

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Steven Douglas Monk**

Interview Date: 11/01/2014

Interviewer: Jane Goodsill

Transcriber: Bob Gaffney

Comment: Part of a series on the history of the building at 307 Fort Street, Richmond, Texas, where this interview was conducted, which is currently the Office of Emergency Management. 13 Pages



This oral history is copyrighted 2017, by the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. All Rights Reserved. For information contact: Fort Bend County Historical Commission, Attn: Chairman-Oral History Committee, 301 Jackson St., Richmond, TX, 77469.

Terms and Conditions

This file may not be modified or changed in any way without the express written permission of the Fort Bend County Historical Commission.

This file may not be redistributed for profit.

Please do not 'hot link' to this file.

Please do not repost this file.



Transcript

GOODSILL: Today is November 1st, 2014. My name is Jane Goodsill. I'm interviewing Steven Douglas Monk of Rosenberg, Texas. We're at the Office of Emergency Management at 307 Fort Street, Richmond, Texas. This building was built in 1954 and it was the Fort Bend County Jail. In 1981 it was the Fort Bend County Juvenile Detention Center and in 2005 it became the Office of Emergency Management. Why don't you start by telling us how your career path started?

MONK: I got out of the military in 1975 and I went to work at the Richmond State School for approximately a year.

GOODSILL: In the military, what kind of job did you have?

MONK: My MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] was 11CHARLIE Mortar man with secondary MOS of 11BRAVO, which was Infantry.

GOODSILL: Were you in Vietnam?

MONK: No, I didn't go to Vietnam. I volunteered to go to Vietnam but they sent me to Germany.

GOODSILL: So what you did in the military didn't really have anything to do with your future career?

MONK: No, not really. In fact, I had a degree in [chuckles] criminal justice when I went in and I was about a half-inch too short for the MPs [Military Police] so I wound up in the mortars and infantry. When I got out my first job was working at the Richmond State School. I worked with the profoundly handicapped from about age eighteen to about sixty-five. I went from there to Victoria Child Welfare. I was their chief investigator for abuse and neglect.

GOODSILL: How did you like that job?

MONK: I lasted about a year. I was out all hours of the day and night. I got drawn down on three times, held at gunpoint. I just thought I'd try something else.

GOODSILL: So what did you do?

MONK: Juvenile had a job so I applied. Mike Humphries was the chief.

GOODSILL: When you say "juvenile" you mean the Juvenile Detention Center?

MONK: Juvenile Probation Department. They were located at that time in the old courthouse. That would have been probably somewhere around the end of '76, '77. I worked for juvenile probably around a year-and-a-half and then I went to work for Al Dobson who was with Adult Probation. I worked for him about a year-and-a-half.

GOODSILL: Tell me the primary difference between Juvenile and Adult probation.

MONK: Juvenile is kind of a hybrid between criminal and civil law and you have to know a bit about both. It's getting more towards criminal now but back then the best interest of the child was considered above or right along the same level as protection of the community. Now protection of the community is the focus so it's become a bit more criminal but they file petitions against them which are civil in nature and don't render a permanent record. If it's a felony it can be a permanent record but there's also provisions for sealing one's records as a juvenile so it's not a "ball and chain."

GOODSILL: So what exactly was your job?

MONK: When I came back to Juvenile after working at Adult, I was the Chief Juvenile Probation Officer.

GOODSILL: Before you came to work for Al Dobson you were at Juvenile?

MONK: I was a Juvenile Probation Officer. We had two little offices in the courthouse. The secretary shared an office, a Probation Officer and an intern shared an office, and I shared the office with the chief. There were five employees.

GOODSILL: When you went to work at Adult Probation, tell me what it was like.

MONK: Adult Probation is different. A lot of it is collecting money because they have to pay their probation fees. We also attempted to help them locate jobs and they had to report to us. If they messed up we filed motions or submitted paperwork to the DA [District Attorney] for motions to revoke probation.

GOODSILL: So you were out of the office doing the actual legwork or handling paperwork?

MONK: The paperwork. There was a lot of paperwork. Gary Lacina was one of the probation officers. He and I used to go out sometimes on Fridays and hit the bars and run all our probationers out of the bars.

GOODSILL: Because of you're on probation you aren't supposed to be in bars?

MONK: No, they're not supposed to be drinking at the bars. We didn't roust them too bad. We just told them they needed to go home. We actually tried to help them back then. The ones that got sent to the penitentiary, there wasn't any helping them. They were predestined almost.

GOODSILL: So how long did you work in Adult Probation?

