

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: CHARLES “Chuck” KELLY

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Interviewer: Karl Baumgartner

Transcriber: Sylvia Vacek

Location: Rosenberg, Texas



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Today is August 26, 2023. My name is Karl Baumgartner, and I'm doing an oral history interview with Chuck Kelly in Rosenberg, Texas. This is being conducted on behalf of Fort Bend County Historical Commission Oral History Project. Chuck is former president of the Fort Bend Historical Commission and has been involved in much of the Commission's collection of historical data.

This will be the first component of Chuck's oral history. It will consist of Chuck's life from childhood through his college experience and will be followed by a subsequent separate manuscript. The second portion will focus on the Fort Bend Historical Commission and Chuck's management of the commission including his position as president of the commission.



Chuck and his father at Texas A&M campus in spring of 1950

Chuck, what is your full legal name?

KELLY: My name is Charles Herbert Kelly. My parents gave me the first names of my grandfathers. So, Charles is from my paternal grandfather, and Herbert from my maternal grandfather. Bruce, my younger brother, has first names of two great grandfathers, one from each side of the family, Bruce Alonzo Salter (paternal) and Phillip William Adams (maternal).

FAMILY BACKGROUND

I was born in 1950, January 9, in Bryan, Texas at St. Joseph Hospital. I'm a honeymoon baby. I was conceived on Mom and Dad's honeymoon, and about 280 days later I was born.

My parents joked about it. On the first night of their honeymoon, they went to the Shamrock Hilton in Houston, which had just opened the month before, the big hotel

on South Main. It was brand new. Anyway, Dad always said “We should have named you Hilton or Conrad or something like that to commemorate the big event!”

I began life at Texas A&M, in the married quarters at the North Gate area of the campus. My mother always jokingly referred to it as incubator courts” because all the veterans had come back from the war and many of them had infant children. Mother said the quarters were very rudimentary like Army barracks. A baby would start crying in one apartment, then another baby would start crying. It was like being in a big maternity ward.

My father was born in 1925. He enlisted in World War II in 1943 when he was eighteen years old after a first semester at Texas A & M. His schooling was interrupted by the war. He essentially had to start over when he left the US Navy in 1946. Things didn’t really work out very well at A&M in his Fish (freshman) year in the fall of 1942. He said, he’d rather face the Japs than go back and get his tail whipped by all those jackasses in the Corps. (laughter). Anyway, after the war he got out of the Navy and met my mother, and they married in 1949.

BAUMGARTNER: Were your parents from this area?

KELLY: Dad was born in Sugar Land. His parents moved to this area from Rusk, Texas. A surprising number of old Sugar Land families trace their roots to Rusk, due often to relocation of personnel in the Texas Department of Prisons. Employees would transfer from the Rusk prisons (including the state hospital for mentally ill and criminally insane) to Fort Bend County prison farms.

BAUMGARTNER: Where is Rusk located?



*Sally Rachuig and Charles Kelly, Jr.
Wedding Picture on April 14, 1949*

KELLY: Rusk is in Cherokee County, east of Palestine in East Texas. And I have roots in Fairfield, too: that whole area is where my father's family came from. And, Mother's family are from Clifton and Chilton, just a little further west. Those are really small towns near Waco. That's where my roots are.

BAUMGARTNER: Several years ago, you relocated from Sugar Land and moved back to the little town of Clifton. I guess your decision to move back was connected to your family history.

KELLY: Yeah, it was. That was one of the options I had – go back to my father's side of the family in Rusk or return to Clifton where Mother's family was from. Clifton was my prime choice. I had liked it from early childhood, visiting there as early as a three-year old and returning for family reunions and other gatherings. I decided probably 30 years ago that's where I was going to retire. It has hills! I live on one at the edge of Clifton.

It's a small town of about 3,400 people. The entire county has only about 17,500 residents; it's kind of the mirror opposite of Fort Bend County, and I like living in a small town. It's very comfortable for me. I wish I still had a good number of relatives there, but I don't; there are just a handful, and they're distant relatives.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you know many relatives when you moved back to Clifton?

KELLY: Yeah, I knew a few from reunions. There are regulars that show up all the time, and I was acquainted with them. I meet people on the street, and I sometimes learn I'm connected to them in some way. Most often they are very distant relations, and it may be they're in-laws, and our families are loosely intermingled. I discovered a cousin when I went down to the food bank to donate some funds. He was sitting behind the desk, and I recognized him from long-ago reunions. I asked, "Now, who are you?" And he told me his name, and I said, "Mike, I know that I'm your distant cousin" ... and it was great meeting him again out of the blue. It's a lot of fun when you rediscover people that you don't really know and make connections. But anyway, I do have a few relatives in town.

We recently had a reunion; we always do them in July. Mother had just one sibling, my Aunt Mayme Bass Hause; and my father was an only child. So, when it gets to me and my brother Bruce, we're a very small family. I have only three first cousins: Bob Bass and Becky Bass Gallimore and Bridget Bass McWilliams, who live in Richmond, Rosenberg, and Fulshear, respectively. So, we are a small group.

BAUMGARTNER: Now, wasn't that a little unusual in those days for families to be so small, like your father not having any siblings?

KELLY: It was often due to the Depression. He was born in 1925, and when The Great Depression hit he was four years old. I'm sure life was pretty tough, or at least, very uncertain. They weren't rich people by any means, they were working class people, so they may have thought they couldn't afford too many more children. Now, my grandparents on both sides came from big families; but family size scaled down abruptly. I think this pattern was common with many families in that era.



Christmas 1958 Chuck and Bruce at their grandmother's home with their Bass cousins: Bob, Becky, and Bridget

I was talking with some friends about this just last night. Bruce and I grew up in an adult-dominated family. We spent a lot of time with our great aunts, great uncles, and grandparents. So, we matured faster, I think, because we were around adults a lot, and they didn't coddle us. For example, they played games with us. They wanted us to learn how to play, and to play to win. My parents took us to good restaurants at a very early age, too. We enjoyed a variety of experiences with our adult relatives.

It was a good environment, a big asset for me and Bruce. For one thing, it spurred a strong interest in history for both of us, because we asked our grandparents about what life was like when they were children. They did things with us and took us

places that spurred our curiosity. I doubt many of today's children get as much adult attention as we did. That's a shame in my opinion.

