

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Sally Rachuig Kelly**

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Interviewer: Bruce Kelly

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

Location: At her son's home in Sugar Land, Texas

26 Pages



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Transcript

KELLY, B: Please give us your full name.

KELLY, S: Sally Rachuig Kelly.

KELLY, B: How did you come to live in Sugar Land?

KELLY, S: My mother and father came when I was about six months old. My father worked for the Humble Company, an oil company, which is now ExxonMobil. The Humble Company was later bought by Standard Oil. The Humble Oil & Refining Company was a local, Texas company. My father worked for the pipeline. He was chief engineer for the pumping station in Sugar Land at the corner of Oilfield Road and what is now Commonwealth.

KELLY, B: That corner would be just across the levee, heading south?

KELLY, S: Yes. At that time Oilfield Road made a dogleg and the pumping station was at that dogleg. It was on the northeast corner.

KELLY, B: Where did your family live when you first came to Sugar Land?

KELLY, S: They lived in the very last little red brick house at the end of Brooks Street. They lived there for two to three months before the house out at The Humble Camp was built. Daddy was transferred here before the house was ready, so we lived there. T. J. Williams worked for Daddy, and they were going to be our neighbors out at The Camp. They had a little red brick house next to us on Brooks Street.

KELLY, B: Where was The Humble Camp?

KELLY, S: The Humble Camp was about three miles down Highway 6 from old Sugar Land. The Camp was in the area where Commonwealth Blvd crosses the levee. The existing Oilfield Road is the original road – they just paved over it.

KELLY, B: How many streets and houses were in the Humble Camp?

KELLY, S: There were two streets with three rows of houses. We had the first house next to the levee. I think there were 8 houses on each row. There were at least 24 houses. And at one time there were about three or four houses on a fourth row, but there was no road there.

KELLY, B: Did the streets that houses were on run parallel to Oilfield Road?

KELLY, S: Yes.

KELLY, B: So you went off a little road from Oilfield Road and made a left onto those streets?

KELLY, S: If you lived on the second row, coming from Highway 6, you would turn right at the first house and go to the second row. But if you were coming to my house, you would go all the way to the end of Oilfield Road. We lived in the very last house on the right.

KELLY, B: Were you in a cul-de-sac?

KELLY, S: No.

KELLY, B: Were there two streets that joined each row?

KELLY, S: No, they were separate streets. The street that went perpendicular was the one you went on in order to get onto the street your house was on, in back of us. There was a small bridge and then you went over the levee. We were across the street from the office. Our house fronted Oilfield Road.

KELLY, B: Tell me about the other buildings there.

KELLY, S: The Humble Camp was a very small, planned community with lots of pretty flowers, a park, a swimming pool and a recreation hall for the people who lived out there. We lived next to the park. There were sidewalks for you to walk through the park. It had a playground for the children and a fish pond. It was very pretty. Lots of oleander plants. Across the street from us were the offices that the Humble processing people used. They did the crude oil. Daddy did the natural gas.

KELLY, B: Were there oil wells pumping in that area at the time?

KELLY, S: Yes. There were oil wells pumping when we moved out there. As a small child, I can remember hearing them pumping right across from the levee, in that low part. They slowly stopped pumping but the big derricks stayed there for a long time.

KELLY, B: Your father was the chief engineer for the pipeline. Where did the pipeline come from and where did it go?

KELLY, S: It came from West Texas, going to the Baytown refinery and to the Port of Houston.

KELLY, B: What year did you start living there and how long did you live there?

KELLY, S: I was born in September of 1931 and I think they moved there in January or February of 1932. I lived there until 1949.

KELLY, B: And why did you leave?

KELLY, S: I married Charles Kelly, Junior.

KELLY, B: When did your parents leave the Humble Camp?

KELLY, S: Daddy was transferred, or had an opportunity to move, to Warda, which is between LaGrange and Giddings. It was a new experimental station that would be run mostly by machinery. Both of his daughters were married, so he and Mother moved up to Warda.

KELLY, B: Tell us your mother's and father's names.

KELLY, S: Herbert Albert Rachuig and Mamie Adams Rachuig.

KELLY, B: And what happened after their move to Warda?

KELLY, S: Daddy started going to Warda in 1950 and they moved up there the next year, in February or March. In April, there was an explosion at that experimental station and he was burned very badly. He died as a result of those burns.

KELLY, B: And what did your mother do?

KELLY, S: Mother moved back to Sugar Land. My sister and her husband (he was in the Army) were in Oklahoma at an Army Base. Our mother rented the house from Mr. Bailey, who was the principal of the high school at the time. That house was about two doors down from Charles and me on Guenther Street. After Charles graduated from A & M, he came back here and worked for Imperial Sugar and they gave us a house on Guenther Street. It was the house that J. B. and Syb Fowler originally lived in.

KELLY, B: Let's go back to the Humble Camp. Was there a store there?

KELLY, S: Yes. Sugarland Industries had a big general store out there. It had groceries, hardware, some feed for the tenant farmers who were out there off of Oilfield Road, like the Stecks and different people who would come in to buy groceries there.

KELLY, B: Who ran that store?

KELLY, S: His last name was Ehrlich. They had two daughters and we were friends of the Ehrlichs. The store also had meat. Once a week Mose Norwick, Senior, would drive the vegetable truck out to the Camp with all kinds of fresh fruits and vegetables. He would park at the front of our house because we had a gravel drive that was off the road. Everybody who wanted fresh fruit and vegetables would buy from him. He had the very best. He was a very nice man.

KELLY, B: Were there any other shops or stores or services out there?