MONK: That was probably a year-and-a-half. I interviewed twice. I interviewed for the chief's job.

GOODSILL: Chief of Juvenile Probation?

MONK: Juvenile Probation. With the juvenile board. I can't remember the guy they hired but he didn't last long. There were a bunch of problems. So the job came open again and I applied again. I remember the judge saying something because every time I applied I raised the salary several thousand dollars. They didn't hire me the second time. There was a problem. That chief didn't last long and there were lots of problems after that. I submitted my application again and I raised the salary again. I remember the judge saying, "What's with this salary?" and I said, "Well, you guys keep screwing up by hiring somebody else and there's more problems to take care of and that's what I get paid for." Judge Dickerson said, "Okay, you got the job on one condition. We don't see anything about juvenile in the paper and you take care of business." I said, "Yes, sir."

MONK: The other two chiefs at Juvenile, I want to say, made the paper a couple of times and they didn't like seeing Juvenile in the paper.

GOODSILL: What year was that?

MONK: That had to be 1977, 1978, somewhere in there.

GOODSILL: Why does somebody want to be the Chief of Probation?

MONK: I knew I could do it. I'd worked as a probation officer and as far as I was concerned most of it was common sense; dealing with people. It was amazing how many people weren't capable of dealing with people. They were from law enforcement and they needed to be more like a social worker instead of a law enforcement officer. Not that they didn't need to perform those duties every now and then.

GOODSILL: So they needed to have some social work skills?

MONK: When I came in I started setting standards for workers, for example you had to have a college degree because they didn't always have that.

GOODSILL: Did you have one?

MONK: Yeah, I had one.

GOODSILL: Before you went in the military?

MONK: Yeah. I went in the military to get some experience and they didn't put me in the MPs, they put me in the infantry so I didn't get any experience there. When I interviewed with Al Dobson when I got out of the military he told me, "You have the book knowledge but you don't have any experience." I remember sitting there and wanting to say, "How am I supposed to get experience if I can't get a job."

GOODSILL: So the skills that it took in order to be Chief, Juvenile Probation Officer...

MONK: Well, I kicked around and worked with the mentally challenged in the institution for about a year and then I worked with abused and neglected kids where I saw firsthand babies dipped in boiling water and all kinds of stuff.

GOODSILL: Early in your career?

MONK: Yeah. That's also part of juvenile probation; a lot of these kids are abused. I would say a lot of them are mentally challenged, at least forty, forty-five percent.

GOODSILL: So the skills you brought with you were social work, knowledge of the system and an ability to do paperwork. Would you say it was political?

MONK: Oh, yeah, was it political. I had been in the county since the seventh grade. I played high school football here. I was on the varsity.

GOODSILL: Where are you from originally?

MONK: I'm from Simonton. I grew up there since about the sixth grade. I never messed with politics but obviously sat back and watched. I usually keep my mouth shut and listened. I knew what the pecking order was in Commissioner's Court. I wasn't worried about Commissioners Court because I dealt with the judges. All I had to do was please the judges. And I knew my judges.

GOODSILL: How long were you the Chief of Probation?

MONK: Up until the time I got into law school in 1983.

GOODSILL: Before we go into law school, this building was originally built as a jail and then used for Juvenile Detention. Tell me what amendments you needed to make for this building to be used to house Juveniles.

MONK: I remember coming here years ago when I was going to school in Sam in the 70's. I used to ride with a couple of my friends that worked for the Sheriff's Department. This was the Sheriff's Department, it was the jail, and basically central operations were right here. Ervin Hurda was the Sheriff then. I'm trying to think of who his Chief Deputy was. He did a lot of favors for me. We weren't always here. We got bounced around before we landed here.

GOODSILL: Juvenile Probation, you mean?

MONK: Yeah, and Adult, too. I remember when I worked for Adult Probation we were over in Richmond City Hall once. Juvenile was over at the YMCA building. We had a kid escape who had killed two people. We had a manhunt that tracked him down and got him back. A psychologist let him go to the bathroom without telling anyone and there was a window in the bathroom. He killed a couple out at Arcola.

Back when I worked for Mike Humphries, when I first came here, we didn't have a detention center. I had come here from CPS [Child Protective Services] in Victoria and Fort Bend County didn't have anything for juveniles. They didn't have an emergency shelter. Basically the budget for handling the juveniles came from the State. Each county got so many allotments per State School kid and there was a value assessed to each one of those allotments. For every kid that didn't get sent to the State School, you got that amount of money, like \$3,000 or whatever it was. So we weren't sending kids to the State School because we had to have that money from the State even to be able to operate.