BAUMGARTNER: You were fortunate to have that kind of relationship with your grandparents. My granddad never talked to me about his life growing up. He taught me how to garden, how to fish, how to watch birds and so forth, but I never talked to him at all about his childhood.

KELLY: I remember asking my paternal grandmother if she ever saw Babe Ruth play baseball. (Both sides of my family were big sports fans.) She said, no, they didn't, but they were big Houston Buff fans. They saw Dizzy Dean pitch several times when he was a Buff. Rice football games were another big attraction. It was the only big-time football available in Houston back then. My family loved sports. One great-uncle loved to go to Galveston. He'd go down with a group of other Sugar Land people and drink and play the slots or roulette at the Balinese Room.



Chuck and Bruce playing Bridge with their paternal grandmother and great aunt during summer vacation in 1964

Editor's Note: While preparing this transcript of Chuck's oral history, Bruce remembered their maternal grandmother, Mamie Adams Rachuig, told him she saw Charles Lindbergh fly over Denton, Texas when she was a college student there in September 1927. He was on a barn-storming tour after his historic solo flight across the Atlantic a few months earlier. [Click here to read a newspaper article about Lindbergh's flight over Denton.](#)

Their life was very interesting to me. The rate of change in day-to-day life was not nearly as rapid as it is today. The 1950s and the '60's weren't too much different than the 1920s, '30s, or '40s in some ways. Or maybe vestiges of those earlier decades didn't fade as quickly as they do now. I guess it's hard to know. I can cite examples from our summer vacations in Galveston. Camp Wallace and the large blimp hanger were still visible as we drove down Highway 6 in Hitchcock. Of course, Galveston was filled with remnants of the US Army camps dating from WW I. Bunkers for large cannons were scattered across various parts of town. Murdoch's bath house, rebuilt after the 1915 hurricane, was still standing over the seawall and out into the surf. It was a favorite family spot until Carla blew it away in 1961. I have photos of my great grandparents walking on the beach beside Murdoch's during a vacation in 1926 on roughly the same spot where we romped in the 1950s.



*Chuck's great-grandparents,
Bruce and Sallie Wells Salter
at Murdoch's Bath House in
Galveston in 1926*

There seemed to be a continuity with the past that doesn't exist today. Some people think that's good; some think it isn't.

BAUMGARTNER: What about your paternal grandparents' side?

KELLY: My grandfather got out of the US. Navy in 1923 and married my grandmother who was four years younger. (He was born in 1899. She was born in 1903.) He had to find a job. People in Rusk were finding employment in Sugar Land, so he followed their path. He got a job with Imperial Sugar, so my grandparents moved to Sugar Land. This was right after World War I when the US economy was in a recession. He brought my grandmother down and they lived in Sugar Land for the rest of their lives.

BAUMGARTNER: He got a job with Imperial Sugar?

KELLY: Yes. And then my father was born in 1925 there in Sugar Land. Although Sugar Land had a hospital, my father was born at home. It wasn't uncommon to give birth at home. My grandfather told us that when our dad was clearly on his way, he had to trot to the other side of town to get the doctor. My grandparents didn't have a telephone!

My Mom's father, my maternal grandfather, worked for Humble Pipeline. He had worked for Humble up in Clifton, was transferred around to several towns in Central Texas, and was eventually transferred to Sugar Land. My mother wasn't born right here in Sugar Land (she was born in Waco), but my grandparents moved to Sugar Land when she was just a few months old. She was very nearly a genuine Sugar Land native.

She grew up at what was known as the Humble Camp south of Sugar Land where First Colony is now located. Her dad was the chief engineer in charge of the pumping station there. That is where my mother grew up, although she went to Sugar Land schools. The Humble camp was sort of a small version of Sugar Land. It was an

isolated community between Sugar Land and the Brazos River bottom. (At most, just a couple hundred people lived at the camp.) Every family had a company home. Humble was very careful about fostering family life in their permanent camps. They had community gardens and recreational facilities, community organizations, and activities for kids. They had a small swimming pool and community meeting hall. Mother and Aunt Mayme thought it was an ideal place to grow up.

BAUMGARTNER: Where was it located?

KELLY: It was on Oilfield Road, but more specifically near the current northwest corner of Sweetwater and Commonwealth Boulevards in First Colony. I barely



Chuck's paternal grandparents at their Sugar Land home in 1943

remember it. Humble closed it down and sold the property in 1955. I remember going with my grandmother and my mother to take one last look at their house before they moved it off. It was sold to someone who moved it to Stafford, to the west side Avenue E just south of Highway 90A.

BAUMGARTNER: You mean they relocated the house?

KELLY: Yeah, they sold those houses. People would buy anything and repurpose it. The area where the camp originally stood is now covered with private residences.

My dad was a Sugar Land townie because his father worked for Imperial, and my grandfather did pretty well in the blue-collar ranks. He didn't have much of an education, but he loved machinery and making things work. You might think of him as the mechanical equivalent of today's computer programmers. He eventually became a chief mechanic in Imperial's packing department.

My grandmother was a telephone operator. That was quite a connection in town because it meant she was keyed into all the gossip. The town's switchboard was manually operated, so most everyone knew the operators who responded with "number please," whenever a town phone was lifted off its cradle.



Chuck and Bruce use the 'wayback machine' to visit their paternal grandmother at work in 1958 (Photo from The Fort Bend Herald)

I can recall picking up the phone and asking the operator if I could speak with ‘Mamaw.’ She said, “Yes, dear. I’ll put her on the line for you.” An old timer told me that one Sugar Land woman used her phone as an early baby monitor when she visited a neighbor. She’d tell the operator she was going next door for 10 minutes and would leave the phone in her baby’s crib. If there was a fuss, just call the neighbor, and she’d go straight home. Now that’s small-town life.

CHILDHOOD IN SUGAR LAND’S LATE COMPANY TOWN ERA

BAUMGARTNER: Yeah, you have told me stories like that on several occasions.

KELLY: There were lots of hilarious stories about town life during the company town days. For instance, I recall one about the town constable. Curtis Hall was the constable, the chief of security, during the last decade of the company town era. Curtis was famous for being the father of Kenneth Hall, Sugar Land’s well-known football star. He was a nice guy, but big and quiet, so he could be very intimidating.