KELLY, S: There was a barbershop for the men.

KELLY, B: Who was the barber?

KELLY, S: I don't remember his name.

KELLY, B: There was a barber in Sugar Land called Mr. Rutledge. Did he come out there and give haircuts?

KELLY, S: That could be.

KELLY, B: Was he there every day?

KELLY, S: I don't think so. But there was a regular little shop. And I don't think he lived out there, but I'm not sure about that. That didn't last too many years and then the barbershop was made into living quarters for a man named Mr. Griffin, who did all of the yard work for the Camp. Not for the homes but in the green space and the gardens. He kept the roses and trimmed the hedges. Across the street, at the office, they had beautiful flowers and another small house next to the office and another playground with seesaws and swings. He maintained that, with one of those little narrow-bladed lawn mowers. It was a full-time job for him.

KELLY, B: What is your earliest memory of the Humble Camp?

KELLY, S: One of my favorite people when I was a little girl was my neighbor. His name was T. J. "Charlie" Williams. He loved to tease me. I remember walking on the sidewalk past his house and he said, "Sally, how old are you?" I remember holding up three fingers. He said, "Sally, you're not that old!" And I put the other finger down and he said, "Now you're right." I remember holding up those fingers for Charlie. He was a sweet guy. That's my earliest memory.

KELLY, B: That's pretty early!

KELLY, S: I might have been three and he didn't know! (laughter)

KELLY, B: Who were some of the other families who lived out there that you remember?

KELLY, S: Mr. Standifer was over all of the refining part. I think they did distilling. They had something to do with gasoline. It was a large complex out there. He was over all of that, plus the men who worked in the fields. He was over everything except what Daddy did.

KELLY, B: When you say the men who worked in the fields, you mean the oil fields.

KELLY, S: More or less, but men who were in something called the gang. If you were in the gang, you did maintenance work for the tanks. You repaired things.

KELLY, B: You mentioned the Sugarland Industries store. It's my understanding that the oil field and all of its property was Sugarland Industries property. Humble came in to drill for and refine oil out there and had a field.

KELLY, S: I think that's true.

KELLY, B: So that was the connection to Sugar Land, and the reason they brought out groceries and that sort of thing.

KELLY, S: Humble probably only had the mineral rights and had a lease. It was all cotton fields around us. I remember the trees on the other side of the levee from us and the prisoners from Central Farm Prison, coming down Oilfield Road in wagons, going down and chopping wood and bringing the wood back to Central Farm.

KELLY, B: Can you remember other families?

KELLY, S: Walter Wappler and his brother's family. They both worked for Mr. Standifer. The Durbins, the LaBlancs, the Hayeses, the Chaneyes, the Drapers, the Burnes and many more.

KELLY, B: Was there a family named Newton?

KELLY, S. The Newtons lived in DeWalt and moved to Humble Camp just a few years before we moved. A lot of people were transferred to other locations such as Tomball or other camps. There was a lot of coming and going. But there were mainstays who stayed the whole time. They were usually the men who were the head of certain parts.

KELLY, B: What did people do for the education of their children?

KELLY, S: The bus was sent out from the Sugar Land Independent School District. They sent one bus which picked up everybody. Not only children at the Camp, but the children who lived along the road, like the Steck boys, and the Pausewangs who were picked up at the end of the road. Anybody who worked for Sugar Land or Humble would ride this one bus. There weren't that many of us, but there would be a bus full of children. We were the original bused-in children!

KELLY, B: How long did it take you to get to school, once you got on the bus?

KELLY, S: Maybe 30 minutes. We would go up to Grand Central and pick up the children who were living there, the Tarver boys, and come up Oyster Creek. If it was too muddy, they had to walk down to Highway 6 and we would pick them up there and come up Brooks Street. In the years past, there was a family named Robertson; the father worked at Houston Light and Power Company. Those two children caught the bus on Highway 6.

What was interesting was, if you were in the first or second grade, the bus would bring you home at 2:00. There was a later route for the older children. Mr. Wanjura was the bus driver, and the custodian at the school. He kept us all in line! He had the patience of Job. We all really respected him and were just a little bit afraid of him. If he ever stopped the bus and stood up, and said, "Okay", that was it. We believed it when he said, "Okay!"

KELLY, B: So all the children at Humble Camp went to Sugar Land for school?

KELLY, S: Not all. You had a choice. The Tatum family had two boys and they went to Missouri City.

KELLY, B: It was about equidistant to both schools, wasn't it?

KELLY, S: Yes. And I think the reason they went to Missouri City was because there wasn't a house ready for them at the time Mr. Tatum came (he worked for Daddy), and they lived in Stafford until their house was built. So they started school at Missouri City and stayed in that school, and they liked it.

KELLY, B: You were there from 1932 to 1949, so you lived there during World War II. Do you have anything you could tell us about that period in your life?

KELLY, S: I remember they let us be enemy airplane spotters. I was ten years old. I think you were supposed to be eleven or twelve to be a spotter, but maybe they just let us do it. In the house where the barbershop had been there was a phone. The spotters would go over to this little house.

It was supposed to be from dawn to dusk. I think they let us go and spot after school. They said to report everything that you see. And we reported birds and everything that flew. Buzzards – there must have been a buzzard report! We were serious and wanted to be very conscientious because we knew what had happened.

KELLY, B: What do you mean?

KELLY, S: We knew about the war and we knew we were living in a area that could be bombed. It was a prime target because of the oil production.

KELLY, B: If the Germans or the Japanese could bomb our oil production areas that would hurt the U. S. war effort?