We had a contract with Brazoria County where we transported the kids back and forth to detention. I knew of an emergency shelter in Victoria. I contacted them and we contracted with them and we started taking kids down there for emergency shelter. But the detention was a real pain because they had to have a hearing within forty-eight hours of being detained. So somebody's got to go pick them up, bring them back up here, and have the hearing. If they're detained, I had to go get them in Angleton and bring them back for court. If they were detained then back to Angleton so it's two trips. I was the one making all those trips and to Victoria to pick up kids. Fort Bend County really needed a detention center. Then we got it.

GOODSILL: This building? The date I have is 1981.

MONK: Yes. I was chief when we moved in here. I studied the colors. I had known there had been some research on colors. I wanted to be sure that I got light pastel colors in the cells. I didn't want any bright colors. There was a lot of science on the colors about aggressive behavior and so forth. Everything was light pastel. Downstairs I had speakers and microphones in the ceiling downstairs so we could hear what was going on in the cells downstairs. We didn't lock a whole lot of kids upstairs if we could manage it.

GOODSILL: Upstairs there were individual cells?

MONK: Yeah, it was more individual cells. Every now and then if I had a troublemaker I'd put him in that cell right over there [gestures]. I had a kid hang himself one night. I sat there and watched him. I told him I was going to let him pass out before I cut him down.

GOODSILL: Oh, so he survived?

MONK: Oh, yeah, and I told him what I was going to do to him when I cut him down. I was going to take all his clothes away. I was going to take all the blankets out of there. I was going to take the mattress out of there. There wasn't going to be anything but steel and I was going to go over to the thermostat and turn it down as low as it would go. Then, when he thought he could behave, I'd come up and talk to him. That's what I did. Never had another problem. Now, would the Judges have approved that? No, probably not. But he was a cop's kid and he was a real pain in the butt. He straightened out.

GOODSILL: It was boys only in this facility?

MONK: No. We usually tried to keep the girls downstairs. In fact, I had a girl that was in here about a year. She was being certified as an adult. I was her attorney. Sometimes the kid's stay in here lengthy.

GOODSILL: When it changed from a jail to Juvenile, other than the colors, did you do very much to the building?

MONK: I hired the people. I didn't require degrees but if I could get people with degrees for detention I would. I certainly wanted them for Probation Officers. I went around and around with a couple of community leaders because I didn't have this color of probation officer or that color of probation officer.

GOODSILL: That was the time of Affirmative Action?

MONK: Yeah. I said, "I'm not lowering my standard. Find me someone with a degree and send them my way." I had some very good Hispanic and black officers that did a great job.

GOODSILL: Did you need Hispanic employees so they could communicate with some of the inmates?

MONK: I did.

GOODSILL: You don't call them inmates when they're Juveniles do you?

MONK: No. In fact this wasn't called a jail. It was called a detention.

GOODSILL: So what do you call them, people who stay here?

MONK: We call them respondents or we call them by their name. To be perfectly honest, I think we locked up too many kids. Now they want to lock them up and give them psychological testing and get a stamp of approval from a psychologist saying they aren't a danger to themselves or others. I sit as a Juvenile Judge these days. There are too many of them locked up for property offenses. It didn't used to be like that. Usually you treat crimes against people a lot more seriously than you do property offenses. The population has grown. I've represented kids that were murderers.

I remember I was the Assistant Chief when I was running the detention center. We had a little girl that had murdered her mother and her father. My officer found the bodies when he went out to check on her. I'd usually let her out of detention at night because she'd help us wash clothes and do other stuff. I'd let her sit and watch TV. I really felt kind of sorry for her because her father had been sexually abusing her and she shot him. She also shot her mother because her mother knew what was going on and never bothered to do anything. It was terribly wrong. She was a pretty young kid, about 15, and seemed just as normal as could be and had been dealt a pretty rotten hand.

I remember I had a call from Katy Police Department one night. They had a fifteen-year-old boy. He had kicked his way out of the jail cell and broke the lock. They were calling to tell me they were bringing him to me. I said, "Well, what's the charge?" They said, "He was trying to steal two cars at the same time." He'd get in one and drive a hundred yards down the road and get out and get in the other one and he'd drive the other one a hundred yards down the road. He was mentally disturbed. No doubt.

When we got him over here I put him in the individual cells downstairs. I don't think we had anybody in here. He was hallucinating. He'd be God one minute. He'd be the Holy Ghost the next minute. Then he'd be Jesus Christ. He'd take his overalls off and he was bad about slinging his...[voice trails off]. So what I did was I'd catch him when he was the Holy Ghost or Jesus and I'd get on the microphone and I'd be God. That's how I controlled him. He was from Florida. How he got here I have no idea.