One day he got a call from a crusty widow who lived roughly where the Windstream office is today on Highway 90A. She was German-American and all business. She said, “Curtis I’ve got a large alligator under my house, and I want you to take care of it.” Her house was a pier-and-beam structure, as were most company homes. Curtis soon drove up, met the woman, and looked under the house with his flashlight. Sure enough, he saw the reflection of the gator’s eyes and heard it hiss. He turned to the woman and said, “I’ll take care of it, but I’ll have to go get my gun.” To Curtis’s surprise she blew her stack and chewed him out. She was insulted that he hadn’t brought his gun. She said, “Next time I call you and say there’s an alligator under my house, you better bring your gun! I know what they look like, I don’t lie!”



Curtis Hall at the Sugar Land jail in the 1960s

My dad went to Sugar Land High School. He went from 1st grade on to the 11th grade; in those days students graduated in eleven years and his was one of the last classes under that scheme. And then my mother also attended Sugar Land schools. She went through elementary grades to high school and graduated in 1949. In total we've had four generations of Kellys who have gone through Sugar Land schools. There are old families that have more, but there are many more families who have fewer!

BAUMGARTNER: Wow.

KELLY: All of Bruce's grandchildren have gone to Sugar Land schools. Three of the four graduated from Dulles. Bruce and I are Dulles alumni. Bruce's oldest grandchild is a Kempner High grad.

BAUMGARTNER: You said Bruce is your brother.

KELLY: Yeah, he's nearly two and a half years younger than I am.

BAUMGARTNER: He has two children?

KELLY: Yeah. He has a son (Ryan) and a daughter (Lauren), and four grandchildren. His son has two boys, and his daughter has a boy and a girl. Only one granddaughter. And they're really my surrogate family. I don't have any children.

I feel less and less attachment to Sugar Land as time passes because the town that I lived in and grew up in doesn't exist anymore. When my mother passed away in 2020, my last anchor was gone, and I felt like I could leave.



*Bruce and Jane in Hawaii where
Jane grew up*

BAUMGARTNER: Now, did the remaining family stay in Sugar Land?

KELLY: Yeah. Bruce and wife Jane live across Brooks Lake from the Fluor complex. And both his children live in the Brookside area, so they're all together. I don't think they could live in a place like Clifton. It's too slow for them, I believe.

But I like it because small town life is what I prefer, and I just have no interest in too much bustle and frenetic activity. I want to enjoy retirement. One of my friends asked me, what do I do? And I said, "Well, I do a lot of nothing, but it keeps me occupied." Mostly genealogical research, historical research, reading, writing, volunteering – and household chores!

I'm still doing work for the Fort Bend County Historical Commission. I'd like to do volunteer work for the museums and other historical organizations up in Bosque County, but it's real tough to find time right now. I do spend as much as I can with the genealogical society because they're helping me research my family. And it's true – you can spend all day working on family research without noticing.

RELOCATION TO CLIFTON, TEXAS

BAUMGARTNER: So, when you left Sugar Land your motivation was to get back to a small town.

KELLY: Something that was not too different from Sugar Land during my childhood. I didn't want it to be more than 2000 or 3000 people. And Clifton's population is, I believe, 3,400. It's pretty small, and the county itself is very small. Just 17,500 people, which is a fraction of Sugar Land's population. What, 10% of Sugar Land, yeah, and that's the whole county. Probably the main attraction is low taxes. Bosque County is not a 'tall cotton' county, but as my paternal grandmother used to say, "There's a thorn with every rose."

BAUMGARTNER: Had you thought about moving back there for quite a while?

KELLY: Thirty years! I had made the decision in the 1990's and I had told Mother about my decision, but I don't think she remembered it. And I didn't want to press it because I think she wanted to keep roots in Sugar Land. And we still have roots in Sugar Land; I'm not an immediate part of them.

BAUMGARTNER: That's where she grew up.

KELLY: Yeah, that's right. It was her hometown, and she was proud of it. She adjusted better to the changes in Sugar Land than I did. She could live with the differences and all that, it didn't bother her all that much. But for me, it was just too different. Like I say, the town that I grew up in didn't exist anymore. It was in my head, and I could take that anywhere with me.

BAUMGARTNER: It's long gone. The downtown area is enormous and looks like every downtown suburb in the United States. It's not the same.

KELLY: Yeah, well, that was the deal. Sugar Land you know, it's covered with concrete. I'm not complaining. Youngsters like Bruce's grandkids don't know any different. So, I don't expect them to have the same frame of reference that I do, but I do hope they will keep an interest in the past.

GENEALOGY

Bruce and I feel we're sort of the last repository of family lore. We both have detailed knowledge about Sugar Land and our family history. I've got tons of boxes containing memorabilia. You wouldn't believe how many boxes of photographs I've got, and a lot of them don't have annotations on them. Bruce and I are going to try 'fix all that;' we have good memories of these things, and we can figure out descriptive information and try to get it down as best we can. Even if it's just a general location and a year; if that's the best we can do, then it's better than nothing. We'll do it for the

kids because I think when we go, if we haven't written it down, it's going to be forgotten. I think we owe it to the people that brought us here. They're how we got here. Good or bad, they were our people. They weren't perfect, but they're our family, and we ought to try to record their stories if we can. And that's why it's great to be doing these oral histories. Every family ought to.

BAUMGARTNER: I really think it's a great benefit.

KELLY: Yeah, it is a big benefit.



The Kelly family in 2006

Well, I want to digress about genealogy with a few examples of family lore since I am heavily involved in family research right now. I guess I should start by saying I can't understand the general lack of curiosity about one's ancestors, the endless line of people who brought us into existence. I would jump at the opportunity to meet any of my ancestors, even if it's just to see how we compare superficially. For example, do we look alike? Have similar mannerisms?

Back to the examples of my family's lore. A couple of weeks ago, I went to the Bosque County Genealogical & Historical Society's library and looked through some reference

books they have on Falls County, where Mother's maternal branch lived. Their surname is Adams and they lived in Chilton about 25 miles south of Waco. My mother and my aunt talked fondly about summer vacations with the family there in Chilton.

Usually, they would drive with my grandparents from Sugar Land to Chilton and then on to Clifton during my grandfather's summer vacation. On a couple of occasions, Mother and Aunt Mayme rode the train by themselves from Houston to Bremond (not far from Chilton), where family picked them up. They did this when they were young (preteen) girls. Generally speaking, summer visits with relatives nearly always offered them some kind of excitement or adventure.