KELLY, S: That was the thought at the time. They could come up through the Gulf of Mexico. The first year of the war there was the thought that it was very possible that saboteurs could do it. It was particularly important in the Houston area because that was the center of oil and gas. It was a strategic part of the war.

KELLY, B: What would be the procedure when you spotted something? How did you report it and who did you report it to?

KELLY, S: In those days, when you used the telephone, all you had to do was lift up the receiver and ask for "operator so-and-so", such as operator 10. Sugar Land would send you to this operator who was the person who recorded all the sightings. They would say, "Yes, what are you reporting?" "Well, there is something in the air," and she would ask, "What direction is it coming from and where is it going?" We would do our best. Mother was good at it. The women were the ones who did the spotting because the men were at work. I'd say, "He's flying over the levee" and she'd ask, "What direction is that?" and I said, "I think that's south." (laughing) They knew we were children but they treated us with a lot of respect because we were trying and they wanted us to do it. They never said, "Get off the phone." We all thought we were doing something very important.

KELLY, B: Did you know any young men who served in the war?

KELLY, S: I did. Our neighbor's only son, went into the Navy at the very beginning of the war and I think he was on a battleship.

KELLY, B: What was his name?

KELLY, S: T. J. Williams, Junior. Charlie Williams' son. I guess I was 11 or 12 by that time. Daddy had priority for a telephone because of his job. Nobody had a private phone in their house at that time. If any call came in, we would receive it. One day I had come in from school and for some reason Mother wasn't home. I answered the telephone and the operator said, "I have a message. Will you take it?" She didn't give me any indication of what it was about, and I said, "Yes." The message was: "Your son, T. J. Williams, is missing, presumed dead."

And then she said, "That is all" or something like that, and I hung up. I didn't know what to do. It didn't sink in for a while. I didn't go next door to tell his mother. I ran to see if Mother was at the next house, visiting her friend, but she wasn't there. Mrs. Newton said, "Let me go tell her". I didn't go with her to tell Mrs. Williams. T. J. was 17, just out of high school, and wanted to go into the Navy. Mother said Mrs. Williams particularly loved her son. They had a daughter but he was the baby boy. Mrs. Williams was a lot like Dot Hightower; sweet, really pretty and kind of quiet.

So many people were being killed. Planes were exploding everywhere and we saw ships going down on the newsreels. We were losing the war. We saw all that as children. We weren't shielded from it. We would go to a movie and Movietone News would show Pearl Harbor. T. J. was a person who was killed, and he was somebody I knew, and I knew his mother and daddy. There was an accumulation of bad war news. The responsibility of taking that message was hard for me. Mother said that Mrs. Williams never really ever got over losing T. J.

KELLY, B: What would you do for entertainment?

KELLY, S: We went to Richmond and Rosenberg to the movies. There were no movies in Sugar Land. There was one little root beer stand but we didn't go there too often. There really was nothing to do other than school functions, like a play, end of school program, the spring festival. Sometimes we would go to Houston. Mother and Daddy went to Houston once a week. As a young girl growing up, one mother would take a whole car full of kids to the movies in Richmond or Rosenberg. We went swimming. There was a swimming pool at The Camp but it was really for small children. There was a nice pool in Rosenberg and Richmond so we went swimming there during the summer. I had slumber parties and people came out. There was a bridge club at The Camp; the women had a garden club. They were very active.

It was a small community. We had bridal showers, and graduation parties for the girls. Mother had lots of slumber parties for us. We had dances in the recreation hall and the teenagers came out to the Humble Camp to dance. There would always be somebody chaperoning. We had our own little town.

KELLY, B: Did you ever wish you had grown up somewhere else?

KELLY, S: No. Never. I can't imagine a better life than what I had. It could not have been better. Everybody knew everybody else's business. Everybody kept their windows open and their doors unlocked. If anybody had a fight, we all knew it. People were very considerate of one another, as far as I know. The kids had the normal fusses and then we'd go back out and play together again. I would not have changed it for anything.

KELLY, B: Did you enjoy going to school?

KELLY, S: I did! I couldn't wait to start to school.

KELLY, B: Who was your first grade teacher?

KELLY, S: Miss Lima Johnson. She was also my husband's first grade teacher. I started school when I was five, in 1936. Mother paid to let me go.

KELLY, B: She must have been ready to be free of you and your older sister. (Teasingly)

KELLY, S: I have one sister, Mayme. She was a grade ahead of me. She is 14 months older than I, born in July. So Mother wanted me to go just as soon as I could! I loved it. Miss Johnson was a wonderful teacher. I was scared of her but I liked her. Mother was the Room Mother. When your mother is the Room Mother that helps!

KELLY, B: So you went to school in the little crescent at Sugar Land School?

KELLY, S: Yes, the very first room, which was 1st grade. The second room was 2nd grade. And so on.

KELLY, B: How many students were in your first grade class?

KELLY, S: At least 20.

KELLY, B: Who were some of the children you went to school with?

KELLY, S: John Pirtle, Patsy Tise, Harry McBride, Margie Haverland, Betty Lubojasky, Alton Muehr, Marilyn Berg, Esther Vavrecka, Dean Steck, and there might have been some children who moved away.

KELLY, B: What was your favorite thing about school?

KELLY, S: I liked all of it. I loved reading. I thought I had died and gone to heaven when I learned how to read. My sister was reading and now I could read. I also liked numbers. I liked story time. I loved the art part. And recess was wonderful because the boys chased you and that was fun. I can't say that there is any part that I didn't like in my early school years. As you get older, and you're not as good at something, then that's harder.