GOODSILL: He probably walked across the gulf.

MONK: I don't have a clue but we had a lot of trouble getting him back to Florida. I called them twice. They said, "Yeah, we'll take him back." and I said, "It ain't a question. We're sending him back." We took him to Austin to the mental hospital and they kept sending him back to us. I finally had to go through Judge Culver who talked to the Administrator at the Austin State Hospital and told him that if he sent that kid back, next time, the bailiff had instructions to bring the Administrator back with him. The kid never came back. Politics is in everything. I had a good group of judges and they pretty much left me alone. I kept them out of the papers. I didn't have any problems.

GOODSILL: The judges that tried the Juvenile cases?

MONK: The judges that were on the Juvenile Board. See, all the judges were on the Juvenile Board. Back then we had Judge Dickerson, who was head of the Juvenile Board. We had Judge Brown and Judge Clark and County Judge. I was here when Judge Culver came on board but those were the only three judges that we had back then. Oh, and the County Judge, I think that was Josh Gates.

Fort Bend County came a long ways in a very short period of time. They went from having nothing to really having it all. Now they've got a brand new Detention facility.

GOODSILL: Where's that?

MONK: It's right over by the jail. I just came from there because as a Juvenile Judge on the weekends I do the probable cause findings. I don't know how many beds/facilities they have over there. They even have a courtroom attached to it. I was in court the other day as Attorney of the Week, which basically means I was handling all the kids in detention that either didn't have an attorney appointed yet or they had an attorney but their attorney wasn't there.

Now they have some kind of new rule that if you represent them at the detention center then you keep them as your clients. I did it for two days and I said, "I got ten cases. I don't need ten cases. That's way too many cases." So I'm going to have to go talk to the Judge about that. I don't think that rule is going to work.

GOODSILL: So we are back when you got into law school...

MONK: Back then things were a lot different with the DA's office. The D. A.'s office followed the recommendation of the Probation Department. We were the ones that made the recommendations to the Assistant D.A. about plea agreements. It is not like that anymore. Now the DA tells them what they're going to do. They're free to agree or disagree but the DA pretty much runs the show about charges, what they want to see for a punishment and so forth. That's all different from when I was here. Fred Fleshman was our Assistant D. A. Fred was good and pretty understanding. We were the ones that had to deal with the kids. They listened to us in reference to what we thought needed to be done.

I went to law school because I was dealing with lawyers all the time and they weren't doing anything that I wasn't capable of doing. It certainly paid better. Budgets were a pain every year. I had to sell them to the judges and then I'd have to go do battle with the commissioners. Now that's where the politics came in and that's where the phone calls came in and "Let me buy you lunch". Yeah, that goes on, sure. I was trying to insure I wouldn't have that much trouble when I got in front of them. Invariably they gave me trouble so I quit buying them lunch.

GOODSILL: What was your specialty in law school?

MONK: It was just general. What was amazing was the only course I made a "D" in law school was criminal law. My professor called me in about that and he said, "Of all the people in my class I would have felt that you would have been in the top of the class." and I said, "Well, did I get the answer wrong?" and he said, "No, you got it right." And he said, "But..." and I said, "I understand. You wanted me to start off with "Well, it could be capital murder but it can't be capital murder because of this, this, and this. It can't be manslaughter because of this, this, and this and it can't be negligent homicide because of this, this, and this. It can't be this and it can't be that. It can only be this because of that" and that's all I wrote.

He said, "Yeah, why didn't you put all those other crimes on your paper? You'd have made an 'A'." I said, "Because you don't understand. In the real world, we don't have time for that crap." We have to make a decision and move on down the road. So if it isn't capital murder I'm not going to think about it if it's a Class A Misdemeanor. He said, "Well, that's not the way law school works." I said, "I learned a valid lesson and it'll never happen again but in the real world, that's how we deal with it." I took him for Criminal Procedure and I aced his class.

GOODSILL: What did you do when you got out of law school? Were you still working here?

MONK: I didn't take any court appointed cases but I worked here for a while and then I went out on my own. In 1986 I went into an office-sharing agreement with a good friend I graduated from high school with.

I was practicing law a little while I was here but I wasn't doing any court appointed criminal work or anything else. I was working from six at night until six in the morning, which made it hard to practice during the day. I left here and went to school. When I got out of my five o'clock class, I was back here by six. I did that Monday through Thursday or Friday through Sunday for three years.