A few times they stayed with an aunt and uncle in Lott, a small town that's a few miles south of Chilton. There's some important background information to consider. First, the Adams family of Chilton were teetotalers, or at least very discrete when they took an occasional nip. The lone exception was the aunt and uncle in Lott. They owned and operated the town café, which served beer. I supposed many people considered it a beer joint – to the dismay of some family members. Consequently, its clientele could be a little 'rough' at times. My grandparents were strict, so I can't imagine them letting their girls stay in Lott, even for just a few days, but I guess my grandmother wasn't going to antagonize her older sister by saying no to an invitation. Furthermore, the aunt and uncle had a daughter several years older than my mother and aunt, but she was fascinating and very kind to them. Another important factor was the 'character' of Lott. It started as a railroad town, and even after the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway abandoned their line through Lott, it was still a rowdy place. Old habits die hard.

My mother and aunt remembered that each Saturday night every summer, the Lott town fathers would close off a few blocks of main street, string some outdoor lights, and have a street fair. The high point of the festivities were the amateur boxing matches for all comers. It was very different from Sugar Land and memorable to a couple of young girls from a completely different environment. I never doubted Mother and Aunt Mayme's memory, but I was elated to find confirming references in Falls County history books. There was one photo of the boxing ring in Lott, and an old photo of 'downtown' Chilton in 1943, which is about the time my mother and my

aunt regarded as the heyday of visiting their family in Falls County. I hope I can find more.

We have similar memories on my father's side of our family. My paternal grandparents often talked with me and Bruce about visiting family in East Texas, either Rusk in Cherokee County, or Fairfield and Streetman in Freestone County. My grandmother's family (the Salters) was large, so they gathered at the family homestead in Rusk at Thanksgiving or Christmas. My father loved visiting his grandparents.

My grandfather told me the drive to Rusk could be an adventure. I suppose State Highway 59 (or its precursor) was their route, but it wasn't clear sailing like today. A lot of people were poor and a few still drove old Model T-era cars in the 1930s. Those old cars didn't have fuel pumps. A gravity-flow fuel line fed gas to the engine. There were places where these cars had to reverse up a hill to get over it. There were also remote locations where bushwhackers would fell trees across the road and waylay travelers. I have a feeling those things happened when my grandfather was a boy just before WW I, but they made great stories about life in the past.



Salters at in Rusk at Christmas, 1931 (Chuck's father is the small boy in front)

All these are pleasant memories, but life back then wasn't a bed of roses. We should be fair and honest and try to get a complete perspective on the past. Still, I was privileged to grow up in the 1950s.

BAUMGARTNER: Well, the '50s were a tremendous era to grow up in. A tremendous era.

EARLY MEMORIES

KELLY: We were lucky. We were blessed.

I have memories from when I was about two years old. For example, I remember going to Polly Ryan Hospital in Richmond with my dad and paternal grandparents to pick up Bruce and Mother after he was born. I was 2 years and 5 months old. (Mom told me Dr. Nichols was her doctor. I think he practiced in Sugar Land and in Richmond and must have had privileges at both Eldridge and Poly Ryon hospitals. She said she chose Poly Ryon because it was new, [and probably she would be free from Sugar Land gossip]. It was a Saturday and Dr. Thompson was covering for him the weekend Bruce was born.)

Bruce and I talked about this topic last night. I think in every case these early memories relate to learning or adjusting to something very fundamental. I'm sure I'm not unique in this regard. The best way to describe this phenomenon is to give an example.

My mother was pregnant with Bruce, but he wasn't born, yet. It was probably the late winter or early spring of 1952. (He was born in May.) I think she had to go to see Dr. Nichols in Richmond, or maybe Sugar Land. Regardless, my father was going to the appointment with her.

BAUMGARTNER: Really, how neat. Dr. Stanley Thompson. He had only been here a couple of years at that time. He moved to Richmond in about 1950 and served here into his 90's. He passed away a few years ago at age 98.

KELLY: I presume my father was going to take time off from work and drive to her appointment, but Mother had to leave me with my grandparents who lived close by.

As we were walking on the sidewalk along Brooks St., we met a man who once lived out at the Humble Camp. He was a friend of my maternal grandparents and my

mother. Of course, we stopped to talk for a second. The man turned to me and said, "Hello, Chuck. You're getting to be a big boy. How old are you?"

I raised my hand and showed 4 fingers as I said, "I'm 4 years old." Who knows why I picked that number. My mother said, "Now, Chuck, you know you're not 4." She took my hand and pushed down two fingers and said, "You're 2 years old." I think the reason I remember this incident is it was the first time I knew how old I was – a very fundamental aspect of life. It stuck with me. I learned a BIG concept regarding life.

It's ironic – neither Bruce nor I were born in Sugar Land.

BAUMGARTNER: But you were living up the country when you were born, weren't you?

KELLY: You're right. That was because my father was up at A&M finishing his final semester, but everybody, all my friends, were born in Sugar Land at the old Sugar Land Hospital.

Back to my memory of picking up Bruce and Mother at Polly Ryon Hospital. I remember all of that because he was the new thing in our family. I got knocked off the perch. (laughter) I was no longer the only baby bird in the nest, so it was a big deal. When he'd been at home for a few months, he caught a cold. He and I slept in the back bedroom of our house. His crib was against the north wall next to the door to the kitchen. My parents borrowed a vaporizer for him and put a blanket over his crib. The warm air blew into his covered crib and cleared his cough. I stood fascinated, watching them set it up. I thought that was the coolest thing. He had a fort; he had the very thing that appealed to a little kid like me.

Mother thought I was concerned about my baby brother. I don't think I understood enough to feel concerned, but I really wanted to get inside that fort with him! So, there's a child's view of these things, and then there's an adult's view. They don't always jibe.

I have lots of early childhood memories. I remember kindergarten. It was a private kindergarten – I loved it. I think I can walk you through the first house we lived in and describe it to you in pretty good detail.

BAUMGARTNER: But how long did you stay in that house?

KELLY: Ten years.

BAUMGARTNER: When you said that, I started thinking about the first house that I lived in, and I was three when we moved there, and I remember every room and every feature of that house. But I mean, whatever? I lived there from age three to age eighteen when I left for college.