KELLY, B: Did you take your lunch?

KELLY, S: Yes. Everybody did. There was no lunchroom. So everybody who lived "away" brought their lunch. A lot of the children who lived in town went home for lunch. We had a whole hour for lunch. The boys had a cloakroom and the girls had a cloakroom. You put your lunch in the cloakroom. You talk about smelling wonderful! They kept the cloakroom door closed, and then when you opened that door, you could smell peanut butter and jelly, the cookies, the bananas. (laughter)

If the weather was good, we ate outside. But if not, we ate at our desk. They did not let us bring any milk or water, in the first grade, because we would spill it.

KELLY, B: So you never ate anywhere else.

KELLY, S: Not in the first year. Mayme and I had the same lunch hour. When she was in the 4th grade and I was in the 3rd grade, Mother gave us enough money to walk to the drug store for lunch once a week, if we were good.

KELLY, B: Where was the drug store in those days?

KELLY, S: The drug store was in the same block as the refinery. There was the general store and the post office and the drug store was in between those two buildings. They had a soda fountain. First we had a sandwich and we'd go to the drug store to buy potato chips and a Coke. That was a treat.

KELLY, B: How long would it take you to walk from school to the drug store.

KELLY, S: It took the whole hour for us to go and get back.

KELLY, B: Were you ever late?

KELLY, S: Oh, I'm sure we were. Evidently Mayme had a watch and she knew what time it was. She would start running, and outrun me. I would just hurry, hurry, hurry. Sometimes I would have on shoes that were hard to run in, like sandals. I don't remember getting in trouble for being late, so I must not have been. Or the teacher was very generous. Remember, Mother was the Room Mother for my first 4 years! (laughter)

She was president of the PTA (Parent Teacher Association). She loved being at the school. She liked the teachers. She always made friends with the teachers. She knew everything that was going on. She liked people.

KELLY, B: Getting back to the Camp, were all the houses the same?

KELLY, S: No.

KELLY, B: Describe your house.

KELLY, S: Our house was a typical house. It had a front porch, all the way across. We got to revise our house after we had lived there about six years. They added on a big room at the back, so we had an extra room. We had a dining room that some others didn't have, because Mother had them take out a partition. So we had a fairly nice house. There was one bathroom. We had a laundry room in the garage. It could have had three bedrooms but Mother made one of the bedrooms into the living room so she could make the next room over into a dining room. We had one big back room, which was Mother and Daddy's room and Mayme and I shared the other bedroom. I would say the Standifers had the biggest house. I think he had three bedrooms. His supervisory position gave him all of the privileges. It was a very nice house for The Camp.

KELLY, B: I understand you had a housekeeper.

KELLY, S: We had somebody who came and worked in the house. Her name was Emma. I think her last name was Anderson but I'm not sure. We just called her Emma. She lived close to DeWalt. She was actually one of the workers on the Dew family plantation in DeWalt. She rented a house from the Dews and she was supposed to work for them anytime they needed her for special parties. I think she also did ironing. When she would have days off, Mother got a chance to use her. She would come and iron and cook some, and clean house. Just do general things. She ironed once a week.

KELLY, B: She was a black woman?

KELLY, S: Yes. Just the sweetest thing. Really a good person. I liked her a lot. She cooked for us on Fridays. She was a wonderful cook. I guess when I was about 14, Mother went to work in the post office in Sugar Land, with Miss Iames.

KELLY, B: Where was the post office in Sugar Land?

KELLY, S: When Mother first started working there, it was right next to all of the offices for Imperial, by the refinery. It was a very small post office. It was the first door on the right, as you climbed the steps. I think she worked 4-5 hours a day, not full-time.

KELLY, B: What were some of the things that Emma cooked that you liked the most?

KELLY, S: She made great pot roast and the best biscuits. My Daddy thought they were wonderful, so she always made biscuits for Mr. Rachuig. Great gravy and candied sweet potatoes. I think we also had rice and green beans. Mother would make the cake or dessert. She liked to bake. That was our Friday meal.

KELLY, B: Let's talk about your high school years. What was high school at Sugar Land like for you?

KELLY, S: It was a lot of fun! It was during the war and we had a lot of changes of teachers. A lot of the men teachers had to go into the service. I had three different teachers for my Biology class. Consequently, I never learned Biology. We had good math teachers. All my teachers were good. There was a lot of patriotism. There were concerts for bond drives. The war years kind of took up your thoughts. People who had boys in the service – that was the topic of school conversation. Who was coming home on leave. Even kids in high school knew that. I started dating Charles when I was a junior so I was pretty wrapped up in that. High school was REALLY good. We enjoyed football season, then basketball season, then track. I was in the band.

KELLY, B: What instrument?

KELLY, S: Well, they started me out on the French horn. I had taken piano for quite a number of years so I could read music. I loved music but I hated that instrument. My lips just weren't right. I couldn't breathe properly to play the French horn. So they moved me over to the baritone. I hated that! That was just not a feminine instrument at all. Girls do not play baritone. But they insisted that I do that. So I had to do what they told me to do. You didn't tell the teacher what you were going to do, in those days. I didn't have to play any of those instruments during football season, only during concert time.

KELLY, B: Why didn't you have to play an instrument during football season?

KELLY, S: I was a majorette, so that gets you off the hook, right there. And that's a LOT more fun. Our band would march in the Houston Fat Stock Show parade every February. That was a lot of fun. And we took field trips. I took Spanish when I was in the 7th and 8th grade and we went to San Antonio on a field trip.

KELLY, B: Tell us about that trip.

