went there on the maintenance crew. We worked the middle shift and our foreman, Mr. Bill Whitten, wanted his whole shift to go with him and we transferred to the third shift, which was graveyards, the midnight shift. Eighteen of us and a nurse in the office, just in case someone got something in their eye or whatever.

BAUMGARTNER: You enjoyed working at the foundry?

BOLDEN: Yes, I enjoyed it. Mainly it was the better money but I enjoyed it, too. But I think part of my health problem now is that graphite, that black stuff we worked in until the time we left. Those graphite pits would be just as deep as this room here and half the size and would have a conveyor down in it and if that conveyor belt got stopped up and they had to keep on running it, we would go jump right in there and it would be up this high. I called it black graphite. It is like sand, maybe to make molds with.

THURMAN BOLDEN: I think it was a little bit different than graphite but you had a sand component in there.

BOLDEN: That stuff got into your nose and you got this handkerchief right there clearing your nose, and you would get off Friday night, you go home, you have Saturday and Sunday and you would be blowing your nose the whole weekend and you would still be getting some of the black stuff out on Sunday just when it is almost time for you to go back. You are just about getting it clear but you are going right back in it again. We wore those little masks.

BAUMGARTNER: That was before OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Washington D. C.) and the government protective agencies.

BOLDEN: That was before regulations.

BAUMGARTNER: When I worked in Compton for Union Pacific Railroad we were insulating boxcars. My job was to build plywood wall panels inside the boxcars and then the next guys would come behind us and blow foam insulation behind the walls with a big hose. We didn't know what was going on but it turns out the foam had formaldehyde in it and the fumes were so bad that the insulation crew would get headaches so severe they always quit within two weeks. No regulation and no protection then.

How long were you with the Foundry?

BOLDEN: I worked at WKM until they shut it down in March of 1961,

BAUMGARTNER: So what did you do to land on your feet and get another job?

BOLDEN: Alvin Ohl worked at WKM, too. When they shut it down Alvin got him a little Texaco service station in Rosenberg at Eighth Street and Avenue H. I was passing through one day and he recognized me and we started talking. I was looking for work. He said, "Can you start today?" I said, "No, not today but I can start tomorrow." So that's how I got started with Alvin. We put in eight years together at the Texaco, two years at the Shell station.

Then one day he said, "Richard, you can't make a whole lot of money like you used to." The deal was, at the station we had to use Texaco oil and they set their price on it. The customers were going to the parts store, Geick Auto Parts, and getting the same oil, same transmission fluid and they would could get Texaco and wanted to know why we were selling it for a \$1.50 a deal when they got it at Geick's for eighty five cents. Alvin said, "We're going to a salvage yard." I said, "I don't think I am going to like a salvage yard." But we went on out there and fell right into the groove.

BAUMGARTNER: How long did you do that?

BOLDEN: Twenty seven and a half years.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow! Really? A & R Salvage was always recognized around town. That was Alvin Ohl and Richard Bolden, right?

BOLDEN: That is the way Alvin had it from the start. That's the way he put it down on paper.

BAUMGARTNER: So what did you do there at the yard? I was told that you were the main sales person and you were the person to talk to if they wanted to buy parts.

BOLDEN: Yes. I had learned all my cars through the ten years at the service stations. Chevrolet, Ford, just any car, name it, I could tell you the year model just by looking at it. Alvin did not have the time and he could not do it like me. Each car that came in I knew exactly what it was. When customers called in, Alvin would not even talk to them, he would tell them, "Let me get you Richard." Most of the time when they were calling they would say, "Alvin, let me talk to Richard." They would ask me if we had their part and I would say, "Oh, yes, we got it. As a matter of fact we have two."



BAUMGARTNER: They were looking for parts or looking to buy a whole car?

BOLDEN: Everybody would be looking for car parts, but you had a lot of people that were looking for whole cars. Some of them would run real good, they just needed a transmission or whatever. If it was a good enough car, we would fix it ourselves. Some people would prefer to fix it themselves. They would come and buy the car and the transmission from me, but they wanted to put it in themselves. That was fine and dandy, too.

BAUMGARTNER: When people come in wanting parts for something that is defective with their vehicle, you would let them walk around and look?

BOLDEN: Not necessarily. We only let people walk around that we knew. If a stranger came in and we had never seen him before, we would take him. We would be polite with them, but you just don't turn them loose.

BAUMGARTNER: How would you price stuff out?

BOLDEN: You had to know the competition. Lanes Auto Parts had a hot line you could listen to all day long, giving prices on parts. I priced parts by listening to what the other parts had sold for, especially with the year models we had. If a front fender for a 1958 Chevrolet sold for forty five dollars by Lanes's or Almeda or any competing stores, that is how I priced them. But I didn't want to sell a 1958 Chevrolet fender for \$45, I wanted to sell it for \$56 or \$57. That is in the same price bracket so I could pretty much get that.