KELLY: Yes. I can remember most of the paint scheme and the location of the furniture. Mother had the house repainted at least once, and they installed bookshelves in an archway dividing our living room and dining room. But all I'm saying is I remember the house real well. All that's vivid in my memory. I may be embellishing things a little and not be 100% accurate. I may have conflated different eras and all that sort of stuff, but you're right. We have home movies. That's the other good thing that preserves memories.

My grandmother, my mother's mother, gave my parents a movie camera when Bruce was a few months old. My cousin Bob Bass and his mother lived in Germany at the time with my uncle who was in the US. Army's occupation forces in West Germany. When Bruce was born, they wanted to see him. My grandmother bought my parents the camera which was terrific because we have home movies of Bruce at age one and me at age three. More important to me now are the scenes we have of my parents, grandparents, and other family members. It's as if they are still with us! They are eight-millimeter reels of film. How much is that? Eight minutes each, I think. But anyway, that's when our home movies began.

We treasure them. I've got home movies of three of my great grandparents. I met them, but of course, if we didn't have the film, I wouldn't remember them as well as I do. But I'm so thankful we've got those films.

EARLY SCHOOLING

I went to kindergarten in Sugar Land. As I've already mentioned, it was a private kindergarten at a residence on 2nd Street, and it was fun. The number of kids probably changed through the two semesters, but photos show there were 14 little boys at one point. No little girls ever attended the year I went to school. Just 14 or so little boys. And as I was telling somebody recently, we would all have been candidates for Ritalin. If they'd had Ritalin back in those days, they'd have pumped us full of it, because we were 'energetic.' A real barrel of monkeys. But we had a good time, a real good time.



Mrs. Boyer's kindergarten class, February 1956

BAUMGARTNER: Why was it all boys only?

KELLY: Just random chance. Actually, one of my buddies who was in the kindergarten class said he thought two or three girls showed up in the first week. They deserted after a few days. Too much testosterone, I guess. Our teacher was a very sweet old lady, wonderful person. But we tested her patience. I know I did.

BAUMGARTNER: So you went to kindergarten, and then where did you go to elementary?

I went to Sugar Land Elementary, which was located where Lakeview Elementary is now.

The elementary grades were in a semi-circle of cottage classrooms with the auditorium at its apex. I don't know if you are familiar with the history of Sugar Land schools, but we called it The First Circle. It was a fantastic campus. We had our own individual rooms, is what I'm getting at. It wasn't just one big building, which was the typical style; there were cottages, and there was a lot of sunlight in the rooms due to large windows on the south side of each cottage.



Mrs. Gary's 1st grade class, Sugar Land Elementary School, 1956/7

BAUMGARTNER: You mean like a first-grade cottage?

KELLY: Yeah. First and second, all the way to high school. Yes, they had these cottages for each grade.

BAUMGARTNER: Was that class area set up for Sugar Land?

KELLY: Yes, that's the way it was beginning around 1918 when the school was inaugurated.

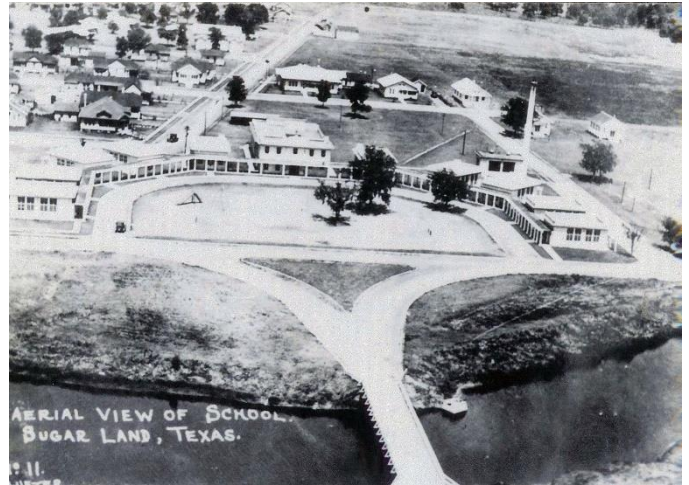
BAUMGARTNER: Is that where Buddy Wheeler would have gone to school? Buddy and his dad were dentist growing up and his younger brother Jerry was a good buddy in his later years.

KELLY: Yeah, exactly. Buddy graduated in 1959. The campus was upgraded in 1953 with the addition of a new high school on the east end. At that point, they had more and more students, and they had to build some new buildings. Anyway, that's where

I went to elementary school and junior high school. We had junior high in those days instead of middle school.

BAUMGARTNER: That was new then, though.

KELLY: Let's go back to when I was in the first grade, it was still Sugar Land ISD, it hadn't consolidated with Missouri City ISD. There was a school for African-American children in today's Mayfield Park. There were also small Hispanic schools for farmworkers' children scattered over the extensive farmland surrounding Sugar Land. Last, there was the school on Lakeview Drive for white children and Hispanic children who lived in town. The Lakeview school accommodated students from the first grade to high school.



Aerial of Sugar Land school campus in early 1920s

There was rapid population growth through the 50's spurred a need for more space. It was one of the drivers for consolidating, which occurred 1959. Buddy Wheeler's dad sort of drove that, he was on the school board and was a mover and shaker in the school system. So, in '59, they consolidated, and they ended up taking the old Missouri City Elementary School and turning it into the first Dulles High School. All the Sugar Land High School students went over there, and then all the junior high students in Missouri City were bussed over to Sugar Land and put in the Lakeview campus. It was a juggling act. There were a lot of temporary buildings.

The population was exploding. There was a pressing need for more classrooms and more schools. So that's when things started mushrooming. But for 10, or 12, 13, 14 years, Dulles was the only high school. Willow Ridge came second in the early seventies, about 1974. Then Clemens. I think I've got that right, but in my era, it was just Dulles.

The Dulles campus on Dulles Avenue was where I went to high school. I always liked school. I enjoyed it, and that's probably why I did well. Ironically, I see the fall as a time for new beginnings. The seasons are going to change. It's going to get colder, and strong cold fronts deliver real cool weather. Thanksgiving, Christmas, and winter are coming soon. I'm probably one of the few people who looks at fall and thinks it's the best part of the year. The beginning of the school year was a large part of it.