KELLY, S: (laughing) Oh! We went in two cars. This was in the days that you didn't have to have a driver's license to drive, and my sister and I started driving very early. Mayme was a good driver, so she drove our car and I think she was just in the 8th or 9th grade.

KELLY, B: Fourteen or fifteen?

KELLY, S: Yes! We drove to San Antonio and spent the day going through the Missions and drove home that same day. That was when you didn't have a freeway to drive on! Daddy got extra coupons for gasoline and I think that's why we took our car. This was during the war. And Mother couldn't go because she was working. Maybe the teacher rode with us part of the way. I don't remember. But the cars stayed close together. And we made it without any problems at all.

KELLY, B: Who was your favorite teacher in high school?

KELLY, S: Oh, my. I had so many! Mrs. Berry taught history. I probably learned to love history because of her lectures. She was excellent. She was good at world history and she made American history so interesting. She loved history. One of my English teachers stands out, but I can't remember her name. She particularly liked Shakespeare so we read Shakespeare and each one of us took a character. I think it was As You Like It. I enjoyed that so much and it helped me learn how to read Shakespeare and understand it. I liked Algebra and Mrs. Orsak taught that. She was just out of college and she explained it so well. So I did well in Algebra but I did not do well in Geometry. I never understood it. I had two different teachers that year and I just couldn't get it. I loved Homemaking – Home Economics was fun.

KELLY, B: Tell us about the Homemaking Building.

KELLY, S: That was a grand building. And I do mean grand. It had a pretty rug, a grand piano and nice old furniture. It was done in style. It was old but stylish. It had pretty floors, pretty china and crystal. Everything that you needed to have grand entertainment.

One of the things that you did (you didn't get to do it when you were a freshman) was give a formal dinner for the school board. Everything had to be made by us and served by us. What I was very impressed with and I had never seen before, were the little bouillon cups with the two handles. We had to make our own bouillon. We made our own sorbet, our own bread. Sometimes the dinners didn't turn out quite as good as the teacher wished. We had a very strict teacher. We were scared to death of her. I don't remember her name, but she was very strict. It was a class you wanted to take but we didn't want to see a lot of that teacher! We could not pass that course unless we could sew a French seam and a gusset. If you couldn't do that, you didn't pass. There were several girls who flunked. I think Tuggie Laperouse [Krehmeiher] has a story for that. There were sewing machines for the girls. We had a laundry. We had to learn to bake bread. The kitchen was completely fitted out. It was like a test kitchen with different areas with sinks, ovens and stoves. There was every kind of dish and serving bowl, wooden spoons, every utensil that you could think of. We had everything we needed. But during the war you couldn't get sugar. We had only five pounds to last for the whole year!

KELLY, B: And there you were, right by the refinery!

KELLY, S: Yes, and everybody says, "You mean to tell me that you cannot get sugar?!" And we said, "No. We're just like everybody else. We have to have a coupon." Things were in short supply so we didn't get to entertain as much as we would have liked to. It was GREAT to go to school here.

KELLY, B: Who was the superintendent when you were in school?

KELLY, S: Mr. Barden.

KELLY, B: What was he like?

KELLY, S: He was a nice, big teddy bear. He was quiet. He was an administrator and he was nice to the kids. But if you got sent to his office, it was just so humiliating. To think you were sent to the Superintendent's office – that was just awful to think about the shame of it!

KELLY, B: Was there a principal or just a superintendent?

KELLY, S: The principal was one of the teachers, Mrs. O'Neil.

KELLY, B: So he was more the disciplinarian?

KELLY, S: He really never did discipline anybody but I think just the threat of your having to go to Mr. Barden's office was enough.

KELLY, B: What was your impression of the campus and how it was run?

KELLY, S: Strict. It was very neat, very clean. But Mr. Barden was very benevolent. He had a kind way about him. He had a manner about him that you did what he said. He was kind of slow moving. I didn't get to know him (laughing).

KELLY, B: Which was a good thing!

KELLY, S: Yes. The parents knew him. He wasn't the kind of person that you could go up to him and just talk to him when you were a student.

KELLY, B: When you were in school, did you ever wish you had gone to a different school?

KELLY, S: No. I think we really were the envy of most school districts around here, simply because we had a model school. It was different from the other schools. We had things in our school that other schools did not have. We had amenities such as a swimming pool.

KELLY, B: Describe the swimming pool for me.

KELLY, S: It was an indoor swimming pool. It was extremely cold when you got in there because no sunlight got in that building. It was very clean. When you got in your eyes turned red because they had so much chlorine in the water. You couldn't use your own bathing suit. You had to use the school bathing suits. That was NOT good. They were those old woolly ones (laughing). They were gray. They had all sizes. Sometimes you got one that really fit you and sometimes you didn't. It didn't really matter because the girls only went with the girls in the pool. I was never fond of that. I dreaded the day that we had to go swimming in P. E. When they said, "Okay, Tuesdays we're all going in the pool," I wanted to be sick. It was so cold. I had problems with my nose and I couldn't breathe so I never really learned how to swim. You were not in there to play – you were in there to swim. What I hated worse than anything was, after it was over, you had to take a shower with everybody else. I was very modest as a little girl and I did not want to take a shower with all of those other girls. It just wasn't right – so I hated that.

KELLY, B: What were some of the other amenities?

KELLY, S: We had a wonderful basketball court, probably one of the best ones around.

KELLY, B: What made it so good?

KELLY, S: It was solid blocks that were pounded into the floor.

KELLY, B: Kind of parquet-looking?