GOODSILL: So when you got out, what kind of practice did you have?

MONK: I did a lot of criminal cases.

GOODSILL: Juvenile or adult?

MONK: I did both. I've always done juvenile. I quit doing the adult appointed work because I don't like dealing with the DA's office. I'll deal with them over the kids.

GOODSILL: How did you like being on the other end?

MONK: Oh, I liked it. I remember many times when the police came in and my position was different than theirs. I had some run-ins with some principals but I knew what I was doing and I wasn't scared of any of them. I had one officer wanting me to lock up a kid... he was really wanting me to break the rules. He wanted me to lock him up for some offense but he had nothing to prove that the kid did anything about this. What he really thought was he had a crime over here but he couldn't yet prove it but he needed me to lock him up for a while. I told him I wasn't going to do that and I told him I thought he was barking up the wrong tree and he had the wrong kid. Eventually I was proven right.

GOODSILL: At what point did you become a juvenile judge?

MONK: I sit in for the Associate Judge, Judge Harold Kennedy, who does detention hearings. When he's not available, sometimes he'll call me and I'll sit as Judge for him instead of defending them. I am also the determining judge on the juvenile court on assigned weekends. As the Richmond Associate Judge and the Rosenberg Associate Judge, the cities needed somebody to relieve the Presiding Judge and to go to the jails on assigned weekends, to magistrate the people taken into custody. There are about four of us that do weekend duty.

GOODSILL: How do you like being a judge instead of a lawyer?

MONK: Being a lawyer's easier. Being a judge is difficult because there are lots of options to weigh, especially with the juveniles. A lot of the cases now are domestic violence assault. You got kids whipping up on parents. You got lots of drugs. You got lots of mental issues. Juvenile has their own physiological department now. They place kids all over the state. They basically try to identify what the problem is for the kid. In many circumstances the problem is the parent. You really kind of need to figure out who you need to fix.

GOODSILL: [Laughs] Good luck with that.

MONK: I remember when I was chief, I had people calling up. A woman called me one morning [and said,] "I can't get my son out of bed. He won't go to school." I said, "Really? You got a pitcher?" She said, "Yeah." I said, "You got an ice maker?" "Yeah." "Well, put some cold water and some ice in a pitcher and let it sit for a little while. You go tell him to get up. If he doesn't get up, you warn him. You tell him what you're going to do and if he doesn't get up, you douse him with that pitcher." Tell him if he lays one finger on you I'll be there in a few minutes." She hung up and I never heard any more.

I remember one time I had a juvenile whose parents came in here. It was a step father, the mother, and a son, who was about 13. They were telling me what the problem was and the kid basically stood up and told them to go to Hell and walked out and slammed my door. Those two-inch thick doors rang out throughout the building. That's one of my pet peeves. You don't slam doors. I sat there and I looked at them and I said, "What are you all going to do about that?" They said, "What can we do?" "Well, come with me and let me show you."

We walked out the front and I asked a couple of my officers, "Where did that kid go?" They said, "He ran out and got in the car." He's in the car and he's locked all the doors so I knocked on the window. I said, "You need to roll that window down because I need to talk to you." He said, "Nope. Not going to do that." I said, "Yeah, roll it down." He said, "No, I'm not going to do that." So I went over and picked up a brick and I walked back over there and I said, "You either roll it down or I'm breaking a window and you're coming out that window." So, he rolled it down just enough that I got my arm in there and when I got my arm in there I got him by the neck and took his head to the ceiling of the car a few times. I said, "When you get tired of this, you can roll down the window." When he rolled down the window, I drug him out that window and I took him back in the building.

I told one of my officers, "Now ya'll take him, you strip him down and you go shower him and you put him in a jump suit and you lock him upstairs. When he's ready to apologize to me he can come down. I think that took about fifteen minutes. He came down and he apologized. I said, "Now apologize to your parents." He kind of looked at me and I said, "You want to go back upstairs?" He said, "No." I said, "No, what?" He said, "No, sir." He apologized. They left.

About three months later I was out at the fair working. I came out, it was after midnight, and I saw this same kid sitting by the fence. I said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "Well, I don't have a ride home." I said, "Well, come on. I'll give you a ride home. You shouldn't be out this late anyway." On the way home I bought him a coke, talked to him. He was telling me his stepfather and his mother didn't care about him. He had new brothers and new sisters and I was the only one that had told him no. I said, "Well, what do you think about that?" He said, "I think they don't love me or they'd tell me no." That was true but I don't know how to correct that. That was true then and it is still true today. Parents need to care enough about these kids to tell them NO.

Interview Ends