BAUMGARTNER: You literally really like fall.

KELLY: Yeah. The truth is, I couldn't live in a climate that didn't have four seasons. I want four distinct seasons, and I want to enjoy each one of them. I wouldn't want to live in paradise where it was balmy every day. I want variation, and I think you probably got that up in Oklahoma – you got a lot of cold weather, so you had more fall.

BAUMGARTNER: We had snow. Every year we had two or three snows. It doesn't snow any more.

KELLY: And probably for several weeks or at least a month of fall. We have just one or two weeks. There's hardly any fall. But then it was coming, and I got to enjoy it. The anticipation was a lot of fun. I liked it.

As some friends were discussing last night, I had an exceptional group of classmates. Random chance put many good kids in my class.

BAUMGARTNER: Why was that, do you suppose?

KELLY: Random chance. Just random chance.

BAUMGARTNER: It wasn't related to the beneficial influence of a group of parents at Imperial Sugar?

KELLY: No – well, yes it was. But it was due to the children, too. Some of the children were raised in semi-skilled worker families. Our valedictorian's father worked in the refinery. He wasn't an executive in any way. And our salutatorian wasn't the son of executives either. However, now that I really consider your question, I know you are absolutely right. Much of the credit should go to our parents.

BAUMGARTNER: What was the valedictorian's name.

KELLY: Her name was Dorothy Syblik, and the salutatorian was Daniel Stavinocha.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, Stavinocha. Related to Bradley?



John Foster Dulles High School Class of 1968

KELLY: Yeah. I don't know exactly how, but they're distantly related.

BAUMGARTNER: Bradley's how old, about 50 or so?

KELLY: About in that range, I think. But my classmate from Sugar Land who is his distant cousin and a good friend that I grew up with, is now 73 or 74. So, they weren't of the same vintage at all.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you know Tommy very much?

KELLY: No, I don't. I really don't know him at all, but I met Bradley's mother and her sister. They were great, great people. We rented Bradley's treehouse out in Needville near Brazos Bend State Park a couple years ago, and it was great fun. We'll do it again. I recommend it highly.

BAUMGARTNER: Who did you used to see around a lot then? The Basses?

KELLY: I did. Since they were my only first cousins, and they lived nearby in Rosenberg, we spent a lot of time together. Bob, who is just a couple of months older than I am, took over his father's business. His father was Nelson Bass. Bob is now CEO of Bass Construction.

BAUMGARTNER: Okay. He's about your age.

KELLY: He's about three months older than I am. We're very close. And Becky Bass Gallimore is his middle sister, or second sibling. She's still a member of the Historical commission, on the cemetery committee, I think.

And then their youngest sibling is Bridget Bass McWilliams; they live out in Fulshear.

BAUMGARTNER: I used to hang out a little with Nelson back in the old days, back when I spent some time at the Mustang Lounge.

TEEN AGE DAYS

Uncle Nelson was always good to us. I worked for him in the summers. He gave me my first job. Bob and I worked for him for a dollar an hour starting in 1964. I can remember driving to work here in Rosenberg and putting in a day in hot weather cleaning up houses, taking debris out, taking stuff to the dump. At the conclusion of my first day on the job, I stopped at a 7/11 in Rosenberg, on Avenue H, and bought a cigar (laughing).

BAUMGARTNER: Really?

KELLY: I had a celebratory cigar as I drove home.

BAUMGARTNER: How old were you?

KELLY: I was 14. I just thought it was the thing to do. I felt like, well, I've got to celebrate in some way. I finished it before I got home to Sugar Land or threw it out the window. It was a White Owl, or Roi Tan, or some comparable cheap brand. We smoked cigars back then. It was a high school thing. A routine Saturday evening was for us to drive into Houston. We would stop at a place called Alfred's, which was a Jewish delicatessen, terrific food, it was a wonderful place. They didn't have a full line of humidoros or anything like that. Just a few boxes of mid-quality cigars. So, we always bought a favorite brand of cigar and then went to Stadium Bowl off South Main. That was a favorite hangout because we played pool, most of us, on a Saturday night. That was typical. We never got tired of that.

BAUMGARTNER: Playing pool.

KELLY: Yeah, playing pool in Houston at Stadium Bowl. We would do other things occasionally, but playing pool was a typical activity on a Saturday. We often stopped at Prince's Drive In on the way home.

I was never good. I got lucky a few times, but I never got any better. I had no future as a hustler. This is jumping ahead just a little, but did you ever play snooker?

BAUMGARTNER: That's actually what I played daily in high school, snooker, a much tougher game than pool.

KELLY: Like you say, pool is a kid's game. I lived and worked in England for three years and I tried to play snooker a couple of times because that's the real game over there. They don't play pool. I had fun, but I was a total failure at snooker. I loved

watching the national championship tournament on television. The pros are really amazing.

COLLEGE

You've triggered a memory here. My college roommate was from Pryor, Oklahoma. He played snooker. But I realize now that that was an Oklahoma game, you know? I visited Pryor with my roommate one spring break; I liked it. I thought it was just like home. We spent a week in Oklahoma with a side trip to Kansas for a beer. Eighteen-year-olds could buy beer there.

BAUMGARTNER: Do you ever bump into him?

KELLY: I certainly do! He and his wife live in San Antonio. I enjoy seeing them when I can, and we trade email messages all the time. They are involved with their family.



Chuck's freshman Rice beanie

Well, we were talking about school. I started at Sugar Land Elementary. My first year in first grade was 1956, and I graduated from Dulles in 1968. I liked school. Like I've said, my classmates were a good crowd, so that sort of made school fun.

BAUMGARTNER: What was your high school like? Your high school experiences?

KELLY: It was good. I've thought a lot about the formal educational aspect of school. I went to Rice, a pretty brainy school, and they recruited students from all over Texas. I mean, I competed with the smartest kids from Dallas, San Antonio, Houston, and Bellaire and those kids had advanced backgrounds. They had calculus. We never had calculus or anything like that in Sugar Land.

But what I would say is I had firmly grounded fundamentals. Our teachers were very good at explaining things to us and making sure we didn't cut corners. If you were

going to get 100 or an A, or whatever, you were going to know the subject pretty well. And that went across the board, for the most part. History, language arts, mathematics, whatever.

BAUMGARTNER: And You're talking about high school?