KELLY, S: Yes. In fact, it was so good and so well kept you couldn't use it, (laughter) except to play basketball on. NOBODY could walk on it. If you walked across the floor in your shoes, you were going to be expelled. I'm not kidding you. There was just a very small area where you could walk around the outside of it. And then you had to take your shoes off and walk in your stocking feet. Everybody wore socks then. It was a small court but an unusual court.

KELLY, B: Was it a half court or a full court?

KELLY, S: It was full court. We had all the wonderful equipment for gymnastics. We had a wonderful library, a good science room with a lot of good equipment.

KELLY, B: And the auditorium?

KELLY, S: The auditorium was really nice. The curtains were pretty and we staged good school plays. It was exciting to go into the auditorium. I remember it had the kind of floor you had to oil. They kept the doors closed all the time unless there was something going on. But when they opened the doors, I can still smell that wonderful smell. They would raise all the windows in the spring, at the end of school, for end of school programs or graduation. I can still feel the breeze blowing right straight through the auditorium. They had each grade perform their own little program. They called your grade, and you lined up outside and then went in, right up on stage. I remember you could look in and see all the people in the chairs, just waiting to see all of us. That was so exciting!

The auditorium was THE special place. There is no doubt about it. That's where the fun was. And everybody came when you had graduation or commencement. You came whether you had anybody in that grade or not. It was something that people did because you knew the children, whether your child was involved or not. The churches participated. The ministers would take turns doing the baccalaureate service.

KELLY, B: They don't do baccalaureate services much these days.

KELLY, S: It was almost like a church service. They would have the baccalaureate on the Sunday night before commencement.

KELLY, B: What happens at a baccalaureate?

KELLY, S: It wasn't long, but the seniors would march in and sit on the stage. There might be several ministers there. They would have a speech from the ministers who would talk about their future. It had a spiritual tone with God in it. It was almost like a blessing, or way of honoring the graduates. It had a different significance from commencement. It was the prelude to the commencement.

KELLY, B: Both were held in the auditorium?

KELLY, S: Oh yes. I don't remember anything being held anywhere but the auditorium ever.

KELLY, B: Do you remember your graduation ceremony? Did you march in?

KELLY, S: We marched in from the front door of the auditorium, down each side, to the front. If the valedictorian and salutatorian were both girls, they led, one on each side. Same arrangement if they were both boys. But after that it was alphabetical. We sat on the stage. There were big wooden steps that they brought in at the front of the stage and you went up those stairs and sat on the stage. If I'm not mistaken, the ones who had the best grades sat on the first row or if there was something special you had done and you were going to be honored, you sat on the front row. Maybe it wasn't even a row. Maybe it was more of a semi-circle. The lectern was right in the middle. The valedictorian and the salutatorian both spoke.



*Sally Kelly, Student Vice-President,
Sugar Land High School, circa 1949*

KELLY, B: Was there special music?

KELLY, S: Yes. We marched in to Land of Hope and Glory; that seemed to be the custom.

KELLY, B: Did the band play or was it a piano?

KELLY, S: It was piano. Different people would play the piano. I know Eva Beth Williams played the piano. She was a teacher and she played the piano for things like that. It was probably an hour long and after you got your diploma, you marched back down, and out. I don't remember having a reception. We all stood out in the front and people would come by and congratulate you.

KELLY, B: Do you remember performing anything on that stage?

KELLY, S: Yes. My piano recital. I do remember that. Mrs. Moore taught piano and she had all ages, from first grade to seniors. She had some really good seniors – some of the boys were good. We had two recitals a year, one in the fall or around Christmas and then an end of school, or spring, recital. So the youngest one went first. In my first recital I played "Teddy Bears on Parade". The next year, I don't think she had any first grade students so I had to start first that year too. That time I played "Country Gardens". Everybody came to those recitals. Our classmate, Betty Pirtle played and she was good. I don't think her brother, John Pirtle played piano. Mayme took piano and in her first year she was supposed to start off the program. She just couldn't do it. No amount of coaxing could get her on that stage. I think she did go out and play in the second recital, in the spring. Then when I started playing, we would play duets and she would do her solo. But that first time was just too awful for her.

KELLY, B: Were you in any other events on stage?

KELLY, S: Yes. There was a senior play and a junior play. Everybody who wanted to be in the play, and most everybody did, generally got a part. Even in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades, you did a play. Maybe we didn't do one in the 1st grade because we couldn't read well enough to learn our lines. But in the 2nd grade, I was Mrs. Claus. Harry McBride was Santa Claus. In the 3rd grade, I was Mrs. Claus again but I had a singing part. I think John Pirtle might have been Mr. Claus. We both had singing parts. I always loved the plays and wanted to be in them. That was a lot of fun.

KELLY, B: I understand there was a spring festival some years. Were you in any of those?

KELLY, S: They had what they called the Imperial Festival but that was after I graduated. They didn't have them during the war. I remember them having them before the war. You sold tickets and the one who sold the most tickets won. I remember our neighbor's, the Williams' daughter was the queen that year. I think there was an end of school concert.

KELLY, B: Let's move forward a little bit. You met your husband-to-be in Sugar Land. How did you meet him?

KELLY, S: It was after he came back from the Navy. He was on Okinawa during the war. He was born here and his parents lived here, we didn't meet because he was older than I. When I was in grade school, he was in high school, so I didn't know him. I had heard of him because he played football and Daddy went to the football games. I didn't meet him until after the war. We didn't start dating until 1948 or the latter part of 1947. We married in April, 1949. He had one more year at A & M so we moved to College Station in September.

KELLY, B: After he finished college, was it your intention to come back to Sugar Land?