BAUMGARTNER: What was Alvin like to work with?

BOLDEN: Alvin was the type of gentleman that had just as many enemies as friends because he had a short fuse, number one. When he would give you a price, don't try to bargain him down or you just make him mad. The biggest portion of your Spanish people are going to bargain, that is their culture you know. "What is your best price?" Alvin would say, "I already told you." So they ask Alvin over and over. I would tell him, "Alvin, if you have something you like pretty good and you know it is good and they come and ask you for it, just give them a price ten dollars higher. Give them a price of \$75 and then say, "I will take \$65 for it. It is real simple, you get your money and they leave happy."

He was good to work with but he could only work with certain people. You could get a really good mechanic who could pull parts, had his own tools, took his time, and there would always be something come up between him and Alvin and he was going to lose that man. That happened a number of times. I would say, "Oh, well, here I go again." He went blind but also had serious heart problems so he had a heart operation, some kind of valve replacement, and the doctor came out and said the operation came out good. You could see that Alvin was still hurting and he told his wife that the operation came out good, and the doctor had already told her that he had pneumonia, and she could not tell him because the doctor didn't tell him and the pneumonia took him on out.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh ,really, that is what happened?

BOLDEN: His eye sight went all the way out; he did have work done on his eyes, cataracts and all that but he still went blind in both eyes.

#### FAMILY

BAUMGARTNER: You know Richard, I haven't asked about your family. What is your wife's name?

BOLDEN: Mildred.

BAUMGARTNER: When did you get married?

BOLDEN: You would have to ask that. When did I get married, Thurman?

THURMAN BOLDEN: How old is little Richard?

BOLDEN: Little Richard is 51. So it was 51 years ago.

BAUMGARTNER: Is Mildred still with you?

BOLDEN: Oh, yes. She has cancer, too, and she is winning so far; it has been about twelve years now. She retired from the Richmond State School. She took a little rest and now she rides buses with the handicapped kids with Lamar Consolidated ISD.

BAUMGARTNER: Thurman, are you still married?

THURMAN BOLDEN: Sure, Esther and I have been married for 35 years.

BAUMGARTNER: About the same for me. Richard, do you have children?

BOLDEN: I had two kids, a girl and a boy. Our daughter, Sharon, is a Registered Nurse. Our son, Richard, Jr., is a band director in Corpus Christi. He finished college at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville. When he finished he had his pickup truck that I bought for him and a trailer that he had his sofa and all his stuff in, and brought it here and parked in front of my house. We were going to get him a little room for his stuff but the school in Corpus called and something had come up and we never unloaded the truck or the trailer. He went on to Corpus and became band director.

BAUMGARTNER: Grandchildren?

BOLDEN: Six.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Beautiful family.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow, that's great! Does raising kids seem like it's different today? Do they play in the neighborhood when they get home from school?

BOLDEN: If they want to but now they have all this computer stuff and half of them from the time they get off the bus, they will hardly come outside. Yes, they used to come out and ride their bikes and stuff but that's all fading away now. I sit right on my street and look at it every day and I say, "Man those kids haven't come out since they went in." My kids played and rode their bikes and went to neighbor's houses. They got their lessons. Back then it was different. Now it has been completely changed around.

BAUMGARTNER: Just in general, when was a better era to grow up? Back when we were growing up, or today?

BOLDEN: It is like a two-sided deal. Back in those days all the beautiful air and the territory there that would be fine, if we could just go back there but still have the same jobs and stuff that we have now. You understand what I am trying to explain

BAUMGARTNER: Yes, there were some good areas then but there was a lot missing. Job opportunity wasn't there, the social structure wasn't there, the educational opportunity wasn't there. There's been a lot of improvement. What I remember best about growing up was exploring, learning about the land, playing outside, thinking up stuff to do outside.

BOLDEN: I used to go out and make my own little cotton field. My field would probably be half the size of this desk here but I would chop it and put my little tractors and make me some little rows in the dirt and that would be my little field.

THURMAN BOLDEN: Oh, yes. Going out there and getting a sardine can and cutting it in the shape of a car and playing in the dirt under the shed, making a tractor out of a black pepper can, a good working tractor, we could steer it and everything. Those June bugs would be flying in the evening, those little brown ones, and that was our cattle. We had our little cattle and we made us a cow truck with a sardine can.

BAUMGARTNER: Richard you've been married 51 years, 27 years on the job with one company, helping to run a business. Your two children have professional careers. Six grandchildren. Looking from way back at the old days in Sublime, who'd have thought? Your Mom and Dad would be proud of you.

Hey men, it's been fun. Thurman, it's good to catch up after all these years. Richard, it's been a pleasure to meet you.

*Interview Ends*