KELLY: Yeah, high school. What I'm saying is we didn't have a lot of highly advanced courses, and certainly not anything like they have now. We spent a lot of time on the basics. The one exception was chemistry. I didn't take but one year of chemistry rather than two. But my classmates who took Chem 2 and went to A&M or UT got advanced placement as freshmen.

BAUMGARTNER: Did you take Latin?

KELLY: Yes, I did take high school Latin and that was another good subject. Our Latin teacher was very, very good.

BAUMGARTNER: Boy so was ours. Talk about giving you an understanding of the English language and the structure.

KELLY: I was going to say there's something transferable about Latin. If you learn a subject, you get the discipline. You know how to tackle a subject and learn it. Our Latin teacher was full of knowledge, and he made learning things very appealing. He even volunteered to teach us some Greek, but it was an after-class, extracurricular kind of thing. Bruce took it longer than I did.

Some teachers would have loved to give us advanced subjects, but there was just so much they could do. Dulles was still a semi-rural, not quite suburban high school. It was a AAA school

and was nothing like the AAAA schools in the big cities. But anyway, I think we were in a rare situation there. We had good teachers. They didn't cut corners. And for the most part, the top tier students got some pretty good instruction.

And I made a mistake at Rice. I thought, you know, I wasn't going to be fighting for overachievement. I assumed I'd be a small fish in a big pond there. I decided not to worry much about grades, I never worried about failing anything, I was too smart for that. I chose to enjoy myself. And that's what I did. I did okay. But I should have tried a little bit harder, and I could have done better; everybody has those regrets. But I wouldn't trade it for anything. I got a good, terrific education at Rice, but more important, it stimulated my intellectual curiosity. As I said, I knew I wasn't going to fail, so I didn't worry about that, and it paid off in a good way.

BAUMGARTNER: Were you thinking of playing college ball?

KELLY: No, I was just a gym rat at Rice (laughter). I played high school football and basketball there at Sugar Land. I regret not playing baseball, but Dulles didn't have a baseball team until I was a sophomore.

BAUMGARTNER: How big was your freshman class at Rice?

KELLY: 400-425. Somewhere around there. How Many at Colgate?

BAUMGARTNER: Similar; we had 360. Of course, there were no girls then

KELLY: Yeah, I knew you probably had a small student body. I think that's good. Many schools have grown way too big. I don't think there's an advantage to going to UT or A&M or wherever and getting lost.

The one thing at Rice that was very different, is that we didn't have fraternities. We had residential colleges, which was borrowed from Yale, Oxford, and Cambridge.



Captains of Dulles 1967 football team l-to-r: Orval Scott, Eddie Hodge, Chuck Kelly, and Ray Valdez

BAUMGARTNER: Was that boys and girls?

KELLY: Yeah, girls had their own colleges (in the old days), but in my day only about 20% of the class were girls, because Rice was still a science and engineering school. After I graduated, I realized I missed a great opportunity. Many of those girls were good catches, appealing and smart and all that. Rice didn't have sororities or fraternities. Nobody rushed for any college. You were assigned to a college when accepted at Rice. Therefore, you had sort of a fraternity atmosphere without any emphasis on the social stuff and involvement in getting in cliques and all that.

It was really good, it was a great experience. And I was in a college that had some good guys - smart guys. I think there were three people who made 1600 on their SATs. There were a lot of smart kids and they were all serious.

Let me back up just a bit. They weren't all serious students, but there were a lot who were, particularly the students who wanted to be doctors. They were driven. One didn't even take four years to finish and got into med school after his junior year.

BAUMGARTNER: I guess the med students are like that everywhere. They work harder, they're more disciplined, they already know what they want to do.

KELLY: Yeah. And we had some in science and engineering disciplines that were really driven as well. There's a fellow named John Doerr. Do you know who he is? He's a friend of Bill Gates, and he is an influential venture capitalist, and in fact, he's a billionaire now. He was in the class at Rice behind me. And you would never have thought back in 1970, '71, whatever, that he was going to be one of the titans of the global economy, but he is.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow.

KELLY: The name is D-O-E-R-R, John Doerr. He was with Kleiner Perkin Venture Capitalist in Silicon Valley. I think he was involved in developing either Microsoft or Oracle. But there were other impressive leaders, even some football players.

BAUMGARTNER: That wouldn't surprise me.

KELLY: Rice was not structured or designed for athletes to be good students. The athletic department made sure they attended class, and it wasn't intended that they loaf. They could get some help if they wanted it, but there were some that did loaf. They had a curriculum designed for a career in sales. It was called Commerce, and they could fall into that. But there were a lot of athletes that were electrical engineers or went into engineering or sciences.

Rice was in the Southwest Conference, but it wasn't a football factory. The smart football players had the opportunity to really focus on their academics.

That's how it was at Harvard and Yale. I got into Harvard, and I have a suspicion that part of it was because I was a football player, a prospective Texas football player who'd join their team.

BAUMGARTNER: Oh, you were admitted at Harvard? That's a significant accomplishment.

KELLY: Yeah, and the coach wrote me and talked about joining the team and matriculation procedures and so forth. But my mother was against it. She didn't really want me to go up to Harvard. She said, look, Rice is good. It's in Houston. That's where you should go. But my father was all for going to Harvard. He wanted me to take that opportunity.

BAUMGARTNER: Wow. It would have transformed your life.

KELLY: I think it is possible I could have failed.

BAUMGARTNER: I don't think so.

KELLY: I don't either, but it's possible. I could have become homesick, whatever. But

I like Boston. I'm just saying, who knows? It would certainly been different.

BAUMGARTNER: It's hard to say. I told you my sister's two kids went to Rice. It's a great school.

KELLY: Yeah, my impression is just that Rice is kind of watering down things now. I'm a little disappointed in Rice. I don't donate any money to them. I'm not exactly estranged, but I'm not real close either. I've never attended a Rice reunion or anything.

BAUMGARTNER: Well, I think you'd enjoy that.

KELLY: I'm thinking that I ought to do it, just because time's getting short.

BAUMGARTNER: You probably should. My sister's children didn't go to a Rice reunion until their 50th, and now really enjoy them.

KELLY: I can understand that. I would probably feel the same way. I don't have that many friends and acquaintances left, but I know a handful of people and I would love to see them. And it's not that I didn't like the people, it's just that I never felt compelled. But I think I better go.