KELLY, S: No. We really didn't plan to come back to Sugar Land. But at the time there were so many veterans graduating. That class and the class before or the one after his, was the largest class that had ever graduated from A & M, at that time. And all other state schools were the same. The people we knew who got jobs very quickly were engineers. He had studied accounting and hoped to be a CPA. But he didn't get to do that. Jobs were harder to find for somebody with his degree. We knew that if he wanted a job here, he was welcome to come back. He had worked in the refinery during the summers and even after he got out of the Navy, he went to the University of Houston and worked at the refinery at night for a year. So it was the logical thing to do until we could find a reason to move somewhere else.

KELLY, B: You came back to Sugar Land in what year?

KELLY, S: He graduated in 1950, so 1950.

KELLY, B: Were you able to get a house in Sugar Land right away?

KELLY, S: No, because there were none available. But they said that the first house that came up would be ours. We had heard that the Fowlers were building their house out on Eldridge Road so their company house would be vacant by September. So we moved into the house on Guenther Street in September.

KELLY, B: I know that when you moved there the address was 1008 Guenther. Later, in the 1950s, they renumbered the houses and it became 106 Guenther. The house is no longer there. What was that house like?

KELLY, S: It was a nice house. It had two bedrooms with a bathroom in between; a big living room and big dining room and a small kitchen. I think Syb Fowler had the small porch on the back made into the kitchen so she could have a separate dining room. The kitchen wasn't big enough for a table but Charles built a breakfast bar underneath the window for us to sit at. We would use the dining room when we had company. Syb had hardwood floors put in the living room and dining room, but not in the two bedrooms.

KELLY, B: Did it have a porch on it?

KELLY, S: There was a front porch all the way across the front, a nice screened porch. The garage was separate and we had a little brick walk to the garage. My washing machine was out there in the garage. Eventually we moved it into the kitchen.

KELLY, B: That house was in the neighborhood called The Flats. Could you describe that neighborhood a little bit.

KELLY, S: I thought it was one of the nicest neighborhoods to live in. When we moved in there were just a few houses across the street from us. There were the Guenthers on the corner, the Harman house, the Matlage house on the corner of Guenthere and Venice. I'm not sure the Pirtle house was started yet.

KELLY, B: These are houses that individuals built themselves, not company houses?

KELLY, S. Yes, they bought the lot and built their own house. The D. P. Mortons lived next to us. He was the manager of the Palms Theater. They had two daughters. Bud and Betty Jenkins and their daughters lived close. After the R. N. Laperouses moved, having built their house on Brooks Street, Ernie and Odell Wood lived next door to us.

KELLY, B: The configuration of the back yards was a little unusual. Could you describe that?

KELLY, S: Yes it was. It was very nice. There was a road in the back and it was U-shaped. There was a row of houses along Brooks Street and if we wanted to go into our garage, we came through that U-shaped road via a little driveway that was just south of 90A, off Brooks Street. If you lived facing Oyster Creek, that was the way you accessed your house. Inside of this U-shape was an open green space. The kids played there.

KELLY, B: The houses were pretty close together, weren't they?

KELLY, S: Yes, especially when you got to the corner. We all shared a pie-shaped back yard. Our back yard was very small. We had a little bit of a side yard on the east side. It was very open. People could look in each others houses. But that's just how you lived and we didn't think anything of it.

KELLY, B: Did you have air conditioning?

KELLY, S: No. I think we just opened the windows. That house did not have an attic fan. And we had the little oscillating fans. We had a small window fan at the very back bedroom. That's all we had.

KELLY, B: In the 1950s, as a young married woman with two children, what was your daily routine like?

KELLY, S: When we just had Chuck, Charles didn't have to get up real early because he could just walk to work. He could be there in less than a minute. It was wonderful. And he came home for lunch. When Chuck was a baby, I slept as long as I could! Then we would get up and go see relatives. We did a lot of that. My sister would come over and we'd have the children together so we could have some company. We would get in the car and go to the store. I don't remember Chuck and I walking to the store. When Bruce was born, things began to settle into more of a routine. We'd get up, have breakfast, the boys would play. Sometimes Mrs. Kelly would come over and visit us. She was a telephone operator and had different working hours. Mr. Kelly worked at the refinery and had varying working hours so he would stop by. Mother got off at 2:00 and then she would stop by. So we had lots of company.

The neighbors came to see me and I'd go see them. There was just a lot of visiting back and forth. There was really no place to go but the drug store, and I went to the drug store. We would dress and go down and have coffee, either in the morning at 10:00 or at 2:00 when Charles took a coffee break. We would go down and meet him, and we did this every day. A lot of times we would go to Haas' Café, or White's Café and meet him and have lunch.

KELLY, B: By this time there was a new shopping center that was built on the opposite side of the highway from the refinery. So the drug store you ate at as a child had moved to a new building.

KELLY, S: Yes, and that made it so easy for us to get to. I would visit my friend, Martha Jo Muehr. Tuggie Krehmeier lived in Houston at the time, but when she moved to Sugar Land, we visited a lot.

KELLY, B: I remember you going to visit Jean McCord Babineaux at her house. And Marilyn Berg's house. There were a lot of young women who you went to school with that you were still friends with.

KELLY, S: And Louise Hall. But she was a nurse and she worked. We walked over to Martha Jo's house a lot. She lived in the little area that we lived in. I became friends with Betty Ulrich, Kim's mother. And with Betty Jenkins. We all lived in that same little area and we did things together.

You just went outside and there would be somebody across the street, or downtown, or in the grocery store, and your day was filled. My days were really devoted to the boys and what they did, and having dinner ready for Charles when he came home.

KELLY, B: Did you go to the movies often?

KELLY, S: Yes we did. Every time it changed!

KELLY, B: How often did it change?

KELLY, S: It changed every two days. It was never longer than two days. But there were certain days he had better movies than other days. I didn't go to the Saturday movies. Movies were a regular form of entertainment. Visiting our friends was our entertainment, too. The women would get together for coffees.

KELLY, B: You belonged to a birthday club, didn't you?

KELLY, S: Yes, we had a birthday club. The women I grew up with that were still here were in the club.

KELLY, B: Who were some of the women in your birthday club?

KELLY, S: Wynelle Wappler and Tuggie Krehmeier, Marilyn Berg, Betty Jenkins, Louise Hall, Barbara Batten, Mayme Bass, Betty Lubajosky, Maxine Gary, Jean Babineaux, Martha Jo Muehr, and I think that was all of the birthday club.

KELLY, B: How often would you meet for the birthday club?

KELLY, S: Every time it was somebody's birthday. (laughing)

KELLY, B: So quite often!

KELLY, S: Sometimes it would be. We might have three birthdays in a month and the next month there might be none. We met ON the birthday!

We started a bridge club and Betty Cordes taught a group of us how to play. There was Tuggie, Barbara Batten, me and usually someone else. Then we added others to the group as different people moved to Sugar Land. Sometimes we'd have three tables but then it narrowed down to two. Dorothy Edwards was one. People would come in and substitute when somebody couldn't play. That was fun. We did that for several years.

KELLY, B: Could you chart your husband's career at Imperial? What job did he start with and who did he work for?

KELLY, S: He worked for Oates Caraway in the purchasing department. He was his assistant. I believe they hired Julius Jocheck and then Mr. Caraway retired. Then Charles became purchasing manager. Then they hired Jackie Milhoan and another secretary. Carol Bosley was a secretary, too. They usually just had one secretary. Charles had Jackie as an assistant. Mary Laperouse worked there as part of the purchasing department. I don't think she was a secretary. As Imperial grew, Charles was made the Director of Purchasing. That was his position when he retired on his birthday. He died the following July. We liked living in Sugar land. We were happy here.



Sally Kelly circa 1974

KELLY, B: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about that we didn't cover?

KELLY, S: About the town?

KELLY, B: What did you like most about the town and what did you like the least about the town?

KELLY, S: The least was having to go to the doctor and going to the hospital. I hated that. It was awful. But I would have felt that way no matter what town I lived in! There's a story that Dr. Slaughter told on me. I don't know if I ought to tell this! They wanted you to go to the doctor and be sure you had all your shots before you entered first grade. His office was above the drug store. You had to climb stairs to get there. Mother never did tell us ahead of time when we were going to the doctor. She just sprung it on us. I remember we had been somewhere, and she said, "Oh, while we're here, let's go upstairs and have Dr. Slaughter look at you." I thought, "Why are we doing that?"

I remember I had on a pair of rompers that Mother had made for us (Mayme and me) and it had a bib. No back on it, just little gathered long pants – she had put nice little red roping through this bib, gathered it and tied it at the back. So I had that on. I had dressed

myself that day. So we went on up and Dr. Slaughter said, "Hop up on this table. I want to check your ears and your mouth." And that was fine. Then he said, "Now I want to check your chest and throat." He started untying the back of that, and I said, "Well, don't go any further because I don't have any underwear on today." (laughter!) I DIDN'T! I remember I just put on my rompers. He just died laughing. He told several people in town, "Better watch her. She doesn't wear



Sally Kelly working on a jigsaw puzzle with her son, Bruce Kelly, who also interviewed her for the Oral History project.

"underwear." He was a sweet guy and was nice, but I'm surprised that I said that to him. I was scared to death of him, but I didn't want him going any further with that examination. I would say, "Do I have to wear underwear with these shorts?" (much laughter) Mother used to say, "Now, Sally, you should always wear underwear." But if I could get by with just slipping something on and going, I would do it, when I was little. She said, "One of these days, you are going to get caught!" Well, that was the time I got caught! I was humiliated. I thought that was just awful that he was telling people that. Even though I was five years old.

KELLY, B: Did you ever smoke?

KELLY, S: Yes. I started smoking when I was four years old. And I also stopped when I was four years old. I was living at The Camp and it was getting dark. Mother always just called us in, standing at the back steps and call to us. Every kid knew their mother's voice. I was back on the 2nd row, playing with my very best friend, at the front of her house. I heard Mother call me. I was barefooted and running across the back, coming across the Wappler's house.

There were about four men who worked in the gang, and when they came in at night, they always sat around, talked about the day and smoked a cigarette. As I was running, one of them had flipped a cigarette a good ways from me but I could see it glowing as I was running. So I thought, "I wonder what those taste like?" I picked up that cigarette. It was a Camel and smoked down to the nub, no filter. I took 2-3 puffs on it as I was walking home and then flipped it away. I didn't like the taste of it. I came up the stairs and I was already getting kind of sick to my stomach. I walked in the door and Mother said, "SALLY, have you been smoking?????" She could smell it, I guess. I told her, "No." She looked at me like, "I know you're not telling the truth but you look terrible."

She didn't say anything, she just turned her back and was putting food on the table. I crawled up in my bed, which was right next to the kitchen. I was so sick to my stomach, and of course I couldn't eat. That was the end of my smoking career.

KELLY, B: I think that might be a good place to stop.

KELLY, S: Yes, I think we should stop while my reputation is still intact!

Interview ends