I missed the 50th. That was last year, but I could do the 51st or the 52nd, they do it every year and it's usually in Houston. My roomy, the fellow that lived in Pryor, he and his wife, who is also a Rice grad, live in San Antonio so I could kind of tag along with them.

And I still have a tenuous attachment to Rice. I recently tried to visit the campus; I was going to do some research at the library there. It had changed so much I couldn't even find a place to park, so I gave up. The Fondren Library has historical items that relate to Fort Bend County, and I wanted to look at them, but it was just too much hassle. Big city life is not for me.

It was a beautiful campus, and I think Rice is still an attractive campus. It was very open in my day. It had a lot of trees and was bucolic, though it's crammed with buildings now.

I finished with a degree in history, I wasn't sure what I wanted to get into. I thought about becoming a lawyer, but I really had no enthusiasm for that. I ended up taking a job at the Museum of Fine Arts working in the registrar's office and worked off and on there for five years. It stretched out because I decided that I was going to take the business route and get a graduate degree. I ended up going to the University of Houston for my MBA. I was employed full-time at the Museum of Fine Arts and going to school almost full time too.

BAUMGARTNER: The Museum of Fine Arts, was that educational for you, too?

KELLY: Yeah, it was very educational for me. What little I know about art, I picked up there. And I kind of like art. It just wasn't something I would naturally gravitate to. When I was growing up in Sugar Land, there was no real push towards artistic things, but I can appreciate art now. Music was much, much bigger. I was in the band, high school band, and Bruce and I are both musical types.

Bruce won a place in the Allstate band. He got a scholarship to U of H. He was a true musician. I liked it, too, but I wasn't interested in becoming a band director or anything like that. What I really enjoyed was economics and finance.

BAUMGARTNER: How'd you get into finance?

KELLY: I became very certain I was going to be a financial analyst. I did one interview with Arthur Andersen, it's when they had the



*Chuck and Joan Maresh Hansen
at the opening of Cullinan Hall in
The Museum of Fine Arts,
Houston, January 1974*

consulting wing, and I got a job with them for five years. But was never fully committed. I learned a lot and ended up going to work at USAA.

BAUMGARTNER: What is USAA?

KELLY: It's a large insurance company in San Antonio. It was a mutual company put together by former and active military officers in the 1920s. They couldn't get insured because they were transients. Well-known, reputable insurance companies thought they were a bad risk. So, they formed their own mutual company, and it was a roaring success.

And not only was it a roaring success, I'm collapsing history quite a bit here, but they were very advanced thinkers, and one of their commitments was to use technology to their advantage in any way possible. They had their own R & D department. And that's how I got involved, as an Arthur Andersen consultant in their R & D department.

I was assigned to a project to build a prototype of a specific type of computer system, and it was groundbreaking in the early 80s. It was just unbelievable, and it was fun, and I really had a good time at that.

At the time, USAA was drowning in paper. Their office in San Antonio was larger than the Pentagon if you included parking garages, but they'd need to spend significant money on an expansion if they didn't do something about the paper. They decided to build a document management system, which was a very ambitious leap into a newly emerging technology. I grabbed the opportunity they offered me.

I agreed to leave Andersen and become a USAA employee. And so, I worked there for three or four more years and then ended up leaving and working for myself as an independent consultant.

BAUMGARTNER: Was that when you were working in Connecticut and the East

Coast?

KELLY: That's right. And I should say that first, while I was working for Arthur Andersen, I worked as a consultant in several companies. That was one of the appeals of working in their consulting group. It was like working in a big bank where they moved selected personnel around giving them a comprehensive view of all the operations and so forth. Well, I did that, and I went to different companies and worked on different systems and projects.

BAUMGARTNER: You would be given an assignment by Arthur Andersen.

KELLY: Yeah, go to work on a client's project. Andersen was known as the Marine Corps of the Big Six accounting firms. Those of us in the consulting wing learned to code computer software as our first assignment. Started at the bottom. They gave us a remarkable amount of training in technical subjects, as well as project management, and general business consulting.

Then they would send you out initially to work as a programmer on projects. Some might go to an enormous project at the Tennessee Valley Authority to do Cobol work, and some might be sent to Texas Commerce Bank, etc. We also worked on different vendor hardware: IBM, Dec ... we got a wide variety of experiences.

And I went through that. I worked at a private company named Lufkin Industries for several years. There were parts of that job that were great and there were parts that were just not very good.

My career as an independent consultant was interesting, though I didn't always make great choices. Sometimes I would take suicide missions, things that were just impossible to do, and I

knew that I should just decline the offer, but I took them anyway.

From my point of view, I'm shocked at how often big computer projects fail. There are

outstanding successes, and I worked on some, but there are so many failures that it's just unbelievable. Maybe I'm a jinx!

BAUMGARTNER: When you say computer projects, what do you mean?

KELLY: Well, expansive, corporate-wide systems. I want to be careful here and not use any company names, but I worked at a very big finance company that had a Wall Street presence. I went up to New York and worked in their office.

BAUMGARTNER: Was this when you were self-employed?

KELLY: Yeah. I wouldn't want to say anything that traces back to them, but they wanted to develop and install a fundamental, company-wide business system. A document management system, and they wanted to do it in less than a year. I knew it was impossible. In fact, I told the guy that hired me that their project schedule was unachievable. Well, it cratered, I think. I really don't know what eventually happened, because I left the project before it was finished. I think it was a bust.

They didn't have a realistic understanding of what they were trying to do. They couldn't create a realistic, workable project plan that would succeed. It was like saying, "Well, we're going to cure cancer in three weeks. Let's get rolling!" I was honest and said it isn't possible. And anybody with common sense would know that, but some people had made promises to the CEO and wanted to be heroes.

There are other examples where unrealistic expectations about what could be done and could not be done doomed projects from their start. If you're going to do a big project, you need to really think about where you want to go FIRST, starting with the big picture and working on down into the details. You first model the result you want to achieve. Then you back track methodically through the developmental steps, so you know how to reach your desired goal.

BAUMGARTNER: OK, Chuck, we have been discussing your life and personal

background. You have a wonderful memory for detail. The second section of this interview will focus on the Fort Bend County Historical Commission and your role and management of the commission including your position as President of the Commission.

End